

A Long and Absorbing 30,000-Word
Novel of Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee.

Union Jack LIBRARY 1½



The
DUAL DETECTIVES
A Tale Of
SEXTON BLAKE & NELSON LEE
By the Author of
"The Boys Of St. Franks."





THE DUAL DETECTIVES

A TALE OF SEXTON BLAKE AND NELSON LEE

Telling of a Strange Mystery, cleverly solved by the joint efforts of SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER, and PEDRO; and NELSON LEE and NIPPER. Specially written for the UNION JACK by the Author of "The Mystic Cipher," "The Mount-Stonham Murder Mystery," and the "Tinker's Case-Diary" Series, etc., etc.

The Story related throughout by SEXTON BLAKE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Mysterious Murder at Arundel Lodge, South Kensington.

TINKER is wholly responsible for this narrative of events. I wish to make that quite clear, so that no blame can be attached to myself.

It came about in this way:

My energetic young assistant, being troubled with literary aspirations, took pen and paper, and wrote up several adventures in which he and I played important parts. These efforts he termed his "Case-Diary" series; and I must acknowledge that the young rascal was quite successful in his scribblings.

But he was not satisfied with that. He told me, plainly and firmly, that it was a matter of national importance that I should take pen and paper also, and set down the facts in story-form of some of my most difficult problems. As he pointed out, I had all the information ready to hand in my case-book—shorthand notes, for the most part—and the story-writing would be merely child's play.

In a foolish moment I listened to him, and promised that I would think the matter over. The result, in a nutshell, is this narrative. In idle hours I have amused myself at the typewriter, and I have nearly turned Tinker's hair white by giving him the "copy" for correction. I have an idea that he sincerely regrets ever having mooted the matter—but I seldom commence a task without finishing it. As it will be understood, I am adding this foreword after having written the story, and Tinker assures me that I have done fairly well—and hopes for a better result next time!

Whether there will be a "next time" remains to be seen; but I fancy there will be many "next times." For I have gained quite a measure of enjoyment in setting down these facts, and the work is a pleasant form of recreation which has come as something of a surprise to me. I only hope that those who read these lines will gain a measure of enjoyment, too.

After looking carefully through my case-book, I decided to record the events connected with the mysterious affair of the "Crimson Pool," as I have termed it. And the opening incident in that case occurred in the private office of Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, at Scotland Yard.

I had dropped in upon Lennard casually one evening in order to congratulate him

upon his recent promotion to chief-inspector. He received me with his usual good-nature, for Lennard is a thoroughly decent man, blessed with a high sense of humour, and a keen detective withal.

But he shook his head when I congratulated him.

"I don't take any credit, Blake," he said smilingly. "Naturally, I am delighted with my promotion—but I'm afraid I am a thief. I have won my laurels owing solely to the help and advice of our mutual friend, Mr. Nelson Lee. He and I have been engaged in very many cases together—and I have received all the credit for his good work. To tell the truth, I feel rather mean."

"What does Lee say about it?" I smiled.

"Oh, he told me not to be an ass," grinned Lennard. "I told him I wasn't comfortable, and he nearly had a fight with me. At the same time, I freely acknowledge that I owe much of my success to Lee—and, if it comes to that, to you, too—"

"Come, come!" I broke in. "If you go on at this rate, Lennard, you will be calling yourself an absolute fool presently. And you're not an absolute fool."

"Just an ordinary fool, I suppose?" chuckled the chief-inspector. "Well, let's talk about something else. How are you getting on, Blake? You look in the pink, I must say. Busy?"

"Not at all, otherwise you would not see me here now," I replied. "You see, Lennard, I make no secret of the fact that I have only called because I have nothing else to do."

"Quite nice of you!" chuckled the inspector. "I was just about to clear off for the evening, so we may as well stroll out together—Oh, hang!"

The telephone-bell was buzzing, and Lennard reached out a hand and jerked off the receiver with obvious impatience.

"Hallo! Who's that?" he called shortly. "Yes, this is—Eh? I'm Chief-Inspector Lennard—Kensington? Well, what about it? A murder, eh? You'd better give me the address."

The inspector pulled a writing-block towards him and jotted down a few lines.

"All right, Mr. Price, I'll come along myself. Expect me there within twenty minutes. You've got the man, you say? Hold him until I get on the spot."

Lennard hung up the receiver, and turned to me with a rueful countenance.

"No home for me to-night," he said. "Why can't people commit murders at decent times of the day? This'll mean the upset of all my plans for the evening, and I

probably sha'n't get a wink of sleep until goodness knows when!"

I smiled.

"You always were a grumbler, Lennard," I said smoothly. "As a matter of fact, you're as keen as mustard on a murder case, but you try to make me believe that you're discontented. What's the trouble?"

