The Black and Other Stories

By Edgar Wallace

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I. — THE CASE OF LADY PURSEYENCE

TWO years ago I received a letter signed Olga Purseyence asking me if I would give the lady an interview on a certain date at a certain hour. I looked up the lady's credentials in my books of reference, and found that she was the widow of Sir George Purseyence, and I wrote back fixing the time and date.

Now, I daresay "Lady Olga Purseyence" suggests to you a tall, willowy, refined-looking lady with sad dark eyes. That is the picture I got of her, and I was very much surprised to find a very stout, dumpy woman, coarse-featured and heavy-eyed. When she opened her mouth the final illusion was gone. She had the vilest Cockney accent, and insisted throughout our interview in

referring to me as "young man",

I learnt afterwards that she was the third wife of the eccentric baronet, and that she had been his cook-housekeeper for ten years before, in a moment of mental aberration, he took her to wife. Her original name had been Mary Ann Sopper, and "Olga" was quite a new creation, having been decided upon by her after her husband's death. I expect she got the name from a novel, but that is by the way.

She started pretty badly from my point of view.

"I wish you to understand, young man," she said, planting herself squarely in the armchair which I had pushed forward for her, "that I don't believe in private, detectives. I never did and I never shall."

"That's good," said I. "Now let's hear your story and let's see if I believe in you."

She frowned at me.

"Don't forget, young man," she said warningly, "that you're dealing with a member of the British aristocracy. If I have any cheek from you I'll take my custom elsewhere."

Of course, the only thing to do was to tell her to take her "custom" elsewhere, but she must have made pretty thorough inquiries into our business before she came, and she was by no means prepared to follow my advice.

"My dear lady," I said, "in the very chair in which you are sitting I have had dukes, duchesses, countesses and earls beyond number."

This seemed to mollify her, and I thought she eyed the chair with greater respect.

"Well, I'll cut a long story short," she said (which in women of this class means that they are going to make a short story long). "I married Sir George rather late in life. A good many people can't understand why he married me," she said with unconscious humour. "I'm not going to boast, but you'll see that Sir George wasn't the only gooseberry on the bush." She positively bridled with pride as she opened her capacious handbag and produced a letter.

It was written in a foreign hand and the postmark was Liverpool. I gathered from the calligraphy that the writer was of one of the Latin races. It would be indiscreet to give the opening of the letter, which dealt with a mad and foolish adventure of a chance meeting at a concert, of other meetings, and finally the greatest adventure of all. The letter concluded:

"And now, my darling, my love, misfortune has come to me, alas! I am without engagement, I am poor, I need money to take me to my land and to give me the rest I need. Will you not send it to me, sweetheart? Five hundred English pounds. It is so little to you, so much to me. Or shall I bring my beautiful violin and play outside your house until you throw it into my hands?"

It was signed "Thy Lover."

"He gives the Post Restante as his address," said I. "Well, it is a simple matter to inform the police, but I suppose you do not want to take that step?"

"Indeed. I don't," said the woman violently, "do you think I want the whole of this county to know? It's bad enough as it is, young man. I'm snubbed here and there, and I'm not going to give them any other handle. Why, I'd have to clear out. I dare not show my nose in the village as it is."

"He addresses you as 'My Darling Mary Ann'." said I, pointing to one passage in the preamble; "is that the name you gave to him?"

She flushed. "That was my name originally," she admitted. "I took on Olga because it sounded more classy. That bit puzzled me, because I never told him my name was Mary Ann, and he must have wormed it out of somebody."

"Now, tell me all about the facts of the case, Lady Purseyence," said I. "We have the man's side of the story, what is yours?"

She had met a "gentlemanly" foreigner at a promenade concert, it appeared. He had sat by her side, had lent her a programme, and had spoken to her entertainingly and interestingly upon the music.

They had afterwards met, and learning that he was a musician—she did not explain exactly what kind of a musician he was, but I afterwards discovered that he played second violin in the orchestra of a Blackpool hotel—she had agreed to spend her summer holiday at Blackpool where he had an engagement. And that, she swore, was as far as the matter had gone. She admitted that she thought he was a distinguished nobleman, or at least a great artiste, who was giving a series of concerts at Blackpool, and when she discovered that he was merely a plebeian hotel fiddler she left Blackpool in a hurry, lest her aristocratic friends should discover her acquaintance with so common a person.

"Now Lady Purseyence, you've got to be very frank with me," said I; "you'll swear to me that nothing else happened, that you did not—er—hold hands or anything of that sort,"

"Good heavens, no," she exploded.

I stopped her with a wave of my hand. "You see, I must know all the facts."

"You know all the facts," she said tartly, "now what am I to do?"

"What is his name?" I asked her.

"Festier," she said, "Jules Festier."

"Do you know his London address?"

She shook her head.

"Have you seen him since?"

"No." she said.

"Well, leave the matter with me. Lady Purseyence," I said. "and I will do the very best I can for you."

Being rather slack at the time I took the case into my own hands, and did not, as I ordinarily would have done, hand it over to my assistants. My first business was to inquire after Festier, and here I had many channels of information. One of my informants in Soho discovered a man who knew Festier, and to my amazement this man gave Festier a very excellent character.

"A most respectable man," he said, "and a pretty good musician. He went back to France three months ago." I stared at him.

"Are you sure?" He was a man whose opinion I valued.

"Quite sure," he said emphatically.

"Has he a good record?" I asked.

"Excellent," he said. Then, after a moment's pause: "Wait a moment. There's a woman in this street, Madame Visconti, who knew his wife when she was alive and with whom he corresponds. Maybe she has heard from him."

I sat down in the little restaurant where the conversation had taken place, as my informant knew the proprietor of the restaurant, and presently he came back in triumph with a letter.

"By good luck." he said, "Festier wrote to Madame only this morning. Here is the letter."

The first thing I saw when I took the letter in my hand was that it was in absolutely different writing to that which Lady Purseyence had received.

To confirm the certainty that the writers were different men there occurred by good fortune the following sentence in the middle of the letter:—

"I suppose you have not seen that kind lady whom I met at the concert. I often think about her goodness to me. You remember, dear friend, that she came to Blackpool to hear me play, but had to leave owing to the illness of her mother."

I made a mental note of this passage, and handed the letter back. That evening I telephoned to Lady Purseyence.

"What excuse did you give to Festier for returning to London from Blackpool?" I asked.

"I forget now." she said. "Oh, yes, I remember, I told him that my mother was ill."

"Do you mind if I come down to see you?"

"Do," she replied. "You will easily find my house. It is the biggest for miles around."

I smiled to myself.

Even the vulgarity of Lady Purseyence could not obliterate the good taste which the late Sir George had shown in furnishing this wonderful house of his, and though her ladyship had added one or two articles of furniture to the beautiful drawing room into which I was shown, articles which made one shudder to look upon, so utterly out of harmony were they with the general furnishing, it was still a noble and tasteful apartment.

She was dressed for dinner when I arrived, and cane to me in a plum-coloured velvet, cut low.

"There were one or two questions I wanted to ask," I explained.

After a seven course dinner, which bored me unutterably, and when the servants had gone, I began my cross-examination.

"I tell you what strikes me as curious, Lady Purseyence," I said, "and you mustn't be offended at anything I say. We're talking in confidence as man to man, so to speak."

"Straightforward dealing is my weakness," she said, "say what you like, young man,

She was flushed and in a more communicative mood than she had been on the

afternoon of my interview. "Why did you go to the promenade concert?" I asked. "Are you a lover of music?"

"I like a rag," she said, "and I've got a mechanical piano that plays all the latest jazz tunes."

"Yes, I know," said I, "but I'm talking about music —real classical music. Do you like it?"

She laughed.

"I think it's muck," she said.

"Then you went out of curiosity?" I asked.

She laughed again.

"No. I didn't," she said. "I'll tell you the truth. I should have gone to sleep if I hadn't talked to that fellow. No. I'll tell you why I went."

She folded up her serviette, resolutely.

"There's a lot of women in this county who look down on me, a lot of cats, I ought to say, and them not better than they ought to be. They are always trying to show and put me in my place, and the worst of them is Mrs. Deston Power. Yes, I must admit she's pretty, but handsome is as handsome does, say I. Well, one day, we had a bazaar, and this Power woman, whose husband is in India and who's got nothing to do but gad around, started talking about the wonderful music of Froli. I think that was the man's name."

I nodded. I knew Antonio Froli by repute. He was what is known in police circles as a "bad lad". A brilliant musician, with a vicious temperament, he had recently been in trouble, and had seen his engagements cancelled because of certain incidents in his private life which had come to light.

Lady Purseyence went on: "I said to myself: 'I'm going to learn something about music.' And up to London I went. I went to hear this fellow Froli, but I spotted Mrs. Deston Power sitting in the front row, and I cleared out, though I needn't have done, for she hadn't any eyes for any but this long-haired Eytalian"

"There's another question I'd like to ask you, Lady Purseyence," said I. "Does any of your relations call you Mary Ann, any of your sisters?"

She shook her head.

"Nobody," she said. "I've got no relations in the world, thank God!"

She stopped and hesitated.

"Nobody?" I asked again.

"Well, she said after a pause, "I'll tell you the truth. It's a humiliating thing for a lady like me to admit, but these—she paused as though to eradicate a violent adjective—"these people around here, the Deston Powers and people of that kind, call me Mary Ann. That's my nickname," she said. "Pretty rotten, isn't it?"

"Very unkind." said I

"They call me 'Mary Ann the Cook', 'The Duchess of Cuisine', and things like that, but I'll show 'em one of these days," she said grimly. "I tell you, Mr. What's-Yer-Name, the women round here are cats."

From that moment I had in my mind the explanation of a difficulty. I went straight away back to town and saw Bob Fenning, of Scotland Yard. Bob is an old friend of mine. We have worked together unofficially on many, remarkable occasions, and Bob would always go out of his way to help me, as I would go out of my way to help him.

"What was this Froli case? I saw it in the papers some time ago," said I.

"Froli? You mean the Dago musician?"

I nodded.

"Well, it isn't a pleasant case, but he was charged with breaking a champagne bottle on the head of a waiter at the Star Restaurant," said Bob. "Behind that, of course, there was a pretty bad case which didn't come into Court. He's a bad lot that young fellow."

"Is he good looking?" I asked.

"Oh, very good looking," said Bob, "in an effeminate kind of way. The women raved about him, and when he was brought up you couldn't get into the court for frou-frou."

"You're the man I want, if you know anything about him." I said. .

"I know a great deal about him," said Bob. "Now just tell me what you want to know."

"Can you tell me the names of any of his woman admirers?"

"Their name is legion," said Bob, "but I can give you half a dozen of his

dining, wining and piping friends," and he rattled off a list.

"Anybody else, I asked, and he must have heard the disappointment in my tone.

"There was one girl, who was the most devoted of the lot." said he, "and when I say girl I mean woman, whose name I don't know. I think she lives somewhere in the country, but she was always with him, dining in these hole-and-corner restaurants that people like Froli affect."

"You don't know her name?" I asked.

"No, but I can tell you what she's like. because I saw her one night when I was shadowing Froli—we had had one or two complaints in London about him. She was a tall, willowy creature, very pale and drawly. She very seldom stays in town—never, so far as I know—and that made it difficult to trace her name. Anyway, we didn't want her name. We were more concerned with another matter in which Froli figured."

"Can you give me any other characteristics about this woman?"

"None, except that she wore her hair, which she parted in the middle and whirled down over her ears, in the Edna May style; that she smoked incessantly out of a long black cigarette holder, which had a band of diamonds about the centre—I think that's about all."

I thanked Bob and went back to my office.

The case now could be very easily settled, and I could relieve Lady Mary Ann Purseyence of any further annoyance; but since it is my task not only to serve my clients but to serve the ends of justice, and particularly not to help one woman at the expense of another, I did not feel that my work was completed.

I found Froli's address, and sent Gibbons, my assistant. up to interview him I always send Bully Gibbons on a job like that. He looks so ferocious, and in his angry moments, or even when he simulates anger, he is perhaps the most terrifying person that a nervous young fiddler with an artistic soul could wish to avoid.

"If there are any letters get then," I said. "I don't think that kind of bird will give you any trouble."

"I bet he won't," said Gibbons grimly, and off he went looking very pleased with himself.

It was seven o'clock the next evening when I presented myself at Hall Manor

House, in the village of Tesserham, in Kent. Certainly Hall Manor House was small, so small as scarcely to justify its magnificent title.

A trim maid opened the door to me, and showed me into a drawing room where she left me. Presently she returned.

"Mrs. Deston Power wishes to know what is your business?" she asked, still handling my card. "She is lying down, and does not feel very well. Could you not write?"

"I must see Mrs. Deston Power herself." said I, "and will you be kind enough to tell her that my business is urgent and cannot wait?"

Presently the maid came back again.

"My lady says that she cannot see you," she said, and handed me back my card. I had written on the back "Business—In reference to Lady Purseyence," and I suppose this reference to the Duchess de Cuisine had been quite sufficient to prevent Mrs. Deston Power condescending to see me.

"Very good." said L "and now will you kindly go to Mrs. Deston Power and tell her that if she does not come down she will miss the treat of her life—I want to play her one of Froli's sonatas."

The girl looked askance at me, and hesitated to take the message.

"Go along and tell her that," said I, in such a tone of authority that she obeyed.

I knew this would be sufficient, and presently Mrs. Deston Power strolled into the room with that look of high-bred insolence on her face which is the peculiar prerogative of the more or less worthless classes.

For if ever I have seen a bad woman in the making that woman was Mrs. Deston Power, and I say God help her husband (she is divorced now) or anyone who has ever placed their honour in her hands. She was smoking a cigarette through a long black holder, and about that holder was a tiny band of diamonds. Also her hair was parted in the middle and banded-I think that is the word —over each ear.

"Who are you, and what do you want," she demand. haughtily.

"I am a private detective employed by Lady Purseyence," said I, "and I am tracing the origin of certain blackmailing letters which have been received by her."

She raised her pencilled eyebrows.

"Do you suggest that I sent Mary Ann blackmailing letters? The idea is too absurd."

"I suggest nothing of the kind, Mrs. Deston Power," said I merely suggest that these letters were sent to her by a man named Froli under the impression that they were being sent to you."

The colour in her face changed.

"What do you mean," she asked quickly.

"I mean this, Mrs. Deston Power: that my client has the option if she wishes of prosecuting you for impersonation."

"How dare you," she asked, but I could see the fear in her eyes. "Please explain yourself."

"The explanation is quite simple, madam," said I quietly. "In London you met a man named Froli. Into your relationships with that man I will not inquire. Adoring ladies of position who run after musicians are not uncommon phenomena."

"Do you dare," she cried. "If my husband were here—"

"If your husband were here, Mrs. Deston Power," said I with a smile, "you would be very glad if he were somewhere else. Now, I'm not going to make any trouble, and I hope you're not either. The truth is that you met this musician, that you went about with him, you dined with him, and that you left London with him on one occasion. The truth is also that he was ignorant of your identity, and when he pressed you to give him your name you gave him the name of Lady Purseyence."

She stared at me open-mouthed.

"Has he—has be written to Lady Purseyence?" she whispered, horror-stricken.

I nodded. "He has written demanding money and threatening to expose her if she does not send that money —that is what his letter amounts to."

"Good God!" she said. "What a fool, what a fool I have been!"

"I think you have been something more than a fool, Mrs. Deston Power," said I, "but for the moment I am not concerned with the ethical side of the case. Will you tell me this? Have you written any letters to Froli? Before you reply I might say that I have no right to ask you, but I am merely acting in your best interests."

"I wrote him no letters," she shook her head. "He has turned out a dreadful man, hasn't he? He was in the Courts some time ago."

I nodded.

"So that's why you dropped him, eh?" I smiled. "Well, I think you would have been wiser if you had dropped him before."

"What do you want me to do?" she asked, and she had me in a dilemma.

"I don't know what I want you to do," said I, "unless it is if this case goes any further, and this Froli gives Lady Purseyence any more trouble, that you will write to him and say that you are the person concerned. Personally, I do not think he will bother you. I have sent a man up to see him, and I have undertaken on your behalf to pay his fare out of the country if he will leave Britain immediately."

She had collapsed into a chair, and sat with her face in her hands, the tell-tale cigarette holder on her lap, and the cigarette itself was smouldering in the fireplace where she had thrown it when I made my revelation.

"You'll not tell Mary—Lady Purseyence?"

I shook my head.

"I don't see that I can without betraying you, Mrs. Deston Power, and I have no desire to benefit my client at your expense. But I do suggest that you should make some kind of reparation to Lady Purseyence."

"What am I do?"

"Ask her to dinner, and cook the dinner yourself," said I brutally.

II. — THE WIFE OF SIR RALPH CRETAPACE

IT is true that conscience makes cowards of us all, but only true

of a bad conscience. There is no greater asset in life than the possession of a fearless mind. The bad conscience is the blackmailer's banking account. It is queer what little things worry some people, and how others have big and serious offences to their discredit and yet can go through life with a smiling face and an untroubled mind. One man will worry himself to death because, as a youth, he fell into temptation and stole a few pounds from his employer,

another will rob people all his life and sleep nine hours every night.

The true blackmailer is a man or woman who appreciates the psychology of the victim he or she may tackle. It is not a question of knowing a great deal about their victims' past acts so much as knowing something of their present state of mind, their prospects and their ambitions. One of the most extraordinary cases, extraordinary because of its bizarre features, that ever came my way, was the Cretapace affair. I knew Sir Ralph Cretapace (I am not giving real names of persons or places) by repute, though it had never been my lot to meet him. From all I had heard of him he was a shy, retiring man who hated publicity, and never went in for politics or public life of any kind, and whose name was certainly the last in the world I expected to ever have upon my books.

At the time the events which I am now describing occurred, I had a little office in Bond Street, and I was living in Acacia Road, St. John's Wood. Though my name and office address were to be found in the telephone book, my home address was omitted at my request, and this for obvious reasons. One does not want to be called up all hours of the day and night by people who, in a fit of remorse or terror, decide to invoke the aid of a detective agency. My experience is that there are very few cases of this kind which will not wait till the morning.

Therefore I was a little annoyed just before I was going to bed at night to receive a call from somebody who was not on the list of my intimate acquaintances. As a matter of fact I used my home telephone to call others—not for then, to call me, and it was very seldom my bell rang on genuine business, though it was not at all infrequent to be called through the error of the telephone exchange. Thinking it was such a mistake. I was ignoring the call and closing my study door on the jangling, noise, when, half in irritation and half obeying a "hunch", I went back and took down the receiver.

To my surprise I was called by name.

"Yes, it is I," I replied.

"I am Lady Cretapace," said the voice, "and I want to see you most urgently."

"Your ladyship doesn't want to see me tonight?" I said good- humouredly.

"Yes, tonight," she replied, to my surprise. "I have put off calling you to the very last moment. but I cannot stand it any longer."

I was not very tired, and I certainly was curious. "Where can I see you?" I said.

"Will you come to 603 Park Lane?" she replied, and I promised I would.

I had some difficulty in finding a taxicab at that time of night, but I picked one up in the Edgware Road and drove down to Park Lane. No. 603 was one of those little houses with enormous rents which are to be found at the Piccadilly end, and I was shown straight into a beautiful little drawing room.

I had pictured Lady Cretapace as a well-developed matron, grey-haired and lorgnetted, and I was agreeably surprised to find a lady of twenty-five and a remarkably, pretty one, too. She was evidently in a state of agitation, and after she had apologised to me for bringing me out at that time of night, she found some difficulty in beginning her story.

"Don't apologise, Lady Cretapace." said I, more with the idea of making conversation than anything else; "we are like doctors. People put off seeing us till the last moment and then send for us in a hurry."

"It was my doctor who suggested I should send for you." she said. "Mr. Furnival, do you know him?"

I knew Mr. Furnival very well, and what she said explained the mystery of her knowing my private address. "Is it about yourself you wish to see me, Lady Cretapace?" I asked tentatively.

She shook her head.

"No," she replied with a faint smile; "I hope I never shall have to see you about myself. It is about my husband."

There was another little pause, during which she seemed to be considering which was the best way of telling me the story.

"You have doubtless heard of my husband. Have you ever met him?"

I shook my head.

"Sir Ralph. as you know, is a very retiring man. He has one of the sweetest dispositions of any human being I have ever met." she added; and I did not need to be a psychologist to know that this lady was very much in love with her husband and that she had not engaged me, as wives have engaged me before, to operate against her lord and master.

"I married Sir Ralph five years ago," she said; "he is fifteen years my senior, and I am his second wife." This was news to me.

"I didn't know there had been another Lady Cretapace," I said.

"Neither was there," said she. "My husband married before he came into the title and his wife died some years ago. My husband is a very sensitive man, and, like many literary men, spends nine months of the year in the country. He does not like London; and if we are not in our home in Sussex we are in Scotland fishing."

"I knew Sir Ralph wrote something or other," said I. "I myself am not a literary man."

"He writes poems." she said, "and songs. You know his 'Love Lyrics of Fez', 'The Purple Temple' and 'The Desert Way'. I suppose they have been played on every piano organ in London. My husband hates that sort of thing, and I think one of the reasons he so seldom comes to London is because he so constantly hears his songs murdered on the street instruments."

So far she was only fencing or, as I thought, excusing her husband, and I waited.

"Until a year ago Sir Ralph was a very abstemious man," she said. "He seldom took wine, and I certainly have never seen him the worse for drink. Moreover, he was carefree and did not worry, in fact he was a little too careless." She stopped, and her lips quivered. "That was a year ago," she said significantly; "today Sir Ralph has changed, oh so terribly. About twelve months ago something happened, I don't know what, which distressed him. The first I knew of the matter was when he came home from town looking a perfect wreck. I questioned him as to what had happened, but he asked me not to press him. He was very gentle and kind, but he would give me no information whatever. Then he started drinking. The first I knew of this was when I found a whisky decanter, which had been filled the day before for some guests who were coming but who were detained at the last moment, was empty. I questioned the servants and very reluctantly, because he is very fond of Sir Ralph, the butler told me that my husband had drunk it all. I was surprised. I did not think it was my business to remonstrate with Sir Ralph, but from open drinking he took to secret drinking. He lived practically in his room and I saw very little of him."

"Nobody called on him?" I asked.

"Nobody," she said. "At regular intervals be went to town, on the first of every month to be exact, was absent for one day and came back. I was very distressed and spoke to him about his habits, but as that only seemed to worry him more I desisted. His friends have done their best to check it, and I must say that he has been drinking less of late, but he is becoming more and more melancholy. He does no work. He has not touched his piano for months, and

this evening I think I have found the solution."

She walked to a desk and unlocked it.

"This is my husband's desk," she said, "and usually he lets me keep it tidy for him, but of late, on one excuse or another, he has refused to give me the key. I had no idea that the desk held any solution, but having some time on my hands I decided to clear it up if any of my own keys fitted the lock. You see this one does." She inserted a small key into the secretaire and pulled down the flap.

"There was nothing very startling to be found until I came upon two cheque-book counterfoils, each containing sixty cheques. As you will see," she handed one to me, "of these sixty, ten have been made out to a person whom he calls X for £500. You will observe that each is made out on the first day of the month—the days he came to London."

I nodded.

"What do you make of it?" she asked anxiously.

"Well. Lady Cretapace," said I, "on the face of it, it looks as though your husband is being blackmailed by somebody, that the blackmailing started a year ago, and that, of course, accounts for his change of habits."

"That is my view, too," said the girl, nodding. "When I made this discovery I went round to see Mr. Furnival, who is a dear friend of mine and a friend of my father, and it was he who advised me to send for you without delay. It isn't the money," she went on to explain; "Sir Ralph is very rich and I have private means. It is the danger to his health and this constant strain which is breaking my heart."

I took a note of the cheques and their numbers, and when I had finished this I asked:

"I suppose you do not want me to see Sir Ralph himself,"

She shook her head vigorously.

"That is the one thing I do not wish you to do." she said. "I want you to undertake the work of discovering what is the secret of his terror, and believe me, whatever it is, however bad, I will be loyal and faithful to him. If he has committed some folly in his past I am sure it is a folly and no more. You have unlimited money to carry out your investigations. Do your best."

It was a novel kind of commission, because the information on which I usually worked, namely, that supplied by the person blackmailed, was denied me; and

I had to begin not so much at the bottom of the ladder, but to dig out of the ground before I reached the bottom of the ladder.

The next morning I paid a visit to Sir Ralph's publishers and had the good luck to find Mr. Morello, whom I knew.

"Cretapace," he said, "I cannot tell you much about him except that his music sells very well. I haven't seen him for over a year. I'll get you some of his pieces." He went into the store-room and came back with about twenty numbers.

"I see these are all Eastern songs," said I.

Morello nodded.

"He specialises on Eastern subjects, and he really gets the Eastern spirit in his music very well indeed."

"Has he lived in the East?" I asked.

"In Morocco. He was for some time the British Attaché in Fez."

"What sort of a man is he?" I asked.

"Very romantic, very impulsive. and I should say the soul of honour." said Nora, "You will find more about him in 'Who's Who' than I can tell you. I've got a copy here somewhere."

He found the book and I turned up the name.

"I don't see any reference to his first marriage here." I said, and Morello looked at me sharply.

"His first marriage," he said; "did you know about that? I don't suppose there are half a dozen people in the world who know he was married before."

Then he asked suspiciously: "What are you making inquiries about?"

I assured him that it was in Sir Ralph's own interest.

"Well, you've been very fortunate in coming to the one man who knows all about that marriage," he said. "I doubt whether Lady Cretapace herself can tell you more than I know. I happen to have all the facts, because immediately on his return from Morocco on leave Sir Ralph brought me his first lyrics. He was little more than a boy at the time. It was a very romantic affair. The British have no Ambassador at Fez; the British Minister lives at Tangier. Cretapace was secretary to the British Commissioner in the Moorish city, and from what

I heard—and from what he told me—he had a pretty dull time at first. Then, one evening, whilst dozing on the roof of his house in Fez—everybody goes on the roof for their siesta—he saw a beautiful girl on the roof of the adjoining building, which was the palace of El Menchi, the Moorish Minister of War. It was the Moor's daughter."

"A Moor!" said I in surprise.

"A Moor," said Morello; "not a nigger, you understand, as white as you or I. The Moors range from pure white to jet black. I have never understood why it is. Old Menchi, for example, whom I have seen, is black as the ace of spades. Of course, there was a great fuss about an unbeliever seeing a daughter of the Faithful without her veil; but Cretapace was so crazy about the girl that he embraced Mohammedanism and married her.

"It was after he was married that he came to England to sell me the lyrics, and it was whilst here that the rebellion occurred and his wife was killed by a chance shot whilst she was on the very roof where he had first seen her. I believe he was nearly beside himself with grief. They had not been long married and they were perfectly happy."

But why did he leave her in Fez?" I asked.

"He was sent on a mission to Persia, and from Persia was ordered home. He was actually telling me how he felt the absence—he had not seen her for six months—when the news of her death arrived."

"That was eighteen months after their marriage?"

"About then; I am not certain to a month or two," said Morello.

"Suppose the story that she was killed was not true, and that she is still alive," said I.

Morello shook his head.

"There is no doubt whatever about it. The British Agent himself sent the news, and he had seen the body. Sir Ralph never went back to Morocco again."

This Conversation occurred on the 31st of the month, and that night Lady Cretapace called me up on the telephone and told me that she had heard from her husband, and that he was coming up to town and begged her to go back to the country.

"I should do as he wishes," said I. "Will he stay in Park Lane?"

"Oh, yes," she said; "but don't you think it would be best if I stayed?"

"No, no," I urged; "go back to Sussex. I'll look after Sir Ralph whilst he is in London."

I sent one of my best men to pick him up at Victoria, and on the following morning I myself took up my station within view of the house. It was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that I had my first glimpse of Sir Ralph. He was a spare man, with a delicate face and a moustache that was fast turning grey. I strolled across the road to get him under better observation, and I noticed that beyond the fact that his hand shook when he raised it to his lips, as he did every few minutes, there were none of the telltale signs of excessive drinking. He walked rapidly down Park Lane to Piccadilly, and I followed him. In Piccadilly he turned, walked eastward, and disappeared up the steps of the Orient Club.

It was at that moment I became conscious—a sort of instinct that is difficult to fathom or analyse—that somebody else was watching Sir Ralph. Maybe it was the knowledge that somebody was sauntering along at the same pace as myself that made me turn my head to the other side of the road, and there I saw a very resplendent gentleman in a top hat, smoking a fat cigar and swinging his cane as he strolled. Now, top-hatted gentlemen are not so common in the West End of London as people imagine, and this fellow was so "brand new" that he would have excited attention anywhere.

He was evidently dressed as he thought the people of the West End ought to dress, which marked him down as an outsider; but my interest turned to joy when I recognised him. It was Dodo Johnson. Half the Cretapace mystery was solved, to my mind, when I laid my eyes on Dodo, for of all the professional blackmailers in the world he is the best known to the English police.

Dodo has served three terms of imprisonment, and has only escaped penal servitude by the skin of his teeth. I did not trouble any more about Sir Ralph; I went to the nearest telephone booth and called my friend at Scotland Yard.

"Is Dodo back?" he said in surprise. "I didn't know it."

"Has he been out of the country?" I asked.

"Yes, he has been in the South of Spain." was the reply. "He cleared out after that Turnbull trouble and he has been away for about five years. Where can we pick him up?"

"Is he wanted?" I asked.

"No. be isn't wanted on any specific charge, but we like to keep our eye on him."

"I'll tell you later." said I grimly. "I want to pick him up myself first."

Dodo Johnson, that complacent man with the twirling moustaches (I never knew how he got his name) had disappeared when I got back to Piccadilly. I strolled past the club and looking up saw that Sir Ralph had taken up a place near the big plate-glass window which overlooked the street. I had not long to wait. Presently I saw the figure of Dodo swaggering towards the club, and with him was a negro youth of about seventeen, very well dressed and, I thought, rather uncomfortable.

They walked past the club and Dodo glanced up. I, who had followed behind them, also looked to see Sir Ralph sitting, his chin on his breast, his eyes closed. I waited till we were some distance past the club, and then I overtook Dodo and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned round with a start and some of the colour left his face,

"Hullo, Dixon," he said uneasily; "what do you want?"

"Five minutes of earnest conversation," said I.

He looked at the native boy and then looked at me.

"I'm afraid I can't see you just now," he said.

"Oh, yes, you can," said I. "Tell the coon to go into the park and wait for you."

He spoke to the native in Spanish and the young man walked away, and I took Dodo's arm very firmly in mine.

"Dodo," I said, "you have got five minutes to spill the beans."

"Spill the beans?" said the innocent Dodo. "I don't understand you, Mr. Dixon."

"Where did you find this interesting native?" I demanded.

"He's a friend of mine," said Dodo.

"Any relation to Sir Ralph Cretapace?"

He shot a glance at me full of apprehension.

"Has he put you on to me?" he said, and then recovering himself. "I really don't know what you mean."

"Listen, Dodo," I said gently, "you have been staying in the South of Spain, and from the South of Spain to Morocco is not even a Sabbath day's journey; the old Gible Musa, which is a slow boat, does the journey in three and a half

hours. Now you've got one chance of saving yourself from serious trouble. I am not going to ask you how much money you have got out of Sir Ralph Cretapace; and, so far as that's concerned, we will let bygones be bygones, because I am not a member of the regular police force and it is not my business to gaol you."

"How much do you know," he asked, after a pause.

"I know you have been to Morocco, and in some way you have got the story of Sir Ralph's early marriage and conceived the ingenious idea of fostering a son upon Sir Ralph, a nigger son of whom he would be ashamed."

"Suppose it is his son?" he asked.

"Suppose nothing." said I; "let's keep to the truth. This Moorish wife of his had a child," it was then that I put my big bluff on him, "and it died," I said; "we have all the certificates. In fact, I've enough evidence to send you down to Dartmoor. Now be sensible. Dodo, and tell me all the facts."

It was a bold guess of mine. Indeed, to this day, I am not certain whether the first wife of Sir Ralph had a child or not, and I don't think that Dodo knew either, for he was thrown off his balance.

"Well, I'll own up," he said. "I heard this yarn in Casablanca, and I worked the idea out, made a few inquiries, and brought the kid back to London. I was not certain how Sir Ralph would take it, but he fell for the story like a starving robin falls for a breadcrumb. Mind you," said Dodo, with that quaint pride in his illegal practices which always amuses me, "I was taking a risk, though I was ready to bolt if he turned the story down. Where are you going?"

"You are coming along to my office," said I. "You are going to make a signed statement, and then I am going to give you twenty-four hours to get out of the country with your coon."

"Don't call him a coon," pleaded Dodo; "he's a nice little fellow, and I'm teaching him to play the banjo."

That evening I called upon Sir Ralph and placed the statement before him, and I have never seen a man so relieved as he was. I left it to him to tell the story to his wife.

III. — THE CASE OF MRS. ANTHONY STATMORE

ONE of the most extraordinary cases which it has been my lot to investigate was that of Tony Statmore. I need hardly say that my object in all the affairs with which I am connected is to keep the case out of Court,

Strictly speaking, it is not my duty to bring a blackmailer to justice, though in the course of my life my investigations have had that result. My first duty is to my clients, and as a rule I am engaged for the very reason that the person who seeks my services is frantically anxious to avoid publicity.

It looked at one time impossible that this happy result could follow my work on the Statmore case. and, curiously enough, this "blackmail", though blackmail it was in the true sense of the word, was in the legal sense not blackmail at all!

If I were giving real names and addresses, which, of course, I am not, every reader would know Statmore's shipbuilding firm. It is one of the most famous in the country. It employs its thousands of workmen, and puts into the water every year thousands of tons of shipping. John Statmore, who was plain Mr. Statmore, having refused, so I am told. the offer of a peerage, was, like many another man in the war, the most fortunate and the most unfortunate. That is to say, he added to his millions, but lost his two sons in the early fighting in Flanders.

I remembered him many years before as a very strict, hard man, who had no sympathy with those who fell by the way. He was a Churchman and the president of many philanthropic societies, and prouder of his name than many an aristocrat.

I will say that he and his sons lived according to their principles, and no breath of scandal ever touched them. Dearly as he loved his boys, Statmore would have cast them out if they had been guilty of half the follies which the young men of the day would commit and never think twice about.

All the Statmores were cast in the same mould and Anthony Statmore, if he was a little weaker than his cousins, had views as rigid as old "Iron John" his uncle. Tony Statmore was working in a draughtsman's office in London learning the rudiments of his profession when the war broke out. He threw up his work after telegraphing to his uncle and receiving his approval, enlisted straightaway into a line regiment, and was drafted out to the front in a few weeks. He was one of the heroic band which held the Ypres salient through that dreadful winter of 1914-15. He was wounded twice and later gassed, after which he came back to London on a long sick leave. Now, the effects of gas upon the men vary considerably, but I understand that one of the most common results of this terrible experience is to bring about a state of

depression which produces in some cases suicidal tendencies. Ordered to rejoin his unit, Anthony Statmore did so with the assurance that he was going out to his death. He believed implicitly that he would never return to his native land again. He had come up from Brighton, where he had been recuperating, and was spending his last few days in town, and in this mood he met Elsie Cave.

She was a shop girl in one of the big West End stores, very pretty and fragile, and with a most plausible little tongue. As a matter of fact, and as I discovered, at the time she met Tony, she was under suspicion at the stores where she was working for stealing, and she had a conviction against her at Reading for obtaining money by a trick.

You would never think it to look at her, but that is the kind of girl she was. Tony met her at a picture-house, where she was sitting by his side, and was struck, not only by her prettiness, but by her general forlorn and pitiful attitude.

He spoke to her and took her out to supper. He was glad enough of the diversion.

According to her statement she was half-starved, and she finished by telling him in the strictest confidence that she was contemplating suicide.

Tony, in a burst of splendid generosity, with the certain knowledge that he was going to his death, proposed marriage to the girl, and the next morning the ceremony was performed at the Marylebone Registrar's office. He had money of his own, and arranged with the bank to allow her a certain sum a week, whilst he also notified the authorities that he was a married man and wished his wife to receive the small allowance which the Government granted.

If he had also notified his uncle he might have saved himself a good deal of trouble; but for some reason, either shyness or being conscious that he had been rather precipitate, stopped him writing to the North, and he went out of England feeling that it was time enough that they should know when the news of his death came through. In justice to him it may be said that it was really nobody's business but his own. He was not dependent upon his uncle in any way, and he had no prospects of inheriting John Statmore's fortune.

Well, what might be expected happened. He was not killed, but he was taken prisoner by the Germans. He was only six months in Germany before he escaped and returned to England.

In the meantime his two cousins had been killed, and John Statmore had notified him, whilst he was in Germany, that Tony was to be his heir. He came

back to England and sought his wife vainly for three months.

Then he found her. It was after the armistice that I first met him in a professional capacity. A tall, good looking young man, rather pinched and very worried, he came to me with a letter of introduction from an old client of mine, and then it was that he told me frankly the story I have narrated.

"I found her in May." he said. "She was living in Reading with her mother, who is a charwoman, though the class of her relatives does not worry me at all. She was very surprised to see me, and I thought, a little disappointed.

"I think she would have been glad to have seen the back of me, because apparently I was a poverty stricken Tommy, but like a fool I told her that I was in the way of being a wealthy man, and that some day I should be a millionaire. Fortunately I did not tell her who my relations were, but she was a shrewd little Cockney, and very soon connected me with John Statmore. I think at first she thought I was lying to her, and I shall remember to my dying day the second she was convinced. I saw her eyes narrow, and a curious look come into her face. " 'Well, dearie,' she said, 'there's no reason why I should live in this hole any longer. I'm going up to London to stay at the best hotel.'

" 'But I haven't any money yet,' I said in consternation; I have only very little in the bank and my pay.'

" 'You can borrow it.' she said promptly; 'there are lots of people in London who will lend you money when they know that you will inherit your uncle's property. Who is he?'

"I didn't tell her who he was; but, as I say, she subsequently discovered for herself. To cut a long story short, she went to London, and, not content with living at the best hotel, the Green Park Hotel, she must live there in style. She and her mother had a suite, the rent of which alone was £40 a week. I expostulated with her, and like a silly ass I told her that if my uncle heard of the marriage he would possibly disinherit me."

I nodded.

"That was a fatal mistake to make. Mr. Statmore," I said, and he agreed with a gesture.

"Don't I know it," he said in despair. "From that time onwards, the real blackmailing started. In the past three months I have got my name into every big moneylender, books in London."

"How much have you drawn?" I asked.

"Close on £20.000," he said with a groan. "Of course. I can well afford to pay it back, if my uncle died; but he is still a hale man and. honestly, I like him so much that I would sooner have my own trouble than to learn he was dead."

There were one or two points about this, of course, which made my work almost impossible; but out of curiosity I ask. him "In what way does she blackmail you?"

He groaned.

"Every time she wants money she threatens to give a big dinner party and invite all her former associates, sending an account of the party to the newspapers." I nodded.

"She has made no attempt to approach your uncle?"

"Oh, no; she knows better than that," said the young man with a laugh; "that would be killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. And yet I am sure that if I refused her there is no step too desperate for her to take." I shook my head.

"Well, of course. Mr. Statmore, you know that I can do nothing for you."

"But why?" he asked.

"Because." I replied, "a wife cannot, in law, blackmail her husband. A wife can commit no offence, short of murder or any of those which lead to the divorce court. She can steal, deceive, conspire. blackmail, in fact almost anything for which another woman would receive penal servitude, and no charge can be made against her bemuse she is your wife."

He sat in a chair and covered his face with his hands. I thought for a while. Personally, I like a forlorn hope, and an easy case never appeals to me.

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"At the Green Park Hotel," said he, looking up with a gleam of hope.

"Well," I said, "I will do my best. though I warn you that that best is not likely to give you much relief. Still, there's a chance."

He gave me the name of the firm for which she was working when he met her, and it was from them that I learnt of her dubious antecedents, but that only made matters worse for poor Tony Statmore if his marriage came to the ears of his strict relatives. That afternoon I called at the Green Park Hotel and found Mrs. Statmore and her mother, a stout, coarse-looking female, expensively dressed, taking tea in their private sitting room. I sent up a card, just my name, and wondered what excuse I should make. I was half way up in the lift when

the idea occurred to me and I determined, at any rare to try it. She was pretty in a shrewish kind of way, this girl, and she looked old fashioned at me as I came in.

"What do you want?" she asked pertly. "Have you come about the furniture for my new house?"

It was the first news to me that she was having a new house, and I shook my head.

"No, Mrs. Glion," I said. That was the name she had registered in, for, like the shrewd little beggar she was, she was taking no risks. So long as she was not known as Mrs. Anthony Statmore she had a lever.

"Then what do you want?" she asked.

"I am a detective." I replied, and I saw her face go pale. "Oh, indeed." she said in bravado. "Well, I really don't know why you have called on me. I have done nothing to be afraid of."

Of course she gave her low origin away in that speech and I could have laughed, for I knew just how that kind of people, when they are jumped up into a superior position. fear the revelation of their unsavoury past.

I smiled.

"Of course you have done nothing, Mrs. Glion," said I. "The point is, I thought I might be able to render you a service. It has been brought to my notice that a gang of blackmailers in London have secured certain information about you which they intend exploiting."

She was perturbed and silent.

"What do they know about me?" said the girl at last. "Well," I said, "they believe your husband is a rich man, who has married you without the knowledge of his relatives, and, as I understand, they threaten to expose the marriage to your husband's friends."

She looked aghast at this remarkable possibility. "They also say that you have been convicted at the police court of theft."

"That's a lie," said the girl. "I am an honest woman, and—"

"Oh, Elsie." said the mother. "I knew there was going to be trouble."

"Will you shut up?" hissed the girl. "What can I do?" she asked again.

"Well. it occurred to me," said I, "that the best thing you can do is to employ a detective to protect your interests. Have you received any letters?" She shook her head."

"I didn't want this to happen," she said half to herself, "with the old man so ill."

"Which old man?" I asked.

"His uncle," she said shortly, and that was news to me too. As I say, she was a shrewd little Cockney, and I found afterwards that she was very well informed as to John Statmore's state of health and movements.

The next morning, to my surprise, I received an urgent Telegram from her saying, "Come at once." I say "to my surprise" because I certainly did not think she was the first person who would jump off the handle at the first point of danger. She was terribly agitated and her face betrayed genuine anxiety.

"Look at this letter! Look at this letter!" she stormed. "What shall I do?"

I took the letter. It was typewritten and began without any preliminary:

I happen to know that you are the wife of Anthony Statmore. I wonder if he knows that you were convicted at Reading on a charge of theft? I wonder if his wealthy uncle is also aware of that fact, and that two other charges were made against you in London? It will be worth a lot of money to keep this from your husband and his friends, and unless I receive £5,000 by tomorrow afternoon I shall place all the facts in the hands of your husband. The money must be in notes and sent to No. 309 Stamford Street, Blackfriars. The man who takes it will know nothing whatever of its contents, so you can save yourself the trouble of putting splits on to watch me. if you fail me, or if you send for the police, I will immediately notify your husband."

It was signed, "Joe."

"£5,000; £5,000!" she raved. "How can I get the money? Its like getting blood out of a stone anyway to get it from Anthony."

"What do you suggest doing?" I asked.

She walked up and down the apartment wringing her hands.

"I shall have to pay it," she said wildly. "Of course, I shall have to pay it. But can't you get on to these people?"

I shook my head.

"I'll have to see him," she said.

"Him," I knew, was the unfortunate Tony Statmore. "Do what you can," she pleaded; "perhaps you can see them and talk them over."

I went into the corridor, and as I opened the door I nearly collided with a red faced young man who looked like a coachman in his master's best clothes, and who was evidently going into the room I had left. I was a little surprised, especially when I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, that he went in without knocking.

I waited for a while for him to get settled. then I opened the door. They sprang apart as the door turned, and both looked so foolish that it was obvious he had had her in his arms. I made some excuse for resuming and went out again. The young man was a side line, but he had to be traced, and I put one of my assistants on to track him immediately.