"Sir Hugh Dorrington has been shot in his own library," replied the chief-inspector. "The Kensington people were rather smart, for they've got the murderer already. You'll have to excuse me now, Blake, because I shall have to disturb quite a number of good people."

He went off, leaving me alone in his office. I could well understand that the "good people" were official photographers, draughtsmen, and such-like. In a murder case the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard always undertook certain routine work to commence with. In the investigation of a murder the first thing was to pin down all the details. My own methods were different, but this was not one of my cases, and it was not for me to interfere.

Lennard was never much in favour of playing a lone hand; he preferred to be backed by the very complete organisation of the C.I.D. But he was compelled to admit that a lone hand is frequently the best in the long run. Being an official detective, he couldn't adopt such methods.

Within ten minutes a large number of people were preparing for work, and Lennard himself reappeared. He entered his office with his hand extended.

"So long, old man," he said crisply. "Can't stop any longer. I'll see you some other time. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not in the least," I replied smilingly.

He bustled out of his office and I followed him. An official motor-car was waiting outside, and Lennard jumped into it and waved his hand. Before the vehicle commenced moving, however, I opened the door and slipped back leisurely on to the comfortable cushions.

"What the deuce—" began Lennard.

"Don't mind me," I said languidly. "I'm coming along, too."

"Well I'm hanged!" ejaculated the chief-inspector.

"Look upon me as though I didn't exist." I went on, selecting a cigarette from my case. "Murder cases interest me, Lennard, and there'll be no harm in me dodging about in the background, I suppose? I'll be good—I sha'n't interfere!"

Lennard burst out laughing.

"I'm only too pleased to have you, old man," he exclaimed heartily. "But I thought

you wouldn't be interested in any police affair—or I should have asked you along. Apparently, you don't need asking!"

"French leave is just as good," I remarked. "You were very frugal in your information two minutes ago, Lennard. Sir Hugh Dorrington, you said? How was he murdered?"

"Shot."

"Yes, I know that—but how?"

"I only had a few words with Inspector Price myself," replied Lennard. "It seems that a masked man broke one of the windows and fired point-blank. He was collared by a sergeant whilst attempting to escape. Honestly, old man, I don't think you'll find much to interest you—it's too straightforward. You like knotty problems, don't you?"

"This may be a knotty problem," I replied shortly.

"Well, there's no telling," agreed the other. "Murder cases are rather tricky to deal with, and when they look straightforward they sometimes let you down with a bang. However, we shall see how things stand presently."

Our destination, it turned out, was Arundel Lodge, Bellstone Gardens, South Kensington. This was the residence of the late Sir Hugh Dorrington, Bart. The baronet, so far as I could remember, had been aged, and I did not know much about him. He had never entered public life in any way, although his name struck me as being slightly familiar in some connection.

We found the house guarded by a uniformed policeman. One or two people were standing about, idly curious, but there was no crowd. Bellstone Gardens was a very select residential thoroughfare, and at this time in the evening it was generally deserted. Arundel Lodge was a house standing in its own grounds, quite a considerable way back from the road.

There was another policeman on guard at the front door, and we were at once admitted. Inspector Price, of the Kensington police, greeted us and took us into a rear apartment—which Lennard immediately appropriated as his headquarters for the time being.

"Rather a bad business, Mr. Lennard," said the uniformed inspector. "I've carried out your instructions, and the prisoner is waiting in the next room."

"Has he made any statement?"

"None, except to hotly declare his innocence," replied Inspector Price. "But, of course, that's absurd. He was caught red-handed by one of my men—Sergeant Barrett. Would you care to have a look—"

"Not just yet," interjected Lennard briskly. "I want to hear what Barrett has to say. He, I understand, made the arrest?"

"Yes."

Price left the room, and Lennard paced up and down thoughtfully. I did not disturb him, but occupied a comfortable chair in the corner, and prepared to listen. Strictly speaking, I was an intruder, and had absolutely no right in the house. So the least I could do was to keep in the background.

Price brought the sergeant back with him after a few moments. Barrett was a big, burly individual with a red face, and he saluted stiffly.

"Let's hear your yarn," said Lennard, without ceremony.

The sergeant cleared his throat.

"There's not much to tell, sir," he explained. "I happened to be walkin' down the Gardens, when I heard a crash of glass. There wasn't much in it, but I paused, being curious-like."

"Was there anybody about?"

"No, sir. The street was empty, except for me."

"All right. Go on."

"I was just about to continue my walk, when I was a bit startled to hear a revolver-shot, sir," said the sergeant. "It seemed to come from one of the windows of this house, an' I pushed open the gate, an' cut across the lawn towards the front windows. An' then I saw a man comin' towards me. I didn't wait to ask no questions, but took him and I didn't make no mistake, sir. He was masked, and there was a revolver in his hand. I arrested him, sir!"

"Quite right," said Lennard. "Who is the fellow?"

"Quite a toff, sir. Gave the name of Frank Canning, an' his manners are those of a real gent," said Sergeant Barrett. "The way he carried on was shockin', sir."

"What do you mean—'carried on'?"

"Why, he swore that he hadn't fired the shot, an' that he was chasin' the real murderer," said the sergeant, with a contemptuous smile. "Of course, that yarn didn't go down with me, sir. I've never seen a

clearer case than this here one. Oh, an' his wrist was cut—"

"On the glass, I suppose?" asked the chief-inspector.

"Yes, sir."

"But look here, why on earth did the man break the glass?" went on Lennard. "I suppose it was an accident? No man, with murder in his heart, would be fool enough to attract attention before firing the actual shot."

"He couldn't do nothing else, sir," said Barrett. "He fired through the French windows, an' the glass is all coloured and frosted. He had to smash a hole in order to get a clear look into the room."

"What about the blind?"

"There isn't one, sir. As soon as he smashed the glass he was able to see right into the room."

"Well, and what did you do after arresting the man, Canning?"

"I'd already blown my whistle, sir, and I handed over the prisoner to Green and Edwards; they've got him in another room," explained the sergeant. "The servants were making a fearful fuss, but I soon made 'em quiet, an' had a look into the library."

"Well?"

"The old gent was lyin' on the floor, sir—shot dead. I at once sent to the police-station for the inspector and the divisional surgeon."

"You didn't touch anything?"

"No, sir."

"All right. That'll do for the present."

The sergeant saluted and withdrew. Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard gnawed his moustache, and glanced over at me thoughtfully.

"Not much of a problem, eh, Blake?" he remarked. "So far as I can see the case is straightforward."

"Yet it is rather astonishing, is it not, that a man should fire a revolver in a public thoroughfare—for it practically amounted to that—and that he should make a considerable noise of smashing glass beforehand?" I asked. "Another little point, Lennard, is worthy of attention. How did the murderer come to cut his wrist?"

"Why, on the broken glass—"

"Exactly. But why?" I persisted. "It surely wasn't necessary for him to thrust his hand inside the opening? Indeed, he would have been able to take much better aim from outside. I shall be quite interested to hear a statement from the prisoner—if he feels inclined to make one."

"The prisoner seems inclined to brazen it out," observed Inspector Price. "He called me a fool to my face, and swore he had nothing whatever to do with the murder. I thought I'd better wait until you came, Mr. Lennard."

The chief-inspector nodded.

"We'll have a look at the library," he said briskly. "Yes, you come, too, Blake. I shall be glad to hear your views."

I smiled, and followed the pair out of the room. We passed along the softly carpeted hall, and entered the library. This was a large, noble apartment, artistically illuminated by many shaded electric lamps. The furniture was antique and sombre, and nearly all the walls were lined with superb old book-cases filled with leather-bound volumes.

Close to the desk lay a huddled-up form, which I knew to be the remains of Sir Hugh Dorrington. A rug had been thrown over the body, but otherwise it had not been touched.

"Mustn't interfere with anything yet," remarked Lennard, looking round. "The photographers must be given a chance first. I suppose the divisional surgeon has pronounced life extinct, Mr. Price?"

"He died on the instant—the bullet went clean through his heart."

We made a cursory examination, just lifting up the rug. The dead man had been fully sixty years of age—possibly older. I judged that he had been of distinguished appearance, and he had worn an iron-grey moustache and beard.

"That's the window through which the shot was fired," remarked the police-inspector. "Being of stained glass, and frosted, a blind was unnecessary. There's a man on duty just outside."

One glance at the window was sufficient for me. A jagged hole, only about five inches across at the widest point, had been smashed in the glass. One or two sharp points projected upwards from the lower edge, and these were blood-stained.

Glancing down at the highly polished floor immediately beneath the window I saw a crimson pool of blood of considerable size—not merely a splash, but an actual pool, as though the wounded wrist had been held

steadily for some little time. Near it, and, in fact, all over the window, were countless splashes of blood.

"He seemed to have gashed his wrist pretty severely," remarked Lennard, eyeing the window and the floor critically. "Did you see the wound, Mr. Price?"

"No, it was bound-up by the time I arrived," replied the inspector. "He had tied his handkerchief round it."

"Was it soaked?" I asked quickly.

"I don't quite understand you, sir."

"Had the blood from the wound penetrated to the exterior of the bandage?"