Another week passed, and I had reason to believe that the girl had paid the money. John Statmore was sinking fast, and evidently the girl was preparing for her last big coup. Whilst Statmore lived she had a hold over Tony. On the Monday rooming she went to see her husband at his office in Cannon Street. She demanded £10,000 this time, and added: "Either I get it, or I go to your uncle." He nodded and opened the door.

"I will see what I can do." he said curtly and showed her out.

At five o'clock that evening as I was preparing to leave my office Mrs. Statmore flounced in. She was in a condition of hysteria between her rage and her fear.

"Can you beat this?" she as., slamming down a letter on my desk. "They've asked for another £10.000. £10.000, mark you! They have sent me a copy of the letter they are writing to Anthony and his uncle."

"How long do they give you?"

"Read the letter yourself!" she snapped. "Till twelve o'clock tomorrow. Can't you see?"

I handed the letter back.

"Don't pay them," said I.

"Don't pay them! she raved, she almost screamed, "don't pay them! Why, what does that mean? It means they go straight to Anthony—I've got to pay them! I must, I tell you! Anthony can raise money. He'll be a rich man soon. He could

raise £100,000 without any difficulty, couldn't he, Mr. Dixon?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I haven't any idea," said I diplomatically.

"But he could," she said, and seemed to brighten up at the thought. "Why, I was asking a friend of mine, Mr. Stenton, the gentleman you saw in my rooms, who came to call on my mother the other day," she said with certain emphasis; "he told me that Anthony could raise half a million if he wanted to. And Mr. Stenton knows. He's been in a moneylender's office before he went on the Turf. Can't you catch this man Joe? Can't you shoot him or something," she demanded fiercely. "What do you think I'm paying you for?"

"Not to commit murder, Mrs. Glion," said I.

The next morning she 'phoned to me and asked me to come round urgently. I found her pacing up and down the room like a tigress.

"I want you to come up with me to the North," she said. "I am going to see my husband's uncle. My husband has refused to give me any more money. I mean it, I tell you. I have told him I mean it, and you shall come up with me."

"But Mr. Statmore is very ill, I understand," said I.

"What do I care?" she asked. "I am going to pay that mean hound in his own coin."

There was nothing for me to do but to accompany her. I was determined that she should make no revelation, but I did not see exactly how I should stop it. I found out afterwards that. recognising the game was up, or nearly up, she had arranged to fly the country with the red faced gentleman who was such a constant visitor at the hotel, and that she had demanded a sum which can only be described as colossal.

Acting on advice, Tony refused. We reached our destination in the evening of a very dull December day, and took a taxicab to the great mansion which Mr. Statmore occupied. But we were not allowed to see the dying man, and when she wrote a note to him I found means to change it for a blank sheet of paper, which I had prepared myself with.

We returned to London by the late train, and the first news I received on arrival was a telephone message from Anthony saying that his uncle was dead. Mrs. Anthony Statmore had heard the news, too, and she 'phoned me in the morning.

"Anyway, Tony's got to pay," she said determinedly, "This case is going to get into the newspapers otherwise, and that isn't going to do him any good."

I laughed.

"I don't see exactly how they can put it into the papers, Mrs. Statmore." I said; "more likely your divorce proceedings will go into the newspapers."

"Oh, so that's it." she said; "you were working with him all the time, were you? And that's why you couldn't catch Joe."

I heard her laugh.

"Come round and see me, I have a little surprise for you."

I pricked up my ears at that.

"Certainly," I said, and took a cab straight away to the Green Park Hotel. When I got there. I found to my amazement that not only was the red faced Stenton there, but two men who were strangers to me.

"You don't know these gentlemen, Mr. Dixon, do you?"

"I'm afraid I don't," I replied.

"They are private detectives." she sneered. "You are not the only detective in London, you know, and when I found you couldn't catch Joe I put these two men on. They've been following him for a week, since I sent the last lot of money to him. He goes every morning to a little office in the West End, doesn't he?"

One of the men nodded.

"From ten till eleven he's there, miss. Nobody knows his name."

"And from ten till eleven I'll be there," she said; "and you can come alone and see him pinched. This other gentleman," she pointed to the second stranger, "is a detective from Scotland Yard. Perhaps you'd like to be in at the death, Mr. Clever Dixon."

"I certainly should," said I.

"But what do you mean by divorce" she demanded, and I laughed.

"Come, come. Mrs. Statmore. I've evidence enough to get three divorces, and I'm citing your friend here as one of the causes." I nodded to the red faced person, who looked uncomfortable.

She said nothing more, but a taxicab was hired and we all drove off to a point in Piccadilly, where we descended. We turned up a side street, the private detective leading the way, to a small block which was let off in flats and

offices, and up the stairs.

"This way, madam." said the detective. She pushed past him and, flinging open the door, walked in.

"Now, Joe," she said triumphantly, and stopped—for, sitting at the table reading his correspondence, was her husband.

"You!" she gasped. "Is that the man?"

The detective nodded, and I saw a malignant light dawn in her eyes.

"That's better than ever I thought," she said. "Officer, this is the man. I charge him with robbing me of £15,000."

The Scotland Yard man pushed his way to the office and looked down at Tony who was smiling.

"Do you know this person, madam?" asked the Scotland Yard man.

"Certainly I know him," she said; "he is my husband!"

"Your husband!" The policeman shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't execute this warrant."

"Well, madam, said the detective, "a husband cannot blackmail his wife, nor a wife her husband. Didn't you know that?"

She was silent.

"Or a wife her husband," I repeated gently.

She turned on me with a look of hate, and sweeping through the door passed out of Anthony Statmore's life. I heard that she sailed the next week with Stenton for New York. At any rate, she did not defend the divorce action which Anthony so successfully brought.

IV. — THE MYSTERY OF BISHOP'S CHAIR

TURNING over a file of miscellaneous papers the other day, having in my mind the urgent necessity for getting rid of a lot of rubbish which accumulates at an amazing rate in my office, I came upon a typewritten sheet of paper which had the appearance of being a very amateurish attempt to advertise a

book, save that certain features in that advertisement were remarkable.

It is seven years ago since that document came into my hands. and I was surprised to see it, being under the impression that it was in the dossier of the Public Prosecutor. On reflection, however, I remembered that there were many of these announcements which came my way, and although I thought I handed them all to the proper authorities, this had evidently been overlooked.

My first introduction to Mrs. Pellon Page came in a conventional way. I received a letter from her couched in the most guarded language, asking me if I would care to undertake delicate negotiations—the "delicate" being underlined. As was usual in such cases, she wrote in a false name—I think it was Morris—and gave me as address a little shop off the Haymarket to which letters could be addressed.

I replied in the usual matter-of-fact manner, telling her that we were in the habit of dealing with very delicate matters indeed, and that she need have no apprehension as to my discretion or probity. I enclosed, as is usual, the names of my solicitor and banker for reference. It happened, fortunately for the lady, that my solicitor was hers, though I think that this fact almost determined her to go no farther in the matter, since she was anxious that her solicitor should know nothing.

Eventually, however, she overcame her fears, and I met her in the Piccadilly tea rooms. She was a tall, graceful woman of forty-five, quietly but handsomely dressed, and still very beautiful. I think she was relieved to discover that the detective she had engaged was not one of the down at heel people she had been led to believe would meet her, and that he was at least presentable and did not excite attention; and I would here remark in passing for the benefit of a younger generation that the art of being well dressed is to be so dressed that you do not look out of the common. The man is badly dressed who is dressed so finely that people turn their heads to look at him, or so poorly that he shows up against those who are normally costumed.

"I am going to be frank," she said; "my name is not Morris." and she handed me her card.

I recognised the name at once as the wife of a member of Parliament, not very well known outside his constituency, it is true, but a man of some substance. In these revelations I am not giving the real names of persons and places.

"I am being blackmailed." She blurted out the very important fact to start with.

"Do you know who is blackmailing you?" I asked. She nodded.

"I know the man's name, though I do not remember ever having met him."

"Or his address?"

She shook her head.

"He writes to me from an accommodation address."

I nodded.

"So then, I take it, you have no desire that this man should be arrested or charged?"

"Great Heavens, no!" she said. "That is the last thing in the world I want, and before I go any further I must ask you whether that is to be the outcome of your work."

"Not unless you wish it. madam," I said. "Though, in a sense, I am condoning a felony by refraining from placing the police in possession of the facts, such a condonation is permissible."

That seemed to satisfy her, and she took from her handbag a typewritten announcement similar to that which I discovered in turning over my papers last week. It ran:

Soon To Be On Sale

The Wonderful Storz

THE BISHOP'S CHAIR

Quarto Size. Price £100.

Don't Miss This.

It Will Create a Sensation.

Apply to

TOMMY DODD,

397, Theobalds Place, N.

I read the announcement carefully, and noticed that he had obviously written

"storz" for "story." I also observed that the word "size" had originally been written "siye," and that the "z" had been put on over the top of the "y." Also, I noticed that the small "e" was crooked, and had evidently been set on to its bar slightly out of the true. Otherwise the type looked new, and from the spacing it was evident that the writer knew something about typewriting, and therefore his slip with the "z" and the "y" was all the more remarkable.

I put the paper down in front of me.

"What is the Bishop's Chair?" I asked.

She hesitated.

"That is the one thing I do not want to tell you," she said. and I shook my head smilingly.

"I am afraid, madam, you will have to tell me everything if I am to be of any service to You"

But on this point she was obdurate, and I thought that my investigations were due to stop, to use an Irishism, before they commenced.

"All I want you to do," she said, "is to see this man and ask him whether he will take a lump sum and cease his persecutions. This is the fourth I have received, and each has been for £100."

"How long has this been going on?" I asked.

"For twelve months." she said.

Again I shook my head.

"It is a very difficult, indeed almost an impossible task you have set me, Mrs. Pellon Page," said I, "I presume that this man, if man it is," she nodded, "is in possession of letters which you have written—indiscreet letters to a man."

She smiled scornfully.

"You suppose wrong, Mr. Dixon," she said. "I have never written a letter which I would not mind the world reading, and I have certainly never done anything in my life, anything of that kind," she added, hastily, "which I am ashamed of people knowing."

"And that is all you wish me to do? Find the man, interview him, offer him a net sum to cease persecuting you?"

She nodded.

"I am afraid, madam," said I, "that you are doing a very foolish thing. There never was a blackmailer who would let up on a man or woman who was rich enough to pay him. Suppose you gave him a large sum. Do you imagine that he would let up on you? He will be back again in twelve months' time demanding even a bigger sum. There is no honour amongst thieves, and less amongst blackmailers."

She raised her hands in a gesture of despair.

"This is killing me," she said in a low voice; "it is killing me. It is brutally wicked. But I must pay; I must pay!"

"There is one thing I would like to ask you," I said at parting, "how long have you been married?"

She shot me a suspicious glance.

"Ten years," she said.

"Can you give me the date?"

She was surprised into laughing.

"My husband is not the solution to your difficulty," she said. "I was married at the Westminster Registry Office," and she gave me the date.

She seemed so loth to give me any further information that I did not press the matter. I might say in passing that the fee she offered me was a very handsome one, and the size of one's fee, in spite of the heroic stuff that is written about detectives, does certainly determine the amount of work one is prepared to put into a case.

My first step was to go to Theobalds Place and make a few inquiries. As the lady suspected, and as I was pretty well sure, the address was that of a little tobacconist, and against one of the shelves was nailed a sign "Letters may be addressed here. Fee 3d."

I had a talk with the proprietor, a reticent man. and asked him whether I could have a few letters addressed there. He growled his agreement and told me his charge. "What is the most convenient time to call for the letters?" I asked.

"Any hour you like," he replied, "as long as the shop's open; but don't you expect me to come down and give you your letters, because I wouldn't do that for anybody."

"I'll call about the same time as Tommy calls," I said.

"Tommy who?" he demanded.

"Tommy Dodd," said I; "He is a friend of mine."

"Tommy Dodd," he frowned; "oh, I know the fellow, he calls as a rule about seven. He's still boozing, isn't he?"

I shook my head sadly and admitted he was.

"A funny fellow," said the tobacconist; "spends half his time abroad, doesn't he?"

"He is abroad a lot," said I cautiously.

"He sent me lots of postcards from Switzerland. It must be a very beautiful country." said he.

So Tommy was a traveller, presumably his life was a long holiday, and he returned at odd intervals to replenish his funds. I hung about the neighbourhood till nearly seven. Then seven. There were not so many customers going into the tobacconist, that I could make much mistake. The working men with their bags of tools, their red handkerchiefs and dinner pails were obviously not in Tommy's class. So that when I saw a young man, well dressed, wearing gloves and carrying a walking stick, stepping briskly along the road and turning into the 'tobacconist's, I guessed that this was my man.

I went in after him, expecting the explanation which I would have to make would be made in the shop; but the tobacconist was not on duty, so Mr. "Tommy Dodd" was not informed that somebody had been there claiming to be his friend.

A girl answered his rap on the counter.

"Any letters for T.D.?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Dodd." said the girl; "none at all."

He frowned.

"Are you sure?" he demanded.

"Perfectly sure," said the girl.

I had a good look at him. He was one of those "puffy" faced young men, hands and face had the plumpness which only comes from an abuse of appetite. His eyes were small and shifty, his mouth thick and loose-lipped.

He made a little grimace and ordered a cigar, which he lit at the counter, and

taking no notice of me, walked out. I did not trouble to make any excuse for coming in, but turned to follow him. As he turned the corner I put my arm through his.

"Well, Mr. Tommy Dodd," said I pleasantly, "I would like a little talk with you."

He turned a sickly green and sagged against me so that I thought he was falling, but with an effort he pulled himself up.

"Who are you?" he demanded in a voice from which the quaver of fear was not wholly eliminated.

"I am a detective." I said.

I thought he was going to swoon.

"A private detective," I added, to relieve his mind. Men of this character have different ways of recovering their equilibrium. Mr. Tommy Dodd followed a very normal course with cowards of this kind in breaking into a string of the vilest abuse.

"So she has put a detective on me, has she?" he stormed. "Well, I'll show her something! You do as you like. Take me to the station! You have nothing against me; but I've got something against her, by God!"

"Unless you want to be pinched," said I, "you will be a sensible man and come for a little walk and see if we can't arrange matters. I have not come to arrest, but to arrange."

As it dawned upon him that he was no longer in any danger his self assurance returned. I verily believe that had I made a bluff that he was pinched, and offered him an opportunity of getting out of the country he would have fallen for it. As it was, however, I was merely carrying out instructions.

His assurance had so far returned that he invited me to his lodgings. He had a first floor suite in a boarding house in Manor Gardens, and I accompanied him thither. In the pleasant sitting room which he occupied I observed a trunk bearing French and Swiss railway labels which had been applied only recently.

"Sit down and have a whisky and soda," he said. "Don't you think I was scared of you, because I wasn't!"

"Naturally," said I. "What have you got to be scared about? These are my proposals. Mr. Dodd."

I took from my pocket a little leather case which I had brought with me and

extracted a card on which I had scribbled a tentative suggestion.

"Just read that."

He took the card in his hand and read with a puzzled face.

"But I don't understand this."

"Well then, read this," said I, giving him another card where I had briefly written the proposal which Mrs. Pellon Page had made, namely, that he should receive a net sum.

But what he did not know was this, that at the back of the first card I had pasted an ordinary carbon paper which had blackened his fingers, and that as he read the proposal he was putting his fingerprints on the back of the second card.

He handed this to me and shook his head with a sneer.

"No good." he said. "What I want is £1000 a year sent to a foreign address, and you are wasting your time asking me to take anything less."

He had poured two whiskies and sodas and was reaching for his own when accidentally I upset mine and the whisky fell over his hand. With an apology I gripped his hand and wiped it with my handkerchief, for I was anxious that he should not observe his blackened fingerprints. He was quite congenial about the accident and was quite prepared to talk; but he would not talk about the matter which interested me, namely, what had Mrs. Pellon Page done which gave him such a hold over her.

"That's my business," he said, when I asked him what was the meaning of the Bishop's Chair. "If she hasn't told you, I am not going to. We can't have two people drawing money." he said with a coarse laugh; "and that information is worth a lot."

I left him at last, satisfied that I had got everything I could get from him. I promised to meet him the next day. He was living in the house under the name of Thomas Clinton. I got on to one of the servants that night, but she had not very much to say to Mr. Thomas Clinton's credit. He drank heavily, he kept vicious society, and he was a man of the most violent temper.

"But he's crazy about his young lady," she said; "though she isn't much good, by all accounts."

Nothing is too small for a detective to investigate, and I went after the young lady, who proved to be a third rate music hall artiste with an unsavoury

reputation.

I met Mrs. Pellon Page by appointment and told her the results of my interview. She drew a long sigh.

"Well, I shall have to pay, I suppose," she said; "thank you, Mr. Dixon, you have done your best, but he is insatiable."

I made another attempt to get information from her, but she was adamant. She paid me my fee, and there the matter rested so far as she was concerned.

But by this time I was interested. I do not like to be baffled, and although I was no longer in her employ, I went out to get news. I inquired at the registry office, and a copy of her marriage certificate enlightened me. When she married Pellon Page she was a widow—a Mrs. Clinton. I did not think there was very much connection between her previous name and the name which this rascal had given me. In fact. I guessed from the first that Clinton was an alias of his, though he was probably influenced in adopting it by reason of the fact that it was familiar to him.

I dropped into my club to see a friend of mine, who is one of those men who are veritable encyclopaedias of the landed gentry. He knows who is married to whom, and why. He knows every family history back to the Conqueror, their relations and their intricate inter-marriages.

"Clinton!" he said; "well, there are lots of Clintons. What was Clinton's front name?"

"Stenton Meredith Clinton," said I and he whistled.

"Oh, he's one of the Clintons of Stokes Bisset. I remember him very well. Terrible fellow; he used to drink and knock his wife about. She married Pellon Page."

"That's the fellow," I said, "do you know anything about him—Clinton. I mean?"

"No; except that he committed suicide in the presence of his wife. Shot himself on an old stone seat in front of the house which was called the Bishop's Chairs."

"That's it, that's it," I said.

"What's it?" he asked puzz1ed.

"That's the man," said I, regaining my composure.

"A bad lot, a very bad. lot." My friend shook his head solemnly and branched forth into a long history of the Clintons and their eccentricities.

I wrote to Mrs. Pellon Page and asked her if she would, come to my office, telling her that I had made a certain discovery. She obeyed the summons, and I could see that she was very nervous. I went straight to the heart of the subject.

"Mrs. Pellon Page," I said, "I am going to ask you a straight question. Who killed your husband, Stenton Meredith Clinton?"

I thought she was going to faint. She gripped the edge of the table, and her face went ghastly.

Presently she said in a low voice—"I did."

"Wilfully?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"It was an accident. He threatened to kill me. He had the revolver in his hand, and I struggled with him for its possession. Just as I was twisting it round it went off. Oh, it was horrible, horrible!" She covered her eyes with her hands.

"Who saw this?" I asked after a while. "The man?" She shook her head.

"It was my old nurse. She kept my secret, and the jury, returned a verdict of 'Suicide'. It was mad of me. I could have told the truth. but I suppose I was a coward."

"Then how does this man come into it—this man who called himself Tommy Dodd?"

"His name is Dodling." she said; "he is the son of my old nurse."

"And she told him?"

She nodded.

"On her death bed the poor creature was troubled and she had to tell somebody. She did not know that the boy was out and out bad. He kept the information, but later he got into some trouble with the bank where he was employed as a shorthand typist, and wrote to me for my assistance, mentioning, that his mother had told him something. I was frantic with terror, and I made the mistake of sending him a large sum of money. Since then," she spread out her hands hopelessly, "it would ruin my husband if it came to light, even though I know I should not be punished. I am glad you know, Mr. Dixon." she said. "and I suppose it was foolish of me not to tell you in the first

place. Nothing can be done nothing, nothing."

I let the matter go at that, having satisfied my own curiosity, and, beyond wondering sometimes whether she was still paying him, or whether he had increased his demands. the matter went out of my head.

I heard once that Mr. Tommy Dodd was still in England, and then occurred the Rolls Road murder. A girl was found in this unsavoury thoroughfare, lying, in the middle of the road, stabbed in a dozen places. She was identified as a frequenter of cheap dance halls and no good was known of her. But her moral character did not interest the police. They were after the man, or woman, who had committed this terrible crime. Of clues there were none. The night of the murder was a particularly foggy one, and she might have been carried a mile without anybody being any the wiser.

The underworld hang together, and though from the finery in which she was dressed it was evident she had been out to some party, a careful search of all the rendezvous where people of this character assembled failed to give the police any clue. It was almost impossible to trace the man she had been seen with in the previous weeks—there had been so many who had danced with her.

I was talking to Inspector Follingham about the case, of which he had charge.

"It is evidently a crime committed by a man who is half insane and who, at the time of the murder, was half drunk," he said.

The insanity theory worked out and a few days later Scotland Yard received a boastful letter signed "The Avenger." It was full of threats as to the next person he would "do in." "There are certain so called stars I am going to fix," one passage ran; "The Avenger is on their trail," and it concluded "Yours till Hell freezes."

A hint dropped by one of the Headquarters men to me sent me to Scotland Yard in a hurry. I saw Follingham.

"I've come to see you about that murder," said I. "Can I see the letter?"

"Certainly." said Follingham. "There's a nice dirty little fingerprint on one corner that I'd give a lot of money to have the duplicate of, so put on your gloves before you handle the epistle."

I slipped on my gloves and took the letter in my hand.

"Can't you trace it?" I asked.

"There are fifty million sets of fingers in this country," he said, "and our record is well under a million. What chance have we of tracing it unless the man is a criminal?"

I read the letter through.

"This was written on a typewriter purchased in Switzerland," I said.

"How do you know?" he asked, interested.

I laughed.

"I'm not making a mystery of it," I said; "but if I were to point out the fact that he often writes 'z' for 'y'. and vice versa, that is because the machines supplied to Switzerland have the keys reversed, and even the most expert typist makes a mistake. As to your fingerprint"—I had kept a certain card locked away in my safe and I had brought it with me, and now I laid it on the table—"I think you will find they correspond. The murderer is a man who calls himself Tommy Dodd. His address is No. 916 Manor Gardens. He calls himself Thomas Clinton there."

"How do you know this?" asked Follingham suspiciously.

"I have reason to know," said I. "I had charge of a case in which he was connected."

They arrested Clinton that night and he fought like the maniac he was. Of course after he was pinched, everybody remembered seeing him dancing with the girl. He had had a quarrel with his own lady love, who, if the truth be told, was as much involved in the murder as any, though she escaped conviction, and the quarrel had extended to his new inamorata. There had been a free for all fight in the street, and probably the music hall artiste was involved, although it was never brought home to her.

Clinton died before his trial, in the prison infirmary at Brixton, and when I took the news to Mrs. Pellon Page she was wrapping up ten £100 notes to send to the murderer. quite ignorant of the fact that he bad been arrested.

V. — THE TWENTY-THOUSAND-POUND KISS

OF all the cases I have had to deal with, none probably offered quite the same features as did the Trusome affair. In many respects it was, of course, a typical

case of blackmail. That is to say, the blackmail took a very familiar, though a very unpleasant form.

Harold Trusome was the son of a very rich manufacturer established for many years in the West of England. He inherited his father's enormous fortune and his leaning for philanthropy.

Young Trusome, even at Oxford, had associated himself with the work of uplifting the socially oppressed. He devoted himself to a mission operating in the East End of London. He was a patron and an energetic supporter of a dozen other philanthropic enterprises. and gave very large monetary support to others with which his name was not associated.

A good looking, broad shouldered specimen of muscular Christianity, he was blessed with a fund of good humour, was something of an athlete, and the last man in the world one would have suspect of worrying about what other people thought of him. But, alas! for frail human nature, he had the vanity of virtue, or possibly he was blessed with too keen an imagination.

The first time I met him was in relation to an inquiry about a man who was employed by him as an inspector in the East End of London. The man's duty was to go round the slums and discover genuine cases of distress. But unfortunately for Mr. Trusome, the person selected was a rascal without any redeeming features. He was wanted by the police on certain charges, and some of his criminal activities had brought him within my purview. It was then that I had to see Mr. Trusome, and he was genuinely shocked.

"Of course, I'll get rid of the man at once." he said. "What a paltry scoundrel he must be! But can you understand, Mr. Dixon, why people allow themselves to be blackmailed? Doesn't it argue an extraordinary want of moral courage on the part of the victims?"

I smiled.

"That is an outsider's point of view, Mr. Trusome." I said; "personally, I have every sympathy with the blackmailed. You see, a man argues that though seventy people out of a hundred believe him innocent of the offence on which the blackmailer is working, the other thirty will say there is no smoke without fire. And in course of time those thirty, having the strongest convictions, will come to make the other seventy believe that there was 'something in it.' "

He nodded.

"I see that," said he. "Nevertheless, I do not think that the opinion of other people would weigh against my own sense of justice and rectitude."

I had no occasion to see Mr. Trusome again, and the story as I tell it is mainly picked up from a narrative subsequently supplied to me, the most important information, of course, being given to me by Mr. Trusome himself. I ought to state that the real names of persons and places are not given.

There are blackmailers and blackmailers. The big "professionals" are satisfied to make one coup in two years, but that coup must be a big one, and must offer wonderful profits. The swell mob is always the most difficult to get after, because, naturally, they cover their tracks, they spend money by the thousands, and as a rule they do not operate in the same country twice in succession. Their plans are laid with the utmost cleverness and deliberation. They study the character, the habits, even the idiosyncrasies of speech of their victim; and a real big blackmailing campaign is as carefully thought out and planned as is a great battle.

Mr. Trusome had a big house at Chislehurst, in the suburbs of London. He was a bachelor and a man who liked the good things of life. And here it might be remarked that, because a man is a good Christian, he is not necessarily a dull companion. Because he believes in the uplifting of his fellows he is not necessarily narrow or mean, or, if it comes to that, frugal or temperate. The latter Trusome undoubtedly was, though he kept a good table and his wine cellar was well stocked.

If he had a fault, it was, as I detected at our first meeting, an inclination to self righteousness. He was inclined to despise people who succumbed to temptations which were never offered to him.

In May, 19—, the big house next to Mr. Trusome was let furnished to a rich American named Dudley Some. Mr. Dudley Some was a youngish, well spoken, quiet, good looking American, and his wife as radiantly a beautiful creature as any human being has a right to be. She might have stood as a model for Gibson with her big eyes and aristocratic features, and in her movements she was grace itself.

The two "families" became acquainted. Mr. Trusome had some wonderful old cartoons of the Renaissance period, and, curious enough, Dudley Some had also a few cartoons by the great Leonardo. Now Leonardo cartoons are very rare; there is only one collection in Britain, as far as I know: namely, that possessed by the King at Windsor Castle, and Trusome was naturally interested.

They dined with one another, and undoubtedly Trusome was attracted by the beauty and vivacity of his charming neighbour. He found that she was interested in social work and offered to accompany her round the slums of

London. This offer was eagerly accepted and the visit occurred, Mr. Dudley Some being one of the party. This was followed by another excursion, from which the American excused himself, as he had an important engagement in Manchester.

Things went on like this through the summer, and then, on the 14th September, occurred the event which brings me to the story. In the first week of September it was announced in the newspapers that the honour of a knighthood had been bestowed upon Harold Trusome. It was an honour which was quite expected by those who knew the splendid work which Trusome had done, and there is no disguising the fact that the new Sir Harold was as pleased as anybody by this mark of his Sovereign's favour. He gave a dinner party at Chislehurst, to which the Dudley Somes were invited. They returned the honour, Sir Harold dining with the couple en famille.

Sir Harold, as I say, had a large house and a fairly large staff of servants. There were eight or nine in all. On the morning of the 14th he summoned his butler to his study.

"Perkins," he said with a smile. "I have given the servants a lot of extra work this last month, and I'm rewarding you all with a great treat."

"Indeed, sir?" said the butler, interested.

"I have taken two boxes for you at the Middlesex," Sir Harold went on, "and I am sending you all up by car this evening."

"That's very good, sir." said the butler, hesitating; "but who is to look after you?"

"I shall be all right," said Sir Harold, laughing; "I think I shall manage without assistance for a few hours. You take them along and give them a good time. You can either have dinner in town, or you can dine at the house before you go."

This was not the first time that their employer had prepared an unexpected little treat for the household. Once he had taken a house for them at Brighton, and had sent his whole staff down for a change.

After lunch Dudley Some called.

"I want you to do me a favour, Sir Harold." he said; I'm called to another of those infernal conferences at Manchester, and I shall be away all night. Will you give eye to my wife"?

"With the greatest pleasure," said Sir Harold heartily.

"She is rather scared of burglars," Dudley Some. went on, "and I have told her that if she gets nervous she is either to telephone to you, or put a light in the window, which you can see from your study, as you were remarking the other day."

Sir Harold rose and slapped him on the back.

"Don't you worry, my dear chap." he said. "I'll be on hand all the evening. It so happens that I am staying at home."

Nothing unusual happened during the rest of the day. The servants went on their treat, and Sir Harold settled down for an evening's quiet work. His study window, as Dudley Some had said, overlooked the side of the American's house; and from where he sat at his desk he could see the big window at which, it had been agreed, a light should be placed in the event of Mrs. Dudley Some feeling nervous or requiring assistance of any kind. It was a stormy night; rain fell in buckets, and a shrill wind moaned round the house. Once or twice he looked up to see whether the light was showing, but all was darkness. About ten o'clock, when he had switched on the electric kettle and was making himself a cup of cocoa, he glanced up, and to his surprise saw a light shining clearly in the hall window. He turned off the kettle and hurried downstairs into the hall, slipped on his raincoat, and opened the door. As he did so he started back, for there on the porch stood Mrs. Dudley Some.

"Oh. I'm so frightened!" she said in a trembling voice, "please let me come in!"

He stood aside and let her pass, closing the doer behind him.

"My dear lady," he said, "whatever is the matter?"

"I don't know," she quavered, "but I heard all sorts of queer sounds, and I have sent my servants to the cinema tonight, and—oh. I am so frightened!"

He led her upstairs to his study. To his surprise she was in night attire, with a big fur coat over her nightdress. She looked amazingly beautiful, but this did not concern him so much as the fact that her feet were wet, the thin slippers she wore being sodden. Presently she jumped up to her feet with a nervous little laugh.

"I have been awfully foolish, Sir Harold," she said, "I'll go back now. It was just a little hysteria, I think."

"I'll take you back." said he rising.

"No, no, no," she said emphatically, "you will stay here. I won't allow you to

leave this room. Promise you won't come out. or I'll stay here all night," she challenged.

He laughed.

"Well, if you're so emphatic, and you are certain that you're all right," said Trusome, "I won't press the point. But I shall feel awfully uncomfortable—"

"You can watch me through the window," she interrupted; "from there you can see me go across the lawn to my own door."

He had to be satisfied with that, and as she disappeared from the room he walked to the window. He waited some time without seeing her, and presently, to his surprise, she walked again into his study with a mischievous smile on her beautiful face.

"I haven't gone," she laughed, "and really, I feel ever so much better now. Will you forgive me, Sir Harold, for my folly?"

"Why, there's nothing to forgive," said the other.

"And you won't tell anybody about my having come?"

"Why, surely not," he said with an involuntary glance at her scanty attire, "but do please get back quickly and change your slippers."

"You won't breathe a word to my husband? He's awfully jealous."

"Oh, indeed!" said Sir Harold. after a moment's uncomfortable pause. "that's awkward. But still, I promise you I won't tell him."

She smiled in his face and laid both of her hands on his shoulders. Their faces were only a few inches apart, and I think Sir Harold Trusome would have been less than human if he did not sacrifice some of his high principles at that moment. Of course, by all the strict canons of morality, it was wrong for him to kiss her, and was indefensible from every point of view, except the human view. Kiss her he undoubtedly did, and instantly her arms were about his neck.

"You are a dear," she breathed.

At that moment the door opened and Mr. Dudley Some came into the room. He stood as though spellbound, and Harold was the first to see him. Slowly he disengaged the girl's arms from his neck and faced the outraged husband. The scene which followed was violent, to say the least of it. The girl slipped out in the confusion and made the best of her way to her own house.

"Explain nothing!" roared Dudley Some, striking the desk with his fist, "it

wants some explaining! You're a blackguard. Trusome! I've suspected something like this all along. If I hadn't lost the train to the North tonight. I should have been ignorant of this treachery. It doesn't want explaining. it explains itself!"

This and more in the same strain; and at last Dudley Some took his departure, leaving a man facing what to him was final and absolute disgrace.

It was three days afterwards when I came into the case. I received a telephone message from Trusome's office and repaired there without delay, wondering exactly what trouble he was in that would make my services necessary. Of course. I realised that every big man like him is a mark for villainy, but I certainly did not expect to hear the story which he told me.

"I can tell you, before we go any further." he said, "that this is not a case of blackmail that I am asking your advice upon. It is simply a matter which ordinarily I should have taken to my solicitor. For a reason which you will quite understand—"

"In fact," I said, "you don't think he would believe you."

"That's exactly it." said Sir Harold.

Very carefully and conscientiously he related the particulars of his association with the Dudley Somes. He led up to the night of the fourteenth, and described in detail all that had happened, coming at last to the scene between himself and the husband.

"Of course, it was simply terrible. I shudder now when I think of it," he said with a little shiver. "I had nothing to say—what could I say? It was unpardonable of me to kiss Mrs. Dudley Some—absolutely unpardonable. But, as I say, her face was close to mine, and I obeyed a mad impulse—" he stopped and shrugged his shoulders in despair.

"It looks bad, of course," said I, "I will not disguise that fact from you. You sent all your servants out for the night, she comes to your house scantily clad, and is discovered by her husband in your arms. In fact," I said, "the circumstances look as black as they possibly can be. Now what has happened since?"

"I am going to tell you." he nodded. "The next morning Dudley Some called upon me, would hear no explanations, and indeed I was not inclined to offer any. He was much calmer than he had been the day before, and was willing, apparently, to listen to reason. When I say 'listen to reason,' " said Sir Harold with a faint smile, "he was prepared to talk like a rational being. He said I had

hopelessly compromised his wife and compromised him. Her maid and another servant saw her come back, and apparently saw her leave my house."

"Where is Mrs. Dudley Some now?"

"She has gone away into the country—in fact to Bournemouth. She left the morning after," said Sir Harold; "she has written me a frantic letter, asking me to make peace with her husband, and blaming herself for everything."

"That makes it worse instead of better," said I. "What is he doing—Dudley Some, I mean?"

Sir Harold shrugged his shoulders.

"He is instituting divorce proceedings." he said shortly. "Of course, this means something more than my social ruin. Dixon. If I were an ordinary society man I suppose I could live the scandal down in twelve months. But I am not a society man. I have a great number of enterprises which are founded on my character. I am known as a social worker; I have just received a knighthood for that work, as you know; and to figure as corespondent in a divorce suit is altogether repugnant to me."

He was greatly moved, and paced up and down the room for a few minutes in absolute silence. I saw what the wreckage of this man's work meant to him, and I confess was sympathetic, for I believed his story. Still, there was more to come, as I realised, and presently Sir Harold flung himself down in his chair at his desk and told me the rest.

"This morning Dudley Some came to see me, and said that he was concerned about his wife's future.

" 'In the event of my divorcing her,' he said, 'do you intend marrying her?'

" 'Certainly not,' I replied. 'I like Mrs. Some, but there is nothing between us and no obligation on my part whatever to make her my wife. I admit I have been foolish, and, if you will, dishonourable.'

"Then he stopped me.

" 'Then do you intend my wife, who is absolutely dependent upon me, to be left to the mercy of the world? Remember, she has no income of her own. She was a comparatively poor girl when I married her in New York, and her small income went out with a bank failure. No, I want to be reasonable, Sir Harold,' he said. 'I am passionately fond of my wife, and you have wrecked my whole career. I should be doing justice to my feelings if I shot you both. But deep down in my heart I have a real affection for the woman who has betrayed me. I

purpose settling twenty thousand pounds upon her right away, and I suggest you do the same. I will even go so far,' he added, 'as to make this concession that I will spare her the humiliation of taking her into court.'

" 'Do you mean you'll drop the divorce proceedings?' I asked.

" 'Exactly,' said Dudley Some. 'After all, I have no desire to be divorced. I shall never marry again. If you do not want to marry her, there is no reason why she should be divorced at all. She can go her way and I will go mine. But I can only gain perfect peace of mind if I feel that she is well provided for, and that she will be if you agree to my scheme.' "

Sir Harold finished.

"And what did you do?" I asked.

"I asked for twenty-four hours to think it over," said Sir Harold. "The money, of course, will not ruin me. In fact, I can very well afford to have paid the whole of the forty thousand pounds. What is troubling me is whether I ought not, as the result of this terrible misunderstanding, to do the honourable thing —allow the divorce to go through and marry Mrs. Dudley Some."

"You mean," said I, "let the case go through undefended?"

He nodded.

"In such circumstances," he said, "I think it is quite possible to keep names out. Now, Dixon, you're a man of the world and are used to all sorts of cases of this character. What am I to do?"

"First of all." I said. "you can answer a few questions. Take your mind back to the morning of the 14th of September, when you decided to send your servants to the theatre. I take it that you had already purchased the tickets or arranged for the seats? Now, when did that idea of sending them strike you?"

He knit his forehead in thought.

"About three days before. I was dining with the Dudley Somes, and Mrs. Some was saying what an excellent show it was, but not quite the kind that she or I would enjoy to the full." He thought a while.

"Go on," I encouraged.

"Then I remember," said Sir Harold slowly, "that Mrs. Some said that she had sent her maid—by Jove, yes, it was Mrs. Some who gave me the idea."

"Exactly," said I dryly; "it was Mrs. Some, I should imagine, who fixed the

night?"

Sir Harold nodded.

"It was, yes." He looked at me. "You don't mean to suggest," he said sternly, "that that unfortunate woman—"

"I suggest nothing, Sir Harold," I said, "except that, where money comes into these cases, one is entitled to suspect anybody of anything. I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind," I went on. "that you are being blackmailed."

"Blackmailed?" he said. "By whom?"

"By Dudley Some," said I.

"Impossible! he said; "absolutely absurd, Dudley Some is, I should imagine, the soul of honour. He is a man of some wealth."

"Do you know anything about him?" I asked. "I mean, do you really know anything about him that he hasn't told you himself?"

"No," he confessed after a pause, "I don't. But I've looked him up in the New York list and I know they have a house on Long Island."

"Possession of a house on Long Island," said I, "does not guarantee the integrity of its owner. Don't you see, the whole thing is a ramp, Sir Harold?"

"I confess I don't," he admitted; "if it is, then that poor woman is a victim, you may be sure, and I want her name kept out of it."

"It is my business to carry out the wishes of my clients, and if you instruct me to go ahead in this matter I will do all I possibly can to get to the bottom of it."

Very reluctantly he commissioned me to proceed, and my first step was to interview a New Yorker who knew everybody who was anybody on or about Manhattan Island.

"The Dudley Somes?" he said; "yes, I know them well. They're a pretty rich family who live in the west for the greater part of the year. The old man is a naturalist, or something of the sort."

"Old man?" I said, "how old is he?"

"About sixty," said my New York friend.

"Isn't there a Mrs. and Mr. Dudley Some, a little younger?"

"Never heard of them." said my friend promptly. "There are two daughters and

both of them are unmarried."

"But the house on Long Island?"

"That is theirs undoubtedly. I have been them several times. It is a beautiful estate, but the Dudley Somes are very seldom in residence."

I only called at Dudley Some's office to identify him, or to photograph him in my eye, as the saying goes. That afternoon I picked him up and trailed him to Waterloo Station. I saw him go into a booking office, and I didn't trouble to overhear the station he took his ticket for, but took my place in the queue and a ticket to Bournemouth.

As I expected, he alighted at Bournemouth West. He gave the name of a hotel, one of the smartest hotels on the south coast, and was driven off. I gave him time to disappear before I mounted a cab and followed him. I got to the hotel in time to see him and his bag disappearing down the corridor. He, at any rate, was the last person to sign his name on the register. and it was not "Dudley Some" he had signed, but "Henry B. Smith, of Birmingham." That puzzled me a little until I made an inquiry. There was no Mrs. Dudley Some staying there, but there was a Mrs. Smith, of Birmingham. They occupied Suite 112, and after I had seen my bag to my room, it was to Suite 112 that I went. I did not trouble to knock at the door of the sitting room but walked boldly in. I saw Dudley Some engaged in earnest conversation with his wife. They were standing in one of the long windows, and looked round at the sound of the door opening. Some frowned and walked towards me

"What do you want?" he asked briskly.

"I want to talk to Mr. Smith," said I.

"That is my name," said Some.

"And this, I presume, is Mrs. Smith?"

I saw the girl, and really I was astounded at her beauty. She was all that Sir Harold had said—the most lovely being that the imagination of man could conceive. "That is my wife," said Smith. "Tell me your business and get out. You've no right to come into this room without knocking, anyway."

"You ought never to have a private conference unless you lock the door, Mr. Some," said I. and he started back. "Oh. I see," he said slowly, "so you've been sent down by Trusome?"

I heard an exclamation from the girl, and turned in time to see a look which I shall never forget to my dying day. It was a look of anger, which transfigured

the beautiful face and made it almost demoniac. With an effort of will she controlled herself and again presented that look of classic, innocent beauty, which had met my eyes when I entered the room.

"I am Mr. Some," said the other after a pause. "and I presume you are Sir Harold Trusome's lawyer?"

"Far from it." said I, coolly annexing a chair and seating myself; "I am a detective."

There was a silence.

"I have come down to pinch you both on a charge of blackmail. There is a second charge against you of impersonating Mr. and Mrs. Dudley Some, but that I do not think it will be necessary to proceed with. Get your hat,"

It was the old formula of the New York detective, that "Get your hat," and I depended upon it to bring my bluff to a successful end. Suddenly the girl stepped forward. I saw her hand go up, and—smack!

Dudley Some stepped back with his hand to his face.

"Oh, you Jake!" she hissed. "Oh, you clever fellow! You poor slusher! Didn't I tell you to keep away from here? It is my own fault. Lew told me not to take you as a side partner, you poor, dippy boob!"

"I did my best," growled the man surlily; "I thought Trusome would fall."

"Of course he'd have fallen if you'd given him time. Gee! You got under him and caught him, you poor fish," She turned to me.

"Ferdinand," she said, "I call that bluff of yours, All you know about me is that I'm not Mrs. Dudley Some. You've got nothing on me—and, anyway, I don't think you're a regular cop; and if you're not a regular cop you can't pinch me in this country."

"You're quite right, Mrs.—whatever your name is," said I, "but there are plenty of regular cops who will."

"Not on your life," she said brightly. "Trusome isn't the kind of man to take the case into court, or I shouldn't have been in this at all, at all."

She looked round at her crestfallen "husband."

"Git, you Jake!" she said contemptuously. "Hit the trail for home, pack all my clothes and get 'em on board the Mauretania. This try on set me back nearly ten thousand dollars. I suppose Trusome wouldn't like to pay my expenses to

that extent?"

"Perhaps if your husband asked him—" I began.

"Husband!" she laughed contemptuously; "now do you think, my poor man, that I would lock myself to something who looks like the leading man in Uncle Tom's Cabin? No, sir," she said briskly.

"Now go you back to your Sir Harold and tell him from me that the least he can do is to send five thousand dollars on account of expenses. And say I'll sell him those Leonardo cartoons for another five thousand—they're genuine. I pinched 'em in New York."

To my surprise, Trusome was not indignant, he was amused.

"I won't buy the cartoons," he said, "but I'll send her a thousand pounds. But what made you jump at this being a hold-up?" he asked, "that's the word, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"That's the word, Sir Harold." I said; "it was very clear to me from the first. It was doubly clear when you told me how Mrs. Some left the room, intending to go back to her house, and then returned to you, having apparently changed her mind."

"But how did that tell you anything?"

"It told me this," said I with a smile. "that the lady had simply gone downstairs to let in her husband, who was waiting on the mat so to speak. That is why she would not allow you to go out with her. The whole thing was very carefully planned. Your habits, your interest in cartoons of the Renaissance, were all discovered. Probably they were discovered in America before these people left their native shores."

"It will be a lesson to me." said Sir Harold after a pause. "The next time I have to see a woman alone I'll wear a muzzle,"

"Another good way is not to see them alone." said I.

VI. — HOW A CROOK SPOOFED ANOTHER CROOK

IF you were to ask me who was the most remarkable client I ever had, I should

answer without hesitation, Mr. Lee Royder. The name of that extraordinary gentleman is perhaps unknown to the majority of my readers, but there are several intelligent people who live in a big grey building on the Thames Embankment who know Mr. L. Royder backward, as the saying is.

L. Royder was born in Australia, but might be truthfully described as a citizen of the world. There was not a town in Europe or America that he had not visited. He had "operated" in Capetown, Johannesburg, Durban and E. London; whilst in Australian police circles his name was a household word. Even in the Pacific Islands he was not without fame; but I confess. such is my ignorance of these matters, that the first time I met him I neither recognized him by the name he gave nor did I associate him with this redoubtable person, the echo of whose fame had penetrated even to my remote London office.

One morning a stoutish, good looking man drifted into my office, wearing a big grey felt hat and a large cigar which stuck up at an angle of forty-five degrees from his white teeth. He was well, even expensively, dressed; he had a large, heavy gold watch-guard across his ample chest, and a big white pearl gleamed in his cravat. They brought a card in to me, upon which was written only the words "A possible client."

"Show him in," said I with a smile, and he came into my office, gave a quick professional glance round, closed the door himself and pulled up a chair to my desk.

"Mr. Dixon, I understand that you're a whale on blackmail cases," he said.

"I don't know what kind of fish I am," said I good humouredly, "but I have had some success with that type of crime."

He nodded. "You're the man I want, then," said he; "my name is Lee Royder."

I thought he said "Ryder" and that he was pronouncing the word with a Cockney accent.

"Ryder?" said I.

"Royder—R-o-y-d-e-r," said he. "I should have though that a gentlemen in your line of business would have heard of me—Lee Royder."

And then the name came to me.

"Why, of course." said I, though I was taken aback, for this was certainly not the type of client I expected; "Lee Royder. You're a—er—"

"A repentant and reformed criminal." said he, with a broad grin. "Yes, I

thought you'd have heard of me. I should have been disappointed if you hadn't. The fact is, Mr. Dixon, I have had a very stormy career and have been in prison as you probably know, once or twice—maybe three times," he added cheerfully; "but that's all long ago and far behind me, and I am now living the chaste and sober life. I do harm to no man, I repent of my evil deeds—in fact." he said, in a burst of confidence, "I am having a holiday."

I was forced to smile.

"You don't mean to suggest that you're being blackmailed?" said I.

"That's the size of it," said he. "Of course, there's a way of dealing with that kind of crook, but in a law abiding country like Britain it would mean trouble for everybody concerned."

I did not ask him what was his method, but I could guess. It was not the first time that Lee Royder had shot a way out of his difficulties, if report be true.

"I have just arrived from Australia on the Royal Mail steamer Orlando," said he. "When I say 'Australia' I mean that I've come by easy stages, dropping off at Colombo and Bombay. At Gibraltar a party of Englishmen came on board, and amongst them was a fellow named, Serpilot." (I am, of course, not giving real names of persons or places.)

"Bogey Serpilot?" said 1.

"Bogey Serpilot," said Mr. Royder with an approving nod. "He's a three-card trickster, shyster, and general sneak-thief. Now I need hardly tell you," he said emphasising his points with the end of his cigar, "that I did not travel on the Orlando in my own name. I travel like Royalty—incognito. I suppose Bogey found trade very dull, for there wasn't a sport on the boat, as I had discovered long before I got to Gibraltar, and he started nosing round the cabins seeking what he might devour.

"One night, after a very late seance in the smoke room, I got back to my cabin to discover that somebody had been giving it the 'once over.' If you don't know what 'once over' means I will explain. It is an American term—"

"I know what 'once over' means," said I. "It means somebody had been having a look round."

"Exactly, and not only a look round," said Mr. Royder, "but a look-under and a look-over and a look-into. It was the look-into which annoyed me most, because in one of the drawers underneath my bunk there were certain confidential documents which I had no desire should be exposed to the light of day, or even to the light of night."

"Those documents being—?"

"That is immaterial to the issue," said Mr. Royder. "Think of them as you will—old love letters, confessions of murder, birth certificates, or the plan of the long-lost South Sea Island where Captain Oodlum, the far-famed pirate, buried his treasure on a night of storm."

I nodded laughingly. "Well, never mind what they were. You think they were seen?"

"I am certain they were seen, because they were gone." said Royder, "and they wouldn't have been gone unless they'd been seen. If I had any doubts on the subject, they were dispelled the next morning," Royder went on, "when this lob-craw1ing son of sin sidled up to me, gave me the grip and sign of the Loyal and Ancient Honour Among Thieves League, Lodge 247. I'm not saying there is such a league, and therefore it would be absurd to say there is such a lodge," Royder went on imperturbably, "and therefore it follows that there's neither grip nor sign. And if I speak in parables it is because I am naturally talkative and like to hear the sound of my own voice.

"He said he understood that I had lost something, and that I would not be above paying a small but tasty sum to make good the same losses. I mentioned fifty pounds and a quick death as an alternative proposition, but he accepted the fifty pounds and dropped the secret of my birth, or the lease of my house, or whatever it was he had pinched, and there the matter ended. We parted good friends—me and my money.

"I thought it was an ungenerous thing for him to do. 'Live and let live' has always been my motto. But the English crook, and the London crook particularly, is notoriously white-livered and low, and I was prepared to pity his ignorance and let it go at that; only, unfortunately. for both of us. I received a letter this morning from him, addressed to me at my hotel. and in my hotel name, which you can read."

Dear Friend,

Ten pounds a day and my share when you pull it off. Send the stuff to the Flowering Arms, Nags Road, Islington. I'll be waiting for my little bit outside—understand?

P.S.—Care of the potman. George Jennings.

"Ten pounds a day," said the irrepressible Mr. Royder, "may seem little to you, sitting as you do in this office and receiving large sums of money from panic stricken pie-cans, but to me it is a monstrous extortion, and I want to hire you

to go after Mr. Bogey, and hand him a few wise words of warning, but not in such a manner as to get his dander up or cause him to take steps which we may both regret."

"Does Bogey know you're Royder, or know anything about you?" I asked.

Mr. Royder shook his head.

"I am travelling, as I say, disguised as a Brown—one of the Browns of Townsville, Queensland, not to be confused with the Browns of Colorado."

"And you do not feel inclined to tell me what were the documents this man took and restored."

Mr. Royder shook his head. "It were better not, he said gently, "for your sake and for mine."

"But why don't you see him yourself." I asked. "Because," said Mr. Royder more gently than ever "I do not think he would see me."

"I don't think he would," laughed I, for Bogey was not the most courageous man in the world.

It was a queer commission; One of the queerest I had ever been offered. But something about the case rather amused me, and my fatal curiosity was piqued. I knew where to find Bogey—not in Nags Road, but in a little public house off the New Cut, Lambeth. That was his favourite rendezvous, and there I found him, supporting the private bar, but drinking abstemiously.

He wasn't best pleased to see me, and I think his mind must have done some quick surveying to discover the cause of my visit. He was a little fellow, mean faced and meagre, and slippery as an eel, and about as reliable as the legendary viper. I beckoned him outside. and he came reluctantly. In a few words I told him my business. He stopped me with a loud guffaw.

"Brown, eh? So Brown's sent you? Well, if that doesn't beat the band!" he roared with laughter. "Well that fellow's got a nerve;" he said admiringly, "to put a 'split, on me. Did he tell you what I pinched?"

"He didn't, but probably you will enlighten me," said I.

"Not on your life," said Bogey emphatically; "that'd make you as wise as me. I've heard a lot about these Australians; they're supposed to be clever, aren't they? Well, we'll see how clever this one is."

"You're not allowed to blackmail even a crook," said I.

"Oh, aren't I?" said he.

"And how did you know he was a crook?" I asked quickly.

"That's telling." said Bogey. "Now, you go back to him and tell him to be a good boy and pay up. It ain't blackmail. Mr. Dixon. I've just engaged myself as a silent assistant, and he must pay my wages regularly. Anyway, he sent the first instalment this morning," he said.

"Well I've warned you," said I. "And I think that about lets me out."

"Look here. Mr. Dixon," said Bogey, touching my arm, "you know the sort of life I live—a dog's life, in gaol and out of gaol, and all the time scheming to make a couple of pounds. Here's a chance of me getting next to a lot of money, and you're not going to tell me that it isn't fair to take a chance. I've offered to help him in a certain matter, but he wants to work lonely and hog the lot. I ask you is that gentlemanly?"

It was, as I say, a queer interview, and a queer case, and in my mind I washed my hands of it when I returned to the office that evening.

Royder came down the next morning to see me to discover the result of my interview.

"He's lying, of course," he said, "if he suggests I've come to this country with felonious intentions; he is merely trying to prejudice me in the eyes of my favourite detective. That's you." he explained.

"It isn't what he threatens, you understand." Mr. Royder went on slowly; "there's something behind his little criminal activities, something which may touch the very safety of the State."

He said this solemnly, and leant back to observe the effect of his words. I laughed.

"As that doesn't seem to impress you," he went on, unconcerned, "I will come down to hard facts, and say that this man's activities threaten my own life which is infinitely more important to me than the salvation of Great Britain and Ireland and the Dominions beyond the Seas. Now I want this man watched day and night, and I wish you to take it on for me, Mr. Dixon. Put the best men you can find on his trail and report to me day and night. I will pay any sum in reason, and I will grant unlimited expenses."

I hesitated. There was no reason why I shouldn't take on the job, the more so as I had privately informed my friends at Scotland Yard that day that Lee Royder was in town—information that was unnecessary since they had already

marked his coming. Moreover, they had informed me that Lee Royder was apparently a reformed character, and had had no trouble at all with the police for several years, thus confirming much that Mr. Royder had told me about himself.

"Very well," I said after a while, "I will take on this commission. But you understand, of course, that if I discover there is any hokey-pokey trick I shall drop the case like a hot brick and assist the regulars in bringing an end to your perfect day."

"Spoken like a gentleman," said Royder heartily. "My lad, you can go as far as you like. I am an honest and innocent tourist, with no object in life save to live down my sinful past. If you find me deviating by a hair's breadth from the straight and narrow path or the broad and winding path—I've got it rather mixed up—which leadeth to a venerable old age, respected by my fellow citizens, pinch me without compunction.'

He left a respectable sum to cover expenses, and I put Morris and Simpson, my two best men, on the trail of Bogey. Bogey was not an easy man to shadow, as a rule, but this time he gave no trouble. He spent most of his day in the little public house in Lambeth, and when he moved out at all it was to go to another public house in Islington, where apparently he interviewed his potman friend and received any correspondence which might be addressed to him there.

At night it was his practice to take a walk in the city, and it was a curious fact, which my men reported to me, that he invariably reached the corner of Billiter Street as the clock boomed nine. This remarkable proceeding interested me so much that I went myself to the corner of Billiter Street and saw Bogey make his appearance and return the way he had come.

Now in Billiter Street is the Third National Bank; and at nine o'clock a small army of commissionaires who have been guarding, the bank by day, are relieved by a night guard of the same corps, who enter the bank about ten minutes to nine.

It was when the day guard was streaming out, which they did at the first stroke of the clock, that Bogey used to turn and walk to meet them. I counted the commissionaires—there were twelve—and I wondered whether Bogey's object was also to count them. At any rate, he used to take up such a position, with his back to the light, that every one of the guard had to pass him and be visible to him. It was when they had all gone that he made his way back to his Lambeth public house.

The circumstances were so remarkable that I asked Mr. Royder to come over

and see me.

"Yes", he said. "I know what he's been doing. Your men have been reporting to me, you know. I can't understand this strange interest in my bank."

"Your bank?" I asked.

"Yes, mine. At least, when I say 'mine' it is the bank which has the privilege of looking after my ill-gotten wealth," he said. He considered for a time, and then he said: "Mr. Dixon, I wish you would do me a favour. Will you attend at the corner of Billiter Street on Thursday night and shadow Bogey to his home?"

"Why Thursday night?" I asked.

"Because on Thursday night." said Royder thoughtfully, "I have an idea he will not go back to Lambeth. or to any other place that you know of. When you have discovered his whereabouts I want you to telephone to me to my hotel. On Thursday morning, too, I should be glad if you will give me your bill and I will pay you."

"Are you leaving London?" I asked with interest. "That depends largely upon Mr. Bogey. The truth is he's annoying me, and he's spoiling what otherwise might be a very pleasant holiday. I admit I have been indiscreet," he said, half talking to himself. "It was indiscreet to leave things in my bottom drawer, and sheer lunacy to trust to the lock. By the way, did you ever hear of a man named Everard?"

I seemed to remember the name, but I could not place him for the moment.

"Everard was a London crook who died in Australia. He had the biggest brain of any man in our profession that I have known," said Lee Royder, and for once he was serious. "The man might have justified the title of 'Napoleon of Crime' if he hadn't had a kink. He was, in fact, the only man who ever elaborated criminal schemes with the same care and foresight as a general prepares a plan of battle. .

"He died on my farm in Queensland?" continued Royder, "and he bequeathed to me—I'm not pulling your leg, but telling you gospel truth, Mr. Dixon—he bequeathed to me the most wonderful collection of get-rich- quick schemes that you or I have ever seen or ever will see. Every detail worked out down to the last button on the last gaiter, so to speak. Some of them, of course, required a terrific capital. Some of them were flavoured with murder, which isn't my game. Some of them depended upon the help of men who are no longer available. But they were all first class schemes, believe me, written out in his own beautiful writing, with drawings, illustrations, plans, diagrams, distances

—even notes, on possible changes of the plans due to bad weather. I tell you that fellow was a genius."

A light dawned on me.

"I suppose it was one of these schemes which was seen by friend Bogey?"

He nodded.

"That's it, sir, and that's why I'm scared. I'm afraid of that bungling jackass trying to carry out Everard's plan and getting me in bad. But," he said with his big smile, "I am paying him to be honest. Do you believe that?"

"No." said I; "I don't."

"Anyway, be on hand on Thursday,"

I did not promise him, but I made up my mind that I would be there. On Thursday morning, as requested, I sent my bill, which was promptly settled in notes. Whatever else Lee Royder was, he was a generous paymaster. To be on the safe side. I went up to Scotland Yard and saw Inspector Manning and put the facts before him.

"It looks suspicious, but I don't see what we can do," he said. "The bank is pretty well guarded by men who have been used to the game for years. I'll send one of my sergeants down to keep you company tonight."

The sergeant called for me at my office, and together we made our way to the corner of Billiter Street, and were there at a quarter to nine and saw the commissionaires march up and pass into the bank through the narrow side door in Billiter Street.

Then, just before the clock boomed out the hour, we saw Bogey slouching along. We had taken up our 'position in a dark doorway, left especially dark by arrangement with the police, on the opposite side of the road. We saw Bogey come to the street lamp and wait. Then the side door in Billiter Court opened, and out came the commissionaires who had been relieved.

Bogey began to walk towards them, and simultaneously I crossed the road and paced leisurely on his trail. I counted the commissionaires as they passed me, and there 'were thirteen. Whether there should be twelve or thirteen or twenty, for the matter of that, I had no means of knowing.

The last of the commissionaires jolted against Bogey and apologised. He was a well made man, his left breast glittering with medals—that I saw, but I did not see his face, the light being rather bad at the point where I passed him on

the opposite side of the street. As Royder had predicted, Bogey did not go back to his accustomed haunt. He turned eastward, quickening his pace, and jumped on a 'bus at Aldgate.

I might have missed him but for a providential taxicab. As it was, I overran him. I had no difficulty, however, in picking him up again and traced him to the famous Sidney Street and a block of tenements. Having marked the number of the apartment, I made my way to the nearest telephone box and 'phoned Mr. Royder. His cheery voice immediately answered me.

"Sidney Buildings? Thanks very much," he said; "so that is where he lives. I wish you would make a note of this, Mr. Dixon. The police may be tremendously interested to learn where our young friend hangs out."

"But why?" I asked.

"Oh, you'll learn all about that in time," he said evasively; "by the way, do weather reports interest you?"

"Not very much." I replied, somewhat surprised by the extraordinary question.

"Well. they interest me," said Royder's voice. "I've just been on to the Meteorological Department by telephone, and you'll be interested to learn that tomorrow will be a fine day, with light, variable winds, with an anticyclone approaching these blessed isles from the Azores."

"Thanks for the information;' I replied, "have you any instructions for tomorrow?"

There was a silence.

"No, no, you are released from your duties tonight. By the way, I observed that you had an official split with you."

"You observed?" I said in surprise. "were you there?"

"I was knocking about." replied Royder vaguely; "I was glad you were there. You see, I wasn't quite sure whether Bogy was a man of his word. He might have brought a pal and there might have been some gunning, especially if he had interfered with the commissionaires—that was what I was afraid of."

"You're growing law-abiding in your old age, Royder." I said.

"Cut out that stuff about my 'old age'," said the voice; "good-night!" I heard the click of the receiver as it was hung up.

I confess the business puzzled me considerably. Why had Royder engaged me

to watch Bogey? Why had he been so fearful for the safety of the Bank's custodians? And how did he know that Bogey would not return that night to his usual habitat? All these mysteries were destined to be cleared up on the next day.

I had reached my office and was looking through some questionable correspondence which had been sent to another client of mine, when the telephone bell rang and I heard the voice of my friend at Scotland Yard, which sounded urgent.

"I am coming along to see you." he said. "Wait for me."

Ten minutes after he strode into my office, a very agitated man.

"Dixon," he said, "the Third National Bank was robbed last night. Nearly a hundred thousand pounds in cash and another hundred thousand pounds in Chilian bonds, was removed from No. 6 Vault.

"From what I can gather, the crime was committed at about eight o'clock. The vault was opened by somebody who had concealed himself on the premises; possibly the thief was a client of the Bank who had an opportunity of gaining access to the vaults during the day and escaped when the commissionaires were relieved."

I gasped. "How many commissionaires are there?" I asked quickly.

"Twelve." said the inspector; "anyway, I'm going to pinch Royder and Bogey. Have you any idea where I can find either of them?"

I gave both addresses—Royder at his hotel and Bogey at his apartment in Sidney Street. But Royder was not caught. He had left his hotel at six o'clock that morning, carrying a light suit-case, and wearing a long, heavy overcoat. He had travelled by taxi and had directed the man, in the hearing of the hotel porter, to drive to the Great Northern Hotel.

"That's obviously a blind," said the Scotland Yard man.

A search of his room saved us the bother of hunting the taxi driver. We found a crumpled telegram, handed in at a suburb of London and signed by a well known firm which said:

YOUR MACHINE WILL BE READY AT SEVEN FIFTEEN. THE WEATHER PROMISES TO BE GOOD AND YOU SHOULD HAVE EXCELLENT FLIGHT.

"An aeroplane," I gasped. "Of course, that is why he was kidding me about the

weather."

Wires and wireless were set working, though we had little hope that Royder would be found, because, as the aeroplane company told us, their passenger was not sure that he was going to Paris, and told them whimsically that he would "make up his mind in the air."

I have reason to believe, however, that Royder already had his plans cut and dried. The machine actually descended near Liege, from whence all trace of the man was lost. Bogey was less fortunate. They captured him at eleven o'clock in the morning whilst he was still in bed, and under his pillow they found the missing bonds. "What I can't understand," said the Scotland Yard man to me after the capture was effected and a wailing Bogey had been conveyed to durance, "is why the other fellow gave him the Chilian bonds? They're almost impossible to negotiate unless you're very clever; they're so easily identified; and they're almost certain to bring their possessor to justice."

I smiled, for I knew why Bogey had been the recipient of those impassable bonds, and three months later I received a letter, bearing the postmark of Buenos Aires, which confirmed me in my suspicions.

"I feel I owe you an apology for making such an improper use of you," it ran, "but Bogey got on to my scheme for smashing the Third National. It really wasn't mine, but the man, of whom I spoke, and he demanded to stand in halves. He knew the robbery would occur at nine o'clock, and I agreed to split the swag on the spot.

"I despise Bogey. who is a vulgar blackmailer, and it is some relief to my conscience to know that 50 per cent of scoundrels engaged in this appalling crime are, or

is, now under lock and key. I don't think Bogey will blackmail for a long, long time. The weather here is very fine. It has been like this for a month and the weather reports promise us another fine day tomorrow, with light, variable winds."

I was really annoyed with Lee Royder for that last bit. He need not have rubbed it in.

VII. — A DOCTOR'S JOLLIFICATION AND ITS SEQUEL

I will now tell you the story of Dr. George Willerby, partly to demonstrate the fact that blackmailers are made and not born, and partly to show how the keenest of brains can become so dulled by fear that they depart from all the methods which common sense dictate and submit to the most infamous system of spoliation at the hands of the criminal classes. .

Dr. George Willerby was, and is, a fashionable physician. He had a house in Harley Street, an estate in Kent, and a set of chambers in Northumberland Court. (I do not give the real names of persons or places in this series.)

In addition to being a great physician he was a bright, witty companion. He had a host of friends in London society, and because he was such a good fellow he was constantly in demand at dinner parties. A rapid diagonist of high esteem, and altogether a brilliant healer, he did not confine himself exclusively to the wealthy classes. He had a little practice of his own, which had grown up in the course of the years amongst people of a humbler position in life, and he gave these the same care and attention he would have given to a Park Lane millionaire.

If he had a fault—and it is a fault which has long since been corrected—it was that at one time of his life he was inclined to look upon the wine when it was bubbling. He was a connoisseur of champagne, and though he very seldom overstepped the rigid line, there were moments when he fell from grace.

It happened one night that a number of doctors, very well known West End physicians and surgeons, foregathered at the house of a friend to celebrate the bestowal of a baronetcy upon one of their number. It was a Friday night, and Dr. Willerby had given notice to all his patients, high and low, that he would be out of town for the weekend, and had arranged for another doctor to take his work whilst he was away. He was, in fact, going to Brighton, but the main point is that there was an excuse for his casting aside all caution and letting himself go.

It was the merriest of parties, which did not break up until the morning. Dr. Willerby was admittedly slightly the worse for wine—or the better, whichever way you look at it—and another very famous doctor suggest. a "soberer" in the shape of a small injection of strychnine. It is not an uncommon remedy, and was there and then applied though the surgeon who supplied the dose, being more than ordinarily cautious, made that dose the minimum.

"Enough to get you home." he said laughingly.

It is pretty certain that it was insufficient to have a sobering effect upon Willerby. He returned to his flat in Northumberland Court, and discovered. to his annoyance, one of his poorer clients literally sitting on the doorstep. "What

the dickens do you want?" asked Willerby, who was still in a jovial frame of mind. "Didn't I leave word that I shouldn't be in town until Tuesday? You must go to Dr. Manson."

Willerby recognised the man as a dissolute fellow who had come down in the world through drink and gambling, which had led him to speculation and a sentence of six months in gaol.

"I'm extremely sorry. sir," said the caller, "but my little nephew is worse than ever tonight, and I think he's dying. I don't know where Dr. Manson's house is, and—" Willerby interrupted him with a genial laugh. He was still feeling bright and cheerful, for the effects of the wine had been by no means modified as the result of the antidote.

"All right; come along." he said.

His car was waiting whilst this conversation was taking place. and together they drove to Camden Town. There were several children in the house, and Dr. Willerby suspected, not without reason. that these "nephews" of Smith's were children his sour-faced wife had adopted for a consideration.

He made an examination of his little patient and saw that the case was a serious one. The child had heart trouble and was subject to fainting fits. Such remedies as he could apply or suggest, he suggested and applied. He was there for an hour, and at the end of that time he had the satisfaction of seeing the little sufferer take a decided turn for the better.

He was still cheery, even garrulous.

"You needn't have sent for me tonight at all." he exclaimed; "all you had to do was to carry out the instructions I gave you when I was here yesterday. I will write you a prescription. You had better go down to the chemist and get it made up. Get it at once."

He wrote briefly on a sheet of paper and handed the prescription to the man.

"And now, for heaven's sake. don't bother me till Tuesday."

He drove home and went to bed, thinking no more of the incident. He was due to catch the 12 o'clock train front Victoria on Saturday morning, and he was half dressed when his valet came to say that a man had called and must see him at once on very urgent business.

"What is his name?" asked Willerby.

"Smith, sir." said the valet.

"Smith?" frowned the doctor. "I told him to go to Manson. Confound the fellow. Show him in."

So into the doctor's dressing room came the apologetic Smith, a lank, shifty man who spoke very good English, and as I found out afterwards, was a man who possessed a very superior education.

"Well, Smith," asked Willerby, "how's the boy?"

"He's dead. sir." said Smith.

"Dead?" the doctor said incredulously, and Smith nodded.

"When did he die?"

"About four o'clock this morning, sir. He had a fainting fit."

"Did you give him the medicine?"

"Yes. sir," said the man meaningly. "I gave him the medicine."

He emphasised the words, and Dr. Willerby looked at him suspiciously.

"But he shouldn't have died," said the doctor emphatically, "even if he hadn't had the medicine. The wet fomentations would have brought him round. Did you use them?"

"Yes, sir, we used them," said the man, and still there was a certain significance in his tone which the doctor did not like and could not understand.

"I'm very sorry," he said after a pause. "you want a certificate I suppose?"

"That's what I want, sir," said the man. "Of course," he hesitated, "you understand, sir, that in the circumstances it is not usual."

The doctor thrust his pin into his tie, thrust his hands into his pockets and stared at the man.

"Not usual to give a death certificate to a patient I've been looking after for months? What do you mean, Smith?"

The man licked his dry lips.

"Well, sir," he said. "You were very bright and fresh last night, and that's no business of mine. I don't see why a doctor shouldn't enjoy himself as well as anybody else in the world. Besides, you didn't expect to be called out, did you, sir?"

"Sit down," said the doctor after a pause, and walked across to his dressing room and closed the door. "Now, be good enough to tell me what you're driving at."

"I was saying, sir," said Smith. not meeting his eyes, "that you were a bit jolly last night."

"I suppose I was," said Willerby, "but I don't see what that has got to do with the death of your nephew." The man put his hand in his inside pocket and deliberately drew out a white envelope. This he handed to the doctor.

"What is this?" asked Willerby.

"That's your prescription, sir."

"The one I gave you last night—the digitalis mixture? I don't want to see it."

"You didn't order digitalis at all, sir," said Smith in a hollow voice and the doctor snatched the paper from his hand, opened it and walked to the window.

He remembered writing the description. "Liquor Digitalis" had been the first item. He read, then turned white.

"Good God!" he gasped, and well he might, for instead of "Digitalis" he had written "Strychninae." And, what is more he remembered writing it.

In a flash it came back to him how strychnine had been on his mind. He even remembered forming the "s" with a flourish without having been conscious of doing so. He looked at the man.

"Strychnine," he said dully. "I prescribed strychnine?" Smith nodded.

The mystery of the child's death was no longer a mystery to Dr. Willerby. He folded the prescription methodically and put it on the table; then walking to the window, he stared out, his hands clasped behind him. "There'll have to be an inquest," he said at last; "this is a case of misadventure."

"I wouldn't have an inquest if I were you, sir," said Smith. "It will all come out."

"What will come out?" demanded Willerby.

"It'll come out about your being drunk, sir," Smith said quietly.

"Do you mean to suggest that I was drunk when I gave that prescription?" demanded Willerby.

"Well, I wouldn't say drunk, sir," said Smith, "let's say jolly—but that'll have

to come out, anyway." Willerby knew that it was ruin, but ruin as it was he might have taken the step had not the insinuating Smith broken in upon his thoughts.

"Why worry about it, doctor?" he said. "It was an accident, and nothing could have saved the child—you've said that yourself a dozen times."

"Where is the mixture?" asked the doctor.

"I've got it here," said the other, and took a small phial of colourless liquid from his pocket.

The doctor examined it. One dose had gone. He walked into his bathroom and emptied the contents. When he came back he found Smith pocketing the prescription. "I'll have that, too." said Willerby.

"No, sir. I don't think so." said the other, "I think under the circumstances I had better keep it, because it reflects somewhat upon me."

"What do you think I'm going to do?" asked Willerby. "I think you're going to give a certificate that the child died of a heart disease," said Smith. "You'll be a lunatic if you don't."

There was no mention of money or any consideration. If there had been any talk of money, the matter might have ended then and there, but there was not. Willerby was admittedly in a panic and taken off his feet. After so thick a night he was probably not in a position to think as clearly as otherwise he might have done. It is certain that he signed the certificate and that on that certificate the child was buried. It is also certain that he gave the man £50 in bank notes. This was on Saturday, the 18th of May, and the date is rather important.

From thence onwards Smith became a regular pensioner. He started by asking for a loan a month after the occurrence, and the loan, the sum of £50, was immediately forwarded by the doctor. A month later he asked for another £50, this time without making any reference whatever to loans. From thence onwards it became a simple case of blackmail, which was borne by Dr. Willerby without complaint. £50 a month was not a great deal of money to him, but what troubled him was his unprofessional and illegal conduct, and there were times when he was on the point of consulting his colleagues as to the best course he should pursue. As a matter of fact, he need not have consulted anybody, because he knew in his heart just what he ought to have done. But now he was in the toils. He had taken the irrevocable step and must continue, and might, indeed, have continued had not the bold Smith suddenly without warning increased his demands from £50 to £100, and had followed

the receipt of the first £100 by a request that the doctor should give him £5,000 to go away to America and "forget all about it." to use his own language.

It was at this point that the doctor decided to consult me, and I received a letter requesting an interview at his flat. If I had been a doctor instead of a detective, I should have probably diagnosed him as a bad nerve case and ordered him away to the country. That's how he struck me when I first met him. It was clear from the first that he was distressed more than even the average victims of the blackmailers are.

He told me his story haltingly, but, once he had made the plunge and had admitted that he was drunk, the rest seemed to become easy. The fact that he was worse for liquor when he gave the prescription naturally worried him much more than giving the certificate of death.

"Of course, I haven't drunk anything since, and don't intend to," he said. "Now, Mr. Dixon, you understand these things. What do you advise?"

I shook my head.

"It all depends on what you want, doctor. If all you wish is to bring the man to justice, that is very simple. But I gather that, like the remainder of my clients, you have no desire for a Court case, and that you want the matter settled privately and amicably,"

"If you mean that I want to be sure the man will not blackmail me again, or make any further demands upon me, you are partly right." he said. "Why I really sent for you was to ask you whether, in your opinion, I should brave the exposure, settling with this man and letting him get away to Australia or America, before I make my statement to the British Medical Council, or whether I should go on maintaining silence?"

It was a very difficult problem he set me, and one which I had no desire to answer offhand. I doubt if any other man, similarly circumstanced, would have taken a different line. As I pointed out, there were so many people involved. There were, for example, the other doctors who had been at the party, and the doctor who had administered the strychnine, or who had suggested the strychnine, all of whom would come into the inquiry.

He nodded.

"I realise all that," he said, "though I didn't realise it so vividly as I do at this moment. At all costs those gentlemen's names must be kept out."

I thought for a moment.

"Before I can advise you, doctor," I said, "I must ask you to let me conduct a little private investigation of my own. I want, for example, to know whether Smith is really going to America or whether this demand for five thousand pounds is one of many which will be put forward."

Smith lived at 83 Bayham Place, Camden Town. It was a tiny little thoroughfare—or rather a cul de sac—the houses being mainly occupied by people of the respectable artisan class. No. 83 differed from none of its fellows in any respect.

The door was opened at my knock by a yellow faced woman, who looked at me, I thought, a little nervously, for it is my misfortune that I look like a detective. "Is your husband in, Mrs. Smith?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," she said, after considering. "What is your business?"

"I wish to see him on a little matter," said I. "Perhaps he would like to come for a walk?"

I saw her eyes narrow.

"Come for a walk?" she asked suspiciously. "Where,

"It is nothing very serious;' I laughed, knowing that "Come for a walk" is to the English crook what "Get your hat" is to the American.

I heard a voice behind her in the passage making an inquiry, and presently she was pushed aside and I saw the lanky Mr. Smith for the first time.

"You want to see me, sir?" he asked, and his shifty eyes danced from side to side.

"Yes, I do, rather," I said, "will you get your hat and coat on?" (He was in his shirt sleeves.)

He disappeared, to come back dressed for the street. "Now, I'm going to be very frank with you Mr. Smith,"

I said. "I am a detective acting on behalf Dr. Willerby."

"Dr. Willerby's got nothing against me." he said in a quavering voice, "I owe him a little money, but there's nothing in that, is there? But I've got something against him."

"That's the very thing I've come to see you about," said I; "you're wanting the loan of five thousand pounds from the doctor. That is rather a large sum, Mr. Smith."

"It is no more than I deserve," said the man, plucking up courage. when he discovered how mild a tone I was adopting, "if you know the case. you know very well that I'm saving that man from absolute ruin."

I looked at him curiously. There was something in his modulated voice which almost suggested that there was a time when he would have described himself as a gentleman.

"Still, five thousand pounds is a lot of money," I went on, at the same time eyeing him and allowing my thoughts to rove, "and I think he's done rather well for you, Mr. Smith—it doesn't cost you a lot to live, and it seems that fifty pounds a month is just about as much as you can spend."

"Oh, is it?" said the man sarcastically, "you must let me be the best judge of that."

"Suppose the doctor makes a confession; suppose he charges you with blackmail," said I, "it would go rather hard with you. Smith, with your previous conviction—by the way, what were you imprisoned for?"

"Mind your own business," he growled, and I laughed. "It is a very simple matter to find out as you are so disobliging. It will only mean that I shall wander down to Scotland Yard and make a few independent inquiries."

"Embezzlement," he said, and promptly changed his tone. "I was the unfortunate victim of circumstances."

"What was your trade at the time?" I asked, and he looked at me steadily for about the space of a second.

"Clerk," he replied, so emphatically that I knew he was lying. Then he went on: "I want the money to get away. I'm tired of this beastly life. How would you like to live here in these squalid surroundings? Five thousand pounds will set me up. I could open a shop in New York—the examinations are not difficult to pass." He stopped himself.

"What examinations?" I asked.

"Customs examinations." he replied glibly. "I thought of setting up as an importer."

"So five thousand is your price," said I, changing the subject. "I have to take that as your final offer to the doctor?"

"You can tell him from me that if he gives me five thousand he'll never hear from me again."

"Unless you go broke." said I, "and then he'll hear pretty quickly. All right, Smith, I'll see what can be done."

It took me a couple of days to discover from Scotland Yard Smith's earlier offence. It had occurred years before, when he had borne another name. Fortunately, Dr. Willerby remembered that the man had been tried at the Old Street Police Court on the same day that he had been giving evidence in a murder case. That narrowed the inquiry down, and I had no difficulty in identifying Smith. I came back to the doctor with my discovery.

"I have found a very curious fact, doctor," said I. "Did you know Smith's profession?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said he.

"He was a chemist," said I, "in the employ of one of the big drug companies."

"Well, what is there remarkable about that?" asked the doctor.

"Don't you see," I said in triumph. "that Smith would have seen the prescription you wrote, and would have known that strychnine was a mistake. Therefore, he was an accessory, and indeed, more culpable than you, since he did what he did knowingly."

"How does that help me?" asked the doctor.

"That remains to be seen," said I, "but I rather think it will help you a lot."

That day I pursued my inquiries, and in the evening I telephoned to the doctor, asking his permission to bring Smith along to the flat. The more delicate matter was to persuade Smith to come. He was suspicious, smelling a trap and refused point blank to go.

"You don't suppose I'm going to say anything in front of a third person, do you?" he asked. "No, Mr. Policeman, that dog doesn't bark."

"You will not be asked to say anything." said I. "All I want you to do is to bring along the prescription." He looked at me, smiled slowly and winked.

"All right," he said, "I'll oblige you."

I certainly didn't expect that he would take the matter so easily, and when I turned up that evening opposite Cobden's statue, which I had fixed as our rendezvous, I very much doubted whether he would put in an appearance. To my surprise, however, he arrived at the moment, fortified with a large, defiant cigar.

"What made him bring you into the case?" he asked when we got into the cab.

"Self defence," said I. "If you had stuck at your fifty a month, you might have drawn a pension all your life. As it is, you stand in considerable danger of spending the next ten years of your life in Portland Gaol."

He laughed scornfully.

"Not a bit of it," said he. "don't you worry! It would be a clever man who could get me gaoled again!"

"That may be the case," said I. "At any rate, my friend, you're going to lose your very comfortable pension."

"Am I?" he said, significantly, "you wait till I see the doctor."

We had not long to wait. Presently the cab drew up before the block of flats where the doctor lived, and we mounted to the second floor. The doctor was waiting to receive us, so unlike his old self that even Smith was taken aback. The doctor greeted him with a nod, and drew me into an inner room.

"I have decided, Dixon," he said, "to make a full confession to the British Medical Council and then go away for two or three years, unless, of course, I am prosecuted."

"I don't think it will come to that," said I, but he shook his head.

"I am losing my nerve," he said, "and I am no longer fit to carry on my profession. The other consultants are talking about me, and the best thing I can do is to get out. Anyway, I have arranged for a locum to take over my practice for three months. If we can settle with this brute, and I am persuaded that a confession to the Medical Council is not desirable, then I shall certainly take a holiday and sell my practice."

I said nothing, knowing what I knew. We returned to the room where we had left Smith, who was evidently uneasy at our conference and suspected all manner of plots.

"Now, Smith." said I, "I want to talk to you very plainly. You understand that nothing which may be said in this room will go outside, unless it is repeated in a court of law. In the first place, doctor," said I, "how much money has this man actually had from you?"

"About two thousand pounds," said the doctor.

"That is a respectable sun, Smith. most of which, I should imagine, you have put away in the bank. You are living very frugally—"

"What I do with my money is no concern of yours," said Smith calmly.

"It is no concern of mine, but it may be of yours, if you have some money saved, and the doctor, in a forgiving frame of mind, refrains from prosecuting you."

Smith grunted something—what it was I could not catch.

"Now, perhaps you will show me the prescription which you promised to bring along?"

Again Smith smiled and took from his pocket an envelope, from which he extracted—a photograph.

"You don't suppose I was going to bring the original along, do you?" he said—that wise fellow.

I took the photograph in my hands.

"This will do." said I; "in fact it will do just as well as the original document."

It was a photograph of the fatal prescription which the doctor had signed, and I handed it to Willerby. He glanced at it and nodded.

"That is it," he said.

"It was given by you in the early morning of the 18th of May," said I. I pointed to the impression of a rubber stamp on the original prescription. "That is the chemist's name, put on all prescriptions that are made up, I understand?"

The doctor nodded again. Smith had his eyes on me and never took them off.

"The child died at four o'clock in the morning, didn't he?" I asked, turning to Smith.

He nodded.

"After taking one dose of this medicine?" I tapped the prescription.

Smith nodded again.

"Then." said I, speaking with emphasis, "will you explain how it comes about that that prescription was not made up until nine o'clock in the morning, five hours after the child's death?"

"That's a lie," said Smith hoarsely.

"It is perfectly true," said I. "The chemist was on duty himself that night, and

showed me his night book to prove that he had not been called out. He also showed me his prescription book, which gave the hour at which the prescription was handed in by you, and dispensed by him."

I looked at Willerby. His mouth was open wide as the significance of the revelation dawned upon him. "Then—then—" he gasped, "the child did not die from poison?"

I shook my head.

"He died, I should imagine, from heart disease," I said. "Smith, who is a chemist, saw the prescription and knew that you had made a mistake. He kept it by him, hoping probably to do a little blackmailing on your error. When the child died, possibly as the result of his or his wife's neglect, he saw the bigger chance, went to the chemist the first thing in the morning, got the prescription made up, and brought a portion of it to you. The certificate you signed was proper and valid; at any rate, the child did not die of strychnine poisoning."

Smith had sunk back in his chair shaking like a leaf. "Is that true, Smith?" I asked sternly. "You've got one minute to decide whether you'll tell the truth or whether you'll take your trial for blackmail. The doctor has nothing to fear, and there is absolutely no reason why he shouldn't go into the box."

It was some time before the man could speak.

"Give me some water," he said faintly, and when he had taken a big gulp he told the story:

"It is perfectly true, sir," he wailed, "I saw the prescription after you'd given it, and I knew you'd made a mistake. The idea of pretending that the child had been poisoned came to me after. You're not going to prosecute me, sir?" he pleaded.

Dr. Willerby pointed to the door with an unsteady hand. "Get out," he said.

What he said to me after the man had left, modesty prevents my writing.

VIII. — THE MILLIONAIRE'S SECRET

MRS. MIDDLETON, returning to her Park Lane residence at one o'clock in the morning, was surprised to see a light in her drawing room, and surprised because her husband usually retired to bed early. She herself had gone to a

charity ball at the Albert Hall and had not expected to return, as she had intended staying with her sister-in-law in Hans Crescent (I am giving the dry details as they were roughly noted by me in my case book, but, of course, I am not giving real names of persons or places).

She opened the door with her key, closed it noiselessly, and went up the heavily carpeted stairs to the first floor, on which the drawing room was situated. She expected nothing sensational except to find, perhaps, that her husband had fallen asleep over his paper, as he did occasionally, and opened the door of the drawing room with a word of reproof on her lips. That word was never spoken.

Instead, she stood struck dumb with amazement at the sight which met her eyes.

Seated at the table in the middle—of the room were two persons—her husband and a girl. The girl was poorly dressed, or, as Mrs. Middleton described it, she was dressed "commonly." She was neither pretty nor plain. They sat on either side of the table, and between them was a huge pile of bank notes which Mr. Middleton was counting. He was speaking, and Mrs. Middleton heard him make a reference to "Constance."

He looked up suddenly and saw his wife. and his face went pale.

"Why, Agnes," he stammered. "I thought you were—"

"Who is this woman?" demanded Mrs. Middleton with pardonable acerbity.

"This is a—a—friend of mine," said Mr. Middleton awkwardly; "or rather, her father is a friend of mine; he does some work for me—and she called for payment."

Mrs. Middleton's eyebrows rose.

"At one o'clock in the morning?" she asked incredulously, "And do you usually pay your friends in bank notes—at one o'clock in the morning,"

Mr. Middleton licked his lips, and, according to his wife, was incapable of speech. Nevertheless, he was not incapable of action. Very carefully he wrapped up the bank notes and handed them to the girl, who had not broken silence.

"That will be all, Miss Jones." he said. "Tell your father I hope that settles our account."

The girl. with no look at the indignant wife, walked out of the room, down the

stairs and let herself out of the front door, in a manner, as Mrs. Middleton told me, that suggested that this was not the first visit she had paid to 604 Park Lane.

Waiting until the door closed, Mrs. Middleton turned upon her husband.

"Now, perhaps, you will explain this extraordinary scene," she demanded.

"It requires no further explanation than that which I have given you," said her husband doggedly.

"And who is 'Constance,' might I ask?" asked Mrs. Middleton, tapping her foot —an ominous sign, "Constancy, or whatever the creature's name is?"

Middleton stared at her.

"You heard that, did you? Oh, well, she's another friend of mine."

"You seem to have some queer friends, Frederick." said his wife. "Is 'Constance' also in the habit of seeing you at one o'clock in the morning?"

Middleton shrugged his shoulders.

"This is not a matter which concerns you at all, Agnes, and I beg of you to keep out of it," he said. "I'm doing a great deal to save you from worry, and I am entitled to some better reward than your suspicions."

"Will you explain—" began his wife.

"I will explain nothing," said Middleton sharply. "You can either take my word that this is a transaction which does not concern you, or else you needn't. I certainly am not going to tell you any more, either now or at any other time."

Again Mrs. Middleton's eyebrows rose, and without a word she left the room. Behold, next morning, her electric landaulette outside my office door, and Mrs. Middleton sitting opposite to me, in my private office.

"I should never, of course, have employed a private detective unless I was certain that something was very wrong," she said. "You understand, Mr. Dixon, that my connections are such that I cannot tolerate even a breath of scandal associated with my name. My father was the son of Lord—". She gave me a long string of aristocratic connections, and lectured me for ten minutes on the stainlessness of a hundred family escutcheons to which she might claim relationship, and ended by haggling with me over the cost of my services. This discussion, however, I brought to a quick conclusion.

"Mrs. Middleton," said I, "I am a fairly busy man, and I do not care to

undertake any new commissions. If you wish to have your husband watched I will undertake to carry out the work, but it must be done in a proper manner, and you must be prepared to pay the cost. When we are watching a millionaire we must employ a man who, in appearance, in dress, and in social manner, is fit to go into the company which millionaires keep. You quite understand that?"

"I suppose I shall have to pay it," she grumbled. "Now you quite understand. I want my husband followed. I want to know first of all who this 'Constance' is, because I am certain that the wretched woman I saw with my husband was her servant, who had come to collect money from him."

"Perhaps you can give me a little information before you go, Mrs. Middleton. Your husband is, of course. well known to me. He is the chairman of several West Australian Gold Mining Companies. Would it be indiscreet to ask how he made his money?"

Mrs. Middleton hesitated. Her aristocratic soul recoiled from admitting that her millionaire husband had not been born a millionaire, the son of a millionaire, and the last of a long line of millionaires.

"He made his money in Western Australia," she said. "He has always been interested in mining propositions, and as a young man spent some years in South Africa. It was from South Africa that he went to Western Australia, and there he made his lucky strike."

"Has he any enemies, may I ask?"

"None," she answered in surprise. "What makes you ask such a question like that? It is his friends that I'm complaining of, not his enemies."

"Is there a possibility that he is being blackmailed?" said I and she laughed scornfully at the very idea.

Trailing Mr. Middleton was not a very difficult business, because he was a man of regular habits. He arrived at his office in Throgmorton Street at a certain hour, left for lunch at another hour, dined at the same restaurant at the identical table every day of his life, and went home to Park Line, never failing to arrive between five o'clock and ten minutes past. He had a manager, an assistant manager, a secretary, and four clerks, all males; there were three stenographers in his office, none of whom were named. "Constance," and all bore irreproachable characters.

My experience is that such scandals, as Mrs. Middleton knows for herself, are very easily revealed. They begin and end in a man's office, and if they

adventure abroad at all are usually reported.

But Middleton, thickset, slightly bald, dark moustached (I guessed that was dyed), sober of demeanour and speech, was not one of that kind. He devoted the whole of his time to business, and was accounted in the City as one of the brightest intellects engaged in commerce. At the end of a week Mrs. Middleton called upon me as by arrangement, expecting I do not know what horrid disclosures.

"Nothing!" she said shrilly. "You found nothing! What do you think I pay you for?"

"I can assure you, madam, that you are not paying me to manufacture evidence against your husband," said I. "You are paying me to discover the truth and the truth is, as I have told you, that he has not met any woman named Constance or Jenny or Jane, other than his stenographer, that he has come straight to his office every morning and gone straight home every evening. The only night he has been out was on Thursday last, when he accompanied a lady to the Empire. The lady in question was a rather florid woman, somewhat overdressed—"

"You are speaking of my dear sister," said Mrs. Middleton coldly. "I know all about that."

"Well," She said, rising, with a sigh of disappointment, "we'll have to see what the next week reveals."

"But I am not prepared to reveal it, Mrs. Middleton." said I. "You must find another agency."

"Nonsense!" said the energetic lady. "You started the work and you've got to carry it out; besides; Lady Granger tells me that you are the best agency in London and the most reliable."

"Nevertheless— I began, when Mrs. Middleton, who had walked to the window and was looking out upon the street, interrupted me with a cry.

"Look! Look!" she said. "Quick, quick!"

I ran to her. She was pointing to the opposite side of the street.

"That's the girl," she said excitedly, "the girl who came to my husband. Oh, do, please, please, Mr. Dixon, bring her in and ask her—"

I snatched up my hat and ran down the stairs. Opposite my office is a large drapery emporium, and the girl Mrs. Middleton had indicated was looking at

the window. I had no difficulty in picking her up again, but did not intend following Mrs. Middleton's suggestion and ask her into my office. Instead I trailed her for two hours, without much difficulty, because she was in a sauntering, shopping mood. I followed her from one store to another, and noted that she had plenty of money. Her purchases she stuffed into a taxi cab which crawled about after her from shop to shop.

At the end she gave the driver his final instructions.

"99 Lexington Gardens," she said. And I followed her in another taxi.

Lexington Gardens is a quiet street in Bayswater, once the abiding place of middle class plutocracy, but now entirely given up to boarding houses. It was to one of these boarding houses she drove, commanding a scowling maid to carry in her multitudinous purchases.

"Can I give you a hand?" said I, having by this time descended.

The maid looked up, caught my smile and grinned.

"Thank you very much, sir; I can manage. Too much of a lady to carry in her own stuff," she replied bitterly, "I tell you, when the lower orders get on in the world they're unbearable."

I was busy piling the parcels in her arms.

"You mean that lady that just went in?"

"Lady!" she scoffed. "Why, she's as common as Saturday afternoon!"

I laughed at this novel comparison, and she went on.

"Her and her old man are a pair, they are. The way they order you about, you'd think you were dirt."

"I thought I recognised her," said I. "She's a Miss—"

"Mincing her name is. They've come into a lot of money lately. They're no more fit to be in a decent boarding house than I'm fit to be in the Zoo. There's the old man now." she said, lowering her voice.

A man was coming down the steps to assist with the parcels; a hard faced thin lipped man, with a settled frown puckering his forehead.

"Hurry up with them parcels," he said loudly. "Don't stand gossiping, or I'll complain to your missus."

"For my part," said the exasperated maid, "you can go to—!" and she flounced

up the steps and disappeared into the wide hall.

"I'd give a 'undred pounds," said Mr. Mincing thoughtfully, "to take her by the scruff of the neck and shake her life out of her. The cheek of these slaveys! Are you a boarder?" he asked suddenly.

"I thought of becoming one," said I. "In fact, I have just driven up to find out if there is a room vacant."

"It's not much of a place." said Mr. Mincing deprecatingly; "I'm thinking of changing to a better class neighbourhood. I've come into a lot of money," he said unnecessarily.

"So I understand," said I.

"Who told you?" he asked suspiciously.

"Oh, everybody in the neighbourhood knows," I replied. hoping that he would not wonder how I, a stranger, came to know the gossip of Lexington Gardens.

He changed the conversation abruptly, and obeying an impulse, I walked into the house, interviewed the harassed little landlady and booked a room. This gave me the opportunity of interviewing the maid again and putting a few questions to her.

"No, sir," she said. "there's no other woman in that party, only Mr. Mincing and his daughter."

"Nobody named Constance?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"Two's enough, and more than enough for Clara," she said grimly. "If there was a family of Mincings staying here, I shouldn't be that's all."

"Where do they come from?" I asked.

"Somewhere down Walworth way," said the girl, busily making my bed. "I know that because the young man who serves us with groceries used to live in the same street. Old Mincing was as poor as a church mouse. Him and his daughter lived in a couple of rooms.'

"When did they come into money?" I asked.

"About six months ago," said the girl. "At least, that's when they moved in here. He's got a big income from somewhere—he gets it once a quarter—and when the stuff comes in you can't get into their rooms for the muck they buy."

I made a few more inquiries, and then went out and telephoned to my house, telling my man to pack my bag and send it to Lexington Gardens by special messenger. I had also to telephone to my office to relieve Mrs. Middleton of anxiety. She wanted me to give her a full account of the morning's work over the telephone, but this I respectfully declined. I would have thrown the case up then and there but for the fact that there was an element of mystery in the business which particularly appealed to me. I wanted to spend at least one night under the same roof that sheltered Mr. Mincing, and to know something more of his habits. As to these, the maid Clara was very communicative.

"They go out every night to a cinema," she said; "sometimes to a music hall, but generally to one of the picture shows."

That suited me down to the ground. I met them at dinner that night—an awkward, self conscious pair. After dinner I managed to get into conversation with Mr. Mincing. I told him that I had just returned from America, and spoke enthusiastically of that country. He was apathetic. I said I did not like it as much as Australia, and raved of the wonderful climate of that great oversea State. He said yes and no, and was obviously bored.

"But perhaps," I suggested, "Australia wasn't a patch on South Africa." I saw his eyes light up.

"In a way," he admitted grudgingly, "but I never want to go to South Africa again."

"You've been there, then?" said I.

"For a little while," he said.

I spoke of Johannesburg; he did not know it. Of Durban; he had been there once for a day or two on a ship. Capetown—obviously he knew Capetown inside out. Happily, so do I. We talk. about Adderly Street, of the Kloof, of the wonders of Wynberg and Simonstown and the railway that skirts the sea.

"How long is it since you left there?"

"Oh, twenty years," said he carelessly. "The place must have changed a lot since I came away,

"Were you there long?"

"About ten years," he said shortly, and changed the subject.

If my theory was correct, it was in South Africa that Mincing had met Middleton. I had already dismissed from my mind his vacant faced daughter

as being anything but an agent. But who was Constance? Was there another daughter?

I went up to my room, which was on the same floor as the Mincings', and presently I heard his deep bass voice calling his daughter impatiently, and they descended the stairs together and passed out of the house. He had locked his door, but that presented no great difficulty. In houses of this character the key of one room will open most. I called the maid and took her into my confidence. She was thrilled at the idea of my being a detective, and wildly excited at the possibility of my investigations being directed to the undoing of the hated Mincings. She was a sensible kind of shrewd, Cockney girl, that one could trust; otherwise I should not have told her, but it was necessary that my investigations should not be interrupted, and I gave her instructions to keep guard on the stairs whilst I conducted a search through such private documents as the Mincings possessed.

In truth, there was very little documentary evidence either for or against the man. Except what papers he had in a shabby little red morocco satchel, fastened by one of those patent locks which any average hairpin can open. There were letters, apparently from his dead wife, which told me nothing; and there was a photograph of a landscape, a glorious landscape it must have been, with its high, upstanding hills in the background, its pine-covered slopes and white roads. There was no inscription on the mount, and it was evidently the work of an amateur.

What I did discover was a small notebook in which were scrawled six pages of more or less unintelligible notes. Some of these it was impossible to decipher, but towards the end I came upon this:

"Good idea. If Med won't part, send picture con and break."

Con and break! Where was Con's picture? I searched again, without result. Again I looked through his letters. There were no envelopes, but as one of the epistles was signed "Jane Mincing" I gathered that the man was not passing under any other name than his own. The search for the girl's photograph was in vain, the only photograph of any kind in the satchel being that pleasant landscape which had excited my admiration.

I was replacing the letters when a triangular scrap of fell from between them. It was evidently a torn portion of an envelope, one of those thin, grey envelopes which are used for foreign postage. I flashed my electric lamp upon it, but saw no more than a row of figures, "718-11911." I put this in my waistcoat pocket, replaced the case, and came out to relieve the frantic anxiety of the. maid.

My investigations did not promise well, for all that I had in the shape of a clue was a scrap of paper on which somebody had jotted a number, which might mean anything or nothing, a reference to a "Con" and to "break", which was obscure; and I was as far off discovering Mr. Middleton's secret as ever. I summoned the maid and told her that I should be out all night, asking her not to mention the fact to her mistress. Then I made my way slowly homeward.

It was as I was standing at the Piccadilly Tube bookstall that the mystery was partially solved. I was looking at the books arrayed in shelves at the back, behind the masses of current literature, and Kipling's new volume caught my eye. The name of the writer set my thoughts wandering to his poetry, which I love, and I found myself repeating favourite old stanzas of mine—and then the revelation came.

I called a cab and drove down to the Eastern Cable Company's office and dispatched an urgent wire. My next step was the boldest. I would see Mr. Middleton himself, although it was against all the instructions which I had received from his wife.

Middleton was at home and alone. However much he might stand in awe of his wife, he had a short, sharp way with strangers.

"What do you want?" he asked brusquely.

"A private interview," said I, looking meaningly at the butler.

He hesitated, then dismissed the servant with a nod.

"Now, sir," he said. "I don't do business in my house; and however urgent your errand is, it could wait until tomorrow."

"Not this," said I coolly. "because I am most anxious to finish my interview with you before your wife returns from the opera."

"What is it about?" he asked.

"It is about John Mincing," said I slowly and speaking with emphasis.

His start was almost imperceptible.

"Sit down," he said.

"First of all," said I, "I must tell you, Mr. Middleton, that I am betraying the confidence of your wife. I am a private detective employed by her to watch you; but I hope that when you have heard all the circumstances you will not be distressed by that apparent want of faith."

"Watch?" he said incredulously. "My wife asked you to watch me? In heaven's name, why?"

Before I could answer, a light dawn. on him and he laughed.

"Good God! Yes, that girl whom she saw me with here. So that aroused her suspicions, eh? I thought it might, but I didn't believe she would go to the length of watching me. Now what have you got to say about John Mincing? That seems to be the more important."

"I have been following you," said "to discover the whereabouts of a mysterious lady named Constance—a name, by the way, which your wife heard when she came in upon you the other evening."

"Constance?" said he puzzled. "What Constance? I don't know any girl named Constance."

"As a matter of fact, I have reason to believe that you did not say Constance," said I. "The word you used was 'Constantia'."

He stared at me and bit his lips.

"Well?" he said.

"Constantia is a beautiful suburb of Capetown," I continued. "One is Constantia and the other is the Breakwater, and I have reason to believe, Mr. Middleton, that you have made the acquaintance of both places."

His face was drawn, and he was evidently in great distress of mind. He did not speak for some time, but sat at the table, his head in his hands. Presently he looked up.

"You're quite right," he said, "and I congratulate you upon your acumen. I served five years in those two hells for illicit diamond buying in Kimberley."

"And a fellow convict was John Mincing." I suggested.

He nodded.

"I should like to say that I was wrongfully accused and that I was punished unjustly," said Middleton, "but if I did, I should be telling a lie. I did buy diamonds from the natives at Kimberley against the law, and I was caught with the goods and sent down for seven years. I served five years of my sentence, partly on the Breakwater, partly at Constantia, and at the end of that time I left for Australia, where I made my strike. Mincing was a fellow convict. We worked in the same gang. In fact, we were chained together for work on the roads. I was not convicted in my own name, you understand, and I have

always hoped and prayed that the rich Middleton would never be associated with the poor devil who worked in broad arrows for the Cape Government for five long and weary years. Mincing was serving twenty years for murder. He was a bad character, and feared even by the warders."

"His number," I interrupted. "was 718-11911."

The man nodded.

"That is right," he said. "I remember it perfectly. Well, as I was saying, I left for Australia and made my strike. I never expected to be identified, and should not have been if my wife hadn't dragged me off to a garden party, where I was photographed as one of the celebrities. By a curious trick of photography the picture made me look younger than I was, and Mincing, looking over an old copy of the illustrated weekly in which it appeared, recognised me instantly, and through his daughter began to blackmail me."

"Why didn't you inform the police?" I asked. "After all, Mr. Middleton, the police are very humane, and they would not hold up against you your past folly."

He shook his head.

"You forget my wife," he said shortly. "I dared not risk the truth coming out, and it was easier to pay than to be exposed."

I rose.

"So that's that," I said. "Now I've got to find a story for your wife, and that's going to be the most difficult of all."

"What about Mincing?" he asked.

"I'll settle with Mincing." said I, "You'll never be troubled with him again. He has only to believe that you have placed the matter in the hands of the police for him to fade away and never be heard of again. But your wife is difficult. She is determined to find a Constance, and won't be satisfied with any substitute."

"I think you may leave my wife to me." said Middleton after a moment's thought, and I was content to do so. I never saw Mrs. Middleton again, but at the end of the week she sent me a very handsome cheque and a simple line of thanks. I should imagine that Middleton told his wife, relying upon the goodness which is within the heart of every woman, however acidulated. I have often wondered, in the course of the years I have been following my profession, why husbands do not tell wives, and wives tell husbands much

more than they do. If there were a little more frankness between married people, I should lose seventy-five per cent of my work, so on the whole perhaps, things are better as they are—from my point of view!

WARM AND DRY

No record of prior magazine publication under this title found

I WENT down to see Superintendent Minter just before the election began. He heard that I was going to participate in the fray with a visible sneer on his homely face. "Politics!" he said. "Good Lord! At your time of life! Well, well, well! I've known a lot of fellows who took up that game, but nobody that ever made it pay, except Nippy the Nose, who used to travel the country and burgle the candidates' rooms when they were out addressing meetings.

"You know a lot about the hooks and the getabits of life, and you know that they're all specialists. If a man's a lob crawler—"

"What's a lob crawler? I've forgotten."

The Superintendent shook his dead sadly. "You're forgetting everything," he said. "I suppose it's these politics. A lob crawler's a man who goes into a little shop on his hands and knees, passes round the counter and pinches the till. There's not much of it nowadays, and anyway in these bad times there's nothing in the till to pinch. But once a lob crawler, always a lob crawler. If you go on the whizz—and I don't suppose you want me to tell you that whizzing is pocket-picking—you spend your life on the whizz. If you're a burglar, you're always a burglar. I've never yet met a burglar who was also a con man. That's the criminal's trouble he's got no originality, and thank the Lord for it! If they didn't catch themselves we'd never catch 'em. Nippy was an exception. He'd try everything once. If you went into the Record Office at Scotland Yard and turned up his M.O. card, which means—"

"I know what a modus operandi card is," I said.

The Superintendent nodded his head approvingly. "That's right. Don't let these politics put business out of your mind. As I say, if you turned up his M.O. card you'd have a shock. He's been convicted of larceny, burglary, obtaining money by a trick, pocket-picking. luggage- pinching—everything except blackmail. It's a funny thing that none of the regulars will ever admit they've committed blackmail, and there's not one of them that wouldn't if he had the chance and the intelligence.

"I used to know Nippy; in fact I got two of his convictions. Nothing upsets a police officer more than these general practitioners, because we are always

looking for specialists. We know there are about six classes of burglars. There's a class that never attempts to break into a live shop, by which I mean a shop where people are living in the rooms upstairs; and there's a class that never goes into a dead joint, which, you will remember, is a lockup shop with nobody on the premises. And naturally, when we get a burglary with any peculiar features, we go through the M.O. cards and pick out a dozen men who are likely to have done the job, and after we've sorted 'em out and found which of 'em were in stir and which of 'em are out of the neighbourhood, we'll pull in the remainder one by one and give them the once over.

"So that when there was a real big bust in Brockley, and we went over the M.O. cards, we never dreamt of looking for Nippy, because he hadn't done that sort of thing before; and we wouldn't have found him, but we got the office from a fence in Islington that Nippy had tried to sell him a diamond brooch. When you get a squeak from a fence its because he has offered too low a price for stolen property, and the thief has taken it elsewhere. "Nippy got a stretch, and the next time he came into our hands it was for something altogether different—trying to persuade a Manchester cotton man to buy a tenth share in a Mexican oilfield. Nippy would have got away with the loot, but unfortunately he knew nothing about geography, and when he said that Mexico was in South Africa the cotton man was a little suspicious and looked up the map.

"Nippy was a nice fellow, always affable, generally well-dressed. and a great favourite with the ladies. When I say 'ladies' I mean anybody that wore silk stockings and used lipstick.

"Nippy used to do a bit of nosing, too, but I didn't know he was making a regular business of it. Now, a nose is a very useful fellow. Without a nose the police wouldn't be able to find half the criminals that come through their hands. I suppose I'm being vulgar and ought to call them police informers, but 'nose' has always been good enough for me, because, naturally, I'm a man without any refinement.

"I happened to be walking down Piccadilly towards Hyde Park Corner when I saw Nippy. He tipped his hat and was going on when I claimed him. 'Good morning, Sooper,' he said. 'I'm just on me way to the office. I'm going straight now; I'm an agent, and everything's warm and dry. I've opened a little business in Wardour Street,' he said.

"Nippy had opened lots of businesses, mostly with a chisel and a three-piece jemmy, but I gathered that he had opened this one by paying the rent in advance. All criminals tell you they're going straight. Usually they're going straight from one prison to another. There are exceptions, but I've never heard

of 'em,

"We had a few minutes' conversation. He told me where his office was, and I promised to look him up. He was so happy about me calling that I thought he was lying, but when I dropped in a few days afterwards I found that he had a room on the third floor. I expected to find that he was the managing director of the Mountains in the Moon Exploration Company, or else the secretary of a new invention for getting gold out of the sea. It was a bit surprising to find his real name, Norman Ignatius Percival Young, on the glass panel. It was now that I found what he was agent for. He was standing in with the very fence who had given him away on his last conviction, and I suspected he was doing the same job. Anyway, he was full of information about various people, and he gave me a tip that afternoon to prove his—what's the word? Yes, bona fides—that's French, isn't it? I made a pretty good capture—a man called Juggy Jones, who did a lot of motor-car pinching, and was in with a big crowd up at Shadwell, who took the cars, repaired them and shipped them off to India. There's many a grand family car running round Madras, loaded to the water-line with little Eurasians.

"Anyway. Juggy was a very sensible man, and if ever a thief could be described as intelligent that man was Juggy. He didn't talk much. He was a big fellow, about six feet two, with a face as cheerful as the ace of spades. But if he didn't say much he did a lot of thinking. I took him out of a cafe, where he was having dinner with a lady friend, and we walked down to the station together and I charged him. He said nothing, but when he came up before the magistrate and heard the evidence and was committed for trial, he asked me to see him in his cell.

" 'I shouldn't be at all surprised, Sooper,' he said, 'if I know the name of the man who shopped me.'

" 'And I shouldn't be surprised either, Juggy,' I said, 'because you've known me for years.'

"But he shook his head and said nothing else. Somebody got at the witnesses for the Crown, and when they went into the box at the Old Bailey they gave the sort of evidence that wouldn't bring about a conviction, and it looked as if he was going to get an acquittal and something out of the poor box to compensate him for his wounded feelings, when the prosecuting counsel took a pretty strong line with one witness, who, after he had changed his evidence three times, said just enough to convict Juggy on one count. He went down for a carpet. Am I being vulgar? Let me say he went down for six months; a very lucky man. If we could have convicted him on the other indictments he'd have taken a dose of penal servitude. Naturally Nippy didn't appear in court. I

wondered what he was getting out of it. It was a long time afterwards that I found out that there was a quarrel between the two rings as to who the stuff should be shipped to, and Nippy had been put in to make the killing. He gave us one or two bits of information which were useful, but you could see that he was just acting for the fence. I made a few inquiries up Islington way, and I found out that whenever the police went to him to find out about stolen property he referred them to the gentleman in Wardour Street who'd be able to tell them something.

"Now a thief who's earning a regular living has never got enough money, and I was pretty certain that Nippy was doing something on the side. because he began to have his old prosperous look and attend the races. As a matter of fact, though I didn't know it, he was working up a connection with a gang of luggage thieves. I found this out when he came on to my manor—into my division, I mean. I found him at a railway station acting in a suspicious manner, and I could have pinched him, but, being naturally very kind-hearted with all criminals if I haven't enough evidence to get a conviction, I just warned him. Nippy was very hurt.

" 'Why, Sooper,' he said. 'I've got a good job. I'm warm and dry up in Wardour Street. Why should I lower myself to go back to my old and sinful life? I haven't had a drink for three months, and I never pass the Old Bailey without taking, off me hat to it.'

" 'There are two ways of being warm and dry, Nippy,' I said. 'One is to be honest, and the other is to get to Dartmoor, where I understand there is a fine system of central heating.'

"While this was going on, Juggy Jones came out of stir and reported to me. He'd got out with his usual remissions and I had a little chat with him.

" 'It's all right, Sooper,' he said. 'I'm going straight. I've had enough of the other game. How's Nippy—warm and dry?'

" 'Do you know him?' I asked.

"He thought a long time. 'I've heard about him,' he said.

"I should imagine he'd been doing a lot of thinking while he was in prison, and when I heard that he and Nippy had been seen together having a drink in the long bar, I thought it advisable to see Nippy and give him a few words of fatherly advice. But you couldn't tell anything to Nippy. He knew it all, and a lot more. He just smiled. 'Thank you, Sooper,' he said, 'but Juggy and I have always been good pals, and you couldn't wish to meet a nicer man.'

"According to his story, they had met by accident in the Haymarket. They had had a drink together. I think Nippy was a bit jealous of him, because he was one of the few crooks I have met who saved money. He had enough money, anyway, when he was at the Old Bailey to engage a good mouthpiece, and he'd got a little flat in Maida Vale. One of my men shadowed Nippy and found he was in the habit of calling there, so I knew if Nippy disappeared and his right ear was found on the Thames Embankment, where the rest of the body would be. Not that crooks are that kind: they never commit murder.

"I only heard the rest of the story in scraps and pieces. But so far as I can make out, Nippy had been trying to get the man into the luggage crowd, which was silly, because. as I have said before, a man who knocks oft motor-cars doesn't knock off anything else. Jaggy said he would like to try the business, and he must have looked it over pretty, thoroughly and taken an interest in it, because one day he sent for Nippy to come to his flat in Maida Vale, and put him on an easy job that came off and brought him about £150. It's a simple trick. You have a motor-car outside the station, and in it a little hand stamp and a case of type. You hang about the cloak room till you see a man coming along carrying a bag in and taking his ticket. You've got a little bag of your own, containing a few well-worn bricks wrapped up in your favourite newspaper. You edge up behind him, and when he takes a ticket you put in your bag and you receive a ticket. Now, suppose you receive No. 431; you know the ticket that went before was 430. You go outside to your little car. You have got a lot of blank tickets of all colours—they sometimes change the colour—and you just make up the stamp to 430 and you stamp it. About three or four hours later along comes a gentlemanly looking person, hands in the ticket and claims the bag, and that's the end of it.

"One night, just as Nippy was going to bed, Juggy rang him up and asked him to come round to see him. When he got to the flat he told Nippy a grand story. It was about a man who travelled in jewellery and who was in the habit of taking one over the eight, and sometimes two. This fellow, according to Juggy, when he felt the inebriation, if you'll excuse the word, overtaking him, used to go to the nearest cloak room and deposit all his samples in a bag which was kept in a safe that you could open with a blunt knife.

"According to Juggy, this fellow was coming to London from Birmingham, and the two arranged to shadow him. They picked him up at a railway station —a large, fat man, who was slightly oiled. You may not have heard the expression before, but it means a man who has been lubricating—which is also a foreign expression, but you must go with the times. They tailed him till he went into a restaurant and met another man. He carried a bag, and he took out of this bag, and showed to the world, a large leather roll which he opened

on the table. There were more diamonds in that roll than Nippy had ever heard of. When he saw it he began to breathe heavily through his nose.

"When they got outside the restaurant he said to Juggy: 'Can't we get him in a quiet place and convert him to free trade? It's warm and dry.'

"But Juggy wouldn't have it. He said that this man, because he was in the habit of getting soused—which is another expression you may not have heard before, but it means the same thing—was always followed by a detective to watch him. Apparently, he wasn't an ordinary traveller; he was the head of the firm. They followed him for a bit. He went into a bar and when he came out he couldn't have driven a car without having his licence suspended for ten years. Sure enough he made for a railway station in the Euston Road, handed over the stock, and they watched it being locked in the safe.

" 'He'll do that every day this week,' said Juggy, 'but no time's like the present. You're a peter-man, I'm not.'

"And then he told Nippy his plan. It was to put him in a packing case and deposit him in the cloak room. 'It's Saturday night. They close the office at twelve, and all you've got to do is to get out in the night, open the safe, claim the stuff, and I'll be down to collect you in the morning.'

"Nippy wasn't what I might describe as keen on the job, but he'd seen the diamonds and he couldn't keep his mind off them. Juggy took him down to a little garage off the Waterloo Bridge Road and showed him the case he'd had made.

" 'If you don't like to do it, I can get one of my lads who'll do the job for a pony and be glad of the chance. It's going to be easy to get, and we'll share fifty-fifty.'

"Nippy was still a bit uncertain. 'Suppose they put me upside down?'

" 'Don't be silly,' said Juggy. I'll put a label on it: This side up—glass.'

"Nippy had a look at the case. It was all lined; there was a nice seat, and although it was going to be a little uncomfortable, there was a neat little pocket inside, with a flask of whisky and a little tin of sandwiches.

" 'You won't be able to smoke, of course, but you won't be there more than seven hours. I'll notify the left-luggage people that I'm bringing the case in, and slip the fellow a dollar and tell him not to put anything on top. All you've got to do is open the side of the case and step out. It'll be like falling off a log.'

"Nippy had a good look at the case. The side opened like a door. It didn't look

hard at all. The only danger was that when they came in the morning to the cloakroom they'd find out that the safe had been opened.

" 'That's all right.' said Juggy. 'You needn't bust it. I've got a squeeze of the key.' He took it out of his pocket.

" 'That's all right.' said Nippy. 'It's an easy job. We'll be warm and dry on this.'

"About seven o'clock that night Nippy got inside the case and tried it out. The air holes all worked; everything was as the heart could desire. He bolted the door on the inside, and then he heard somebody putting in screws on the outside.

" 'Hi!' said Nippy, 'what's the idea?'

" 'It's all right.' said Juggy. 'They're only fakes; they come out the moment you push'

"I don't know what happened to Nippy in the night, and I can't describe his feelings, because I'm not a novel writer. He heard cranes going and people shouting, felt himself lifted up in the air, heard somebody say 'Lower away!' and he went down farther than he thought it was possible to go. And then Nippy began to realize that something had to be done.

"It was two hours before anybody heard him shout, and at last the stevedores broke open the case and got him out. He was in the hold of a ship, and the packing case was labelled on the top: 'Bombay. Stow away from boilers. Keep warm and dry.'

"It broke Nippy's nerve. He's in Parkhurst now, recuperating."

THE SOOPER SPEAKING

A different story with the same title was published in Collier's magazine, April 28, 1928 and reprinted in the collection The Lone House Mystery and Other Stories, William Collins & Sons, London, 1929

"ITS a queer thing," said the Superintendent, "that when I explain to outsiders the method and system of criminal investigation as practised by the well-known academy of arts at Scotland Yard, they always seem a bit disappointed.

"I've shown a lot of people over the building, and they all want to see the room where the scientific detectives are looking at mud stains through microscopes, or puttin' cigar ash in test tubes, or deducting or deducing—I don't know which is the right word—from a bit of glue that was found in the keyhole that the burglar was a tall, dark man who drove a grey touring car and had been

crossed in love.

"I believe there am detectives like that. I've read about 'em. When you walk into their room or bureau or boudoir, as the case may be, they give you a sharp, penetrating look from their cold, grey eyes and they say: 'You came up Oxford Street in a motor-bus; I can smell it. You had an argument with your wife this morning; I can see the place where the plate hit you. You're going a long journey across water; beware of a blue-eyed nippy—she bites."

"I believe that the best way to detect a man who's committed a crime is to see him do it. It isn't necessary even to see him do it. In nine cases out of ten the right man will come along sooner or later and tell you be did it, and what he did it with. Most criminals catch themselves. And I'll tell you why. Not nine out of ten, but ninety-nine out of every hundred of these birds of paradise don't know where to stop, and as they don't know where to stop they stop half-way. I've never met a crook who was a whole hogger and could carry any job he started to a clean an' tidy finish. There never was a burglar who didn't leave something valuable behind, but that's understandable, for burglars are the most nervous criminals in the world. They lose heart half-way through and there's a lot of people like 'em. As Mr. Rudyard Kipling. the well-known poet. says:

'All along of doing things

Rather more or less.'

"The most interesting more or less crime I ever saw was the Bidderley Hall affair. Bidderley Hall is a country house in the Metropolitan Police area—right on the edge of "T" Division near Staines. It was an old Queen Anne house—it's been pulled down lately—standing in a ten acre park, and it was owned by a gentleman named Costino. Mr. Charles Costino. He was a rich man, having inherited about half a million from his brother Peter. Funny name Costino, but that's what it was. I don't make the names, I simply put 'em on record. Their great great grandfather had been a Roumanian, or something of the sort, but they'd grown out of it.

"Peter was rich and Charles was poor. Peter boozed but Charles never got gay on anything stronger than barley water. He was artistic and knew a lot about old masters. He never bought any but he knew about 'em. His brother Peter knew nothing except that two pints made a quart and two quarts made you so that you wasn't responsible for your actions.

"As a matter of fact, he was a bit of a bad egg—gave funny parties at his home in Eastbourne and was pinched once or twice for bein' tight when in charge of a motor-car.

"One morning the coastguards found Peter's car at the foot of a two hundred foot cliff, smashed to blazes. They never found Peter. The tide was pretty high when his car went over—about three in the morning according to a revenue boat that saw the lights, and after a time Charles got leave to presume his death and took over all that Peter had left of a million.

"I saw Peter once. He was one of those blue-faced soakers who keep insurance companies awake at night.

"It was a grand bit of luck for Charles, who had this old house on his hands and found it a bit difficult to pay the rates.

"When he came into money he didn't live much better than when he was poor. The only time he broke out was when he took in a man of all work, who was butler, footman, valet and fed the chickens. In a way it was not a good break. as I could have told him if I had only known at the time. Mr. Costino, it seems, had had an old lady looking after him—I forget her name, but anyway it doesn't matter. She'd been in the family for four generations, and she either left to better herself or died. Whatever she did she bettered herself. Anyway, Mr. Charles Costino was without a servant. He only lived in four rooms of the house since he came into the money and there wasn't much cleaning to be done, but he did have a bit of silver to clean, and there were the chickens to look after. The silver used to be locked in a cupboard in the dining-room and was pretty valuable as I happen to know.

"Now, the new man he employed was named Simon. He's no relation to anybody you know, and I very much whether that was his name anyway. He was a graduate of the University of Dartmoor where he had spent three happy years at the ratepayers' expense. I knew him as well as the back of my right hand.

"One day by accident I was passing through the Minories and I saw Simon come out of a shop that buys a bit of other people's silver now and again, so I pulled him up. According to his story he had been to this pawn-broker's shop to buy a ring for his young lady, but they hadn't got one to fit. I know most of the young ladies Simon has promised to marry—they've all been through my hands at one time or another—but I've never met one that he bought anything for, except a bit of stickin' plaster. So I took him back to the shop, and the fence blew it and showed me the silver Mr. Simon parted with.

"It was not in my division at all and perhaps I had no right to interfere. To tell you the truth, the Divisional Inspector was a bit nasty about it afterwards, but what made it all right for me was when Simon said it was a cop and volunteered to come back with me to Staines. He didn't want any trouble and

he told me he was tired of working for Mr. Costino and would be glad to get back amongst the boys at the dear old college. He said he had sold six pieces and got four hidden in the house ready to bring away.

" 'Costino wouldn't notice them going.' he said. 'He's soused half the time and the other half he's in delirium tremens.'

"It was news to me. because I didn't know Costino drank.

"We drove from the station to the house in a cab and on the way there Simon told me how slick he'd had to be to get the stuff out of the house at all. Apparently he slept in a room over a stable, some distance front the house but in the grounds. Nobody slept in the house but Charles Costino.

"We drove up to the Hall—and a miserable looking building it was. I think I told you it was a Queen Anne house. Queen Anne is dead and this house was ready to pop off at any minute. None of the windows was clean, except a couple on the ground floor. It took us a quarter of an hour to wake up Costino and even then he only opened the door on the chain and wouldn't have let us in but he recognised me.

"I have never seen such a change in a man. The last time I saw him he was a quiet, sober feller and his idea of a happy evening was to drink lemonade and listen to the wireless. Now he was the colour of a bad lobster. He stared at Simon, and when I told him what the man had told me, he sat down in a chair and turned grey—well it wasn't grey, but a sort of putty colour. After a bit he says:

" 'I'd like to speak to this man. I think I can persuade him to tell me the truth.'

"I don't like people comin' between me and my lawful prey, but I humoured him, and he took Simon into the other corner of the room and talked to him for a long time in an undertone.

"When he finished he said:

" 'I think this man has made a mistake. There are only four pieces of silver stolen, and those are the four pieces he has sold. I can tell you in a minute.'

"With that he unlocked the door of a high cupboard. It was so crowded with silver that it was impossible for any man to count the stuff that was in it. But he only looked at it for a minute and then he said:

" 'He's quite right. Only four pieces are missing.'

"So far as I was concerned it didn't matter to me whether it was four or ten, so

long as he gave me enough for a conviction. It was not my business to argue the point. I took Simon down to the cooler and I could tell something had happened, because he was not his usual bright and cheery self. Usually when you take an old con to the station he is either tellin' you that when he comes out what he's goin' to do to your heart, lungs and important blood vessels, or else he's all friendly and jolly boys. But Simon said nothing and sort of looked dazed and surprised. He was hardly recovered the next morning when I met him at the police court and got my remand.

"It was a very simple case. It came up at the Sessions, and Mr. Costino went into the box and said Simon was one of the best servants that had ever blown into a country house. You expect perjury at the Assizes but not that kind of perjury. But that was his business. Anyway, Costino made such a scene about what a grand feller Simon was, how he fed the chickens so regular that they followed him down the street, that he got off with six months hard labour, and that, so far as I was concerned, was the end of it till it came my turn to take him again.

"About seven months after this I was on duty on the Great West Road, watching for a stolen motor-car. It was one of those typical English summer days you read about—raining cats and dogs, with a cold north wind blowing—and I was getting a bit fed up with waitin' when I saw a car coming along following a course that a yachtsman takes when he is tacking into the breeze. The last tack was against an iron lamp standard, which smashed the radiator and most of the glass, but it didn't apparently kill the driver, for he opened the door and staggered out. I had only to look at him to see that he had had about twenty-five over the eight. My first inclination was to hand him over to my sergeant on a charge of being drunk in charge. It would mean a lot of bother, because if he had plenty of money he'd produce three Harley Street doctors and fourteen independent witnesses to prove that the only thing he'd drunk since yesterday morning was a small glass of cider diluted with tonic water.

"I was deciding whether it would be better to pinch him or push him under a motor-bus when I recognised him. It was Simon.

" 'Hello,' I said. 'How long is it since you came out of the home for dirty dogs?'

"He didn't know me at first, and I oughtn't to have known him at all, because he was beautifully dressed, with a green tie and a brown hat, and a bunch of forget-me-nots in his buttonhole, not that anybody who had ever put their lamps on his dial would ever forget him. When he didn't answer I asked him if it was his car, and he admitted it.

"While I was talking to him one of my men came up and told me that they had

stopped the stolen car about a hundred yards down the road, so I was able to devote myself to my little friend.

"We helped him along and got him into the sub-station round the corner. He was, so to speak, flush with wine. He got over his shock and he began to talk big, flash his money about, and gradually, as he recognised the old familiar surroundings—the sergeant's desk and the notice on the wall telling people not to spit on the floor—he saw he was in the presence of law and order and it gradually dawned on him that I was me.

" 'What bank have you been robbing?' says I.

"He laughed in my face.

" 'Costino gave that to me for saying that I only pinched four bits of silver.'

"He started to laugh again and stopped. I have an idea that in the thing he called his mind he realised that he had said too much. Anyway, he wouldn't say any more. We took his money away from him, counted it and put him in a nice, clean cell.

"Now I am not a man who is easily puzzled. Things in life are too straightforward for anybody to have anything to puzzle about, but this certainly got me thinking. Costino must have given him the best part of a thousand pounds to admit that he had stolen only four pieces of silver. Why did he do that?

"I thought it out. At about eleven o'clock that night I said to my sergeant:

" 'Let's go and do a real bit of detective work'

"I drove him down in my car to the road in front of Bidderley Hall. We parked the car in the drive, just inside the old gates, and we walked up to the house. The rain was pelting down. I don't remember a worse night. The wind howled through the trees and gave me one of those bogey feelings I haven't had since I was a boy.

"When we got up to the house, we made a sort of reconnaissance. All the windows were dark; there was no sign of life; if there had been any sound we couldn't have heard it. We went all round, trying to find a way in, and just as we got back to the front of the house one of the worst thunderstorms I can remember started up without any warning. My sergeant was all for knocking up Mr. Costino and puttin' the matter, to him plump and plain, but I saw all sorts of difficulties and my scheme was to pretend that We found a window open and being good policemen and not being able to make Costino hear we had got in through the window and had a look round. There was only one

place possible, we decided, after we tried every window on the ground floor, and that was a window on a small balcony at the back of the house.

"We searched round and found a ladder, and put it against the balcony. I went up first and I just put my leg over the parapet and was facing the window when there came a blinding flash of lightning that made my head spin. It was one of those flashes of lightning that seem to last two or three seconds, and in the light of it, as plain as day, I saw right in front of me, staring through the window, a horribly white face with a long untidy beard. I was so startled I nearly dropped back. I called my sergeant up the ladder. I wasn't afraid, but I wanted somebody with me. I don't know whether you have ever had that feeling. Two can be frightened to death better than one.

"I told him just what I had seen, and then I got my pocket lamp and flashed it into the room. As far as I could see through the dirty window the room was empty. Between the window and the room was a set of iron bars. They weren't very thick; they looked the kind that were put up in West End houses so that children can't escape from nurseries when they catch fire. We got the window open. The sergeant and I not only bent the bar, but we bent the whole frame It was not very securely fastened; a bit of carpentry work done by somebody who understood plumbing.

"There was no furniture in the room. It was thick with dust. On the wall was a picture hanging cockeyed. The door was open and we went on and found a landing and a narrow flight of stairs leading down. But the curious thing about those stairs was that they didn't stop on the ground floor. In fact, there was no door opening until we got to the basement. There had been a door, but it had been bricked up.

"We were going down the last flight of steps when we heard a door bang and the sound of a bolt being shot. When we got to the basement level we found a door. It was shut, and we couldn't move it. I could find nothing on the stairs in the light of my lamp except that somebody was in the habit of going up and down.

"When I went up to the room with the balcony and examined the bars we had bent, I made rather an interesting discovery. Three of the screws on the lower left-hand corner had been taken out, and they had been taken out with a jagged top of a sardine tin. We found the 'opener' lying on the floor. It must have taken a long time to loosen those screws, for one of the screw-holes was quite dark, and must have been out for months.

"There were two courses left to us; one was to come the next day with a search warrant, which no magistrate would grant on the information we had, and the

other was to go round and wake up Costino and ask him to let us go through the house. There was a good reason for not doing that.

"I took off my boots and went down the stairs in my stockinged feet, with my sergeant behind me. We crept up to the door and listened. For a little time I heard nothing partly because the thunder was still turning the house into a drum, and partly because we could not quite tune in. But after a while I heard a man breathing very quickly, like somebody who had been running. We waited for a quarter of an hour and then another quarter of an hour. It seemed like a week. And then we heard the bolt being very gently pushed back. A man on the other side of the door opened it an inch. In another second I was through. He ran like the wind along the cellar and was just reaching another door when I grabbed him. He fought like six men, but we got him down. And then he said:

" 'Don't kill me, Charles. I'll give you half the money.'

"And that was all I wanted to know here.

"We pulled him up and sat him on an old box, and I explained that we were just innocent police officers, that we very seldom kill anybody except under the greatest provocation, and after a while we got Mr. Peter Costino calm, and he told us how his brother had come down to Eastbourne to see him and borrow some money, and how he got him drunk and intended driving him and the car over the cliff. Peter wouldn't have known this but his brother told him afterwards. Charles lost heart and let the car go by itself, and brought Peter back to Bidderley Hall, and shut him up in the cellar. Peter didn't know very much about it till he woke up the next morning and found himself a prisoner, and after about two years of this kind of life he got more or less reconciled, especially as he was allowed to go up to the room with the balcony. It was the only bit of the world he was allowed to see, and then only at nights.

"That's the trouble with criminals: they never go along the whole hog. Charles didn't have the nerve to kill his brother. He just locked him up. He got the house and half a million pounds, but he got about two million worries. That two years made Peter a sober man and turned Charles into a drunkard. Peter might have died in this cellar if Mr. Charles Costino hadn't given Simon the hook a thousand quid to keep his mouth shut about the property he had stolen and hidden in the house. Charles was in mortal terror that we would search the house for the missing silver, and if we had searched the house we'd have found Peter.

"Charles is in Dartmoor now. So is Simon. He got a lagging for a big smash and grab raid, and got five. From what I've heard he and Charles are quite

good friends. The last I heard of Charles he was painting angels in the prison chapel. As I say, he was always a bit artistic."

THE END