"Not that I remember," replied Inspector Price.

"H'm! Rather queer," I said absently.

"Why is it queer?" asked Lennard.

"Well, it must be pretty obvious to you that the murderer didn't hang his hand through the window for very long," I replied. "Yet there is quite a considerable quantity of blood on the window and on the floor. That proves one thing. The gash in his wrist was a serious one, the blood flowing with great freedom."

"Exactly," agreed the chief-inspector.

"And yet Inspector Price informs us that a mere handkerchief bandage does not even show a sign of blood," I continued. "The wound must have ceased bleeding remarkably quickly, Lennard. In my opinion, we have not learned all by any means. It is quite likely that a second man was present."

"Well, I'm not going to theorise," said Lennard briskly. "It's fatal. My business is to gather all the facts together—and not to draw conclusions. If I form a theory, Blake, I shall find myself endeavouring to prove that that theory is correct—instead of getting at the truth."

I had to admit that Lennard's reasoning was sound. For I am of a similar opinion myself; it is always as well to keep an open mind. If I do theorise occasionally, I never allow the practice to interfere with the cold facts.

"I wish to ask a favour," I said slowly.

"Go ahead."

"May I take a sample of this blood in the pool?" I asked. "You needn't look shocked—I sha'n't take the lot. Just sufficient to enable me to make a test. I am rather interested in blood tests."

Lennard readily consented, and I took two tiny glass tubes from my medicine-case, and half filled them with blood from the pool. Corking them securely, I slipped one back into the medicine-case and handed the other to my friend.

"I don't want it," said Lennard. "There'll be men along presently who make a speciality of this sort of—"

"Never mind them," I interrupted. "You take this, Lennard, and pack it away in your pocket. You saw me take it from that pool, didn't you?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"It is, without doubt, the murderer's blood?"

"My dear man, what are you getting at?"

"I have already formed one of the theories which you are inclined to deprecate," I smiled. "Take this sample of blood, my dear fellow, and keep it until I refer to the matter again. Don't hand it to the specialists, who are probably now on their way. It's just a little matter between you and I."

"Oh, all right—anything to please you," chuckled Lennard. "You must let me remark, however, that I don't know what the deuce you're driving at."

I found it necessary to retreat into the background once more. For it must be remembered that I had not been commissioned to look into this case, and I was only there on the good-natured sufferance of Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard.

So far as I could judge, the only people in the house were servants; Sir Hugh had evidently lived alone, and there were certainly no other members of his family on hand at present. The police had Arundel Lodge practically to themselves.

Lennard had a faculty for quick organisation. He was an official detective—or, rather, a chief of detectives. He was in complete charge of this case, and he had commenced the work in a businesslike manner.

The first moves in an investigation of a murder mystery were generally automatic. The original facts had to be established as quickly as possible.

Certain matters had to be investigated by specialists.

And a considerable number of officials and other people kept arriving at Arundel Lodge.

Flashlight photographs were taken of the room in which the murder had been committed. This had to be done before the body could be properly examined.

Finger-print experts closely examined the window and other parts of the room, and scattered their grey or black powder on different objects.

Meanwhile draughtsmen were making plans—accurately to scale—of the room and practically everything in it.

Personally I was not particularly interested in all this activity. I was of the opinion that too many cooks were inclined to spoil the broth—in other words, all these officials would probably muddle the trail rather than otherwise. For, although the police had taken a prisoner, my own private opinion was that there was a great deal yet to discover.

Lennard set about searching the library after the photographers had done their work, and after the body had been removed from the apartment. I was given an opportunity of making a closer examination, and I found that death had been instantaneous. The poor old gentleman had been shot clean through the heart.

"By Jove! This is interesting," said the chief-inspector, beckoning to me.

Before showing me what he was looking at he gave some orders to two of his subordinates, instructing them to bring a certain Mr. Lloyd to the house as quickly as possible.

"The gentleman is a lawyer," explained Lennard. "It seems that he attended to all Sir Hugh's business, and he evidently was present when this will was drawn up. It was made less than a week ago, Blake."

"Indeed!" I said mildly.

"And it does not improve the position for Mr. Frank Canning," added the inspector grimly. "I have already glanced over the document, Blake, and I don't mind informing you—in strict confidence, of course—that practically the whole of the old man's fortune goes to Frank Canning."

"That is quite interesting," I remarked.

"Furthermore," continued Lennard, his eyes gleaming, "Frank Canning is the nephew of Sir Hugh Dorrington. Rather striking, isn't it?"

"Undoubtedly it is striking to learn that your prisoner is Sir Hugh's heir," I agreed. "But, my dear Lennard, I shouldn't advise you to count too much upon it."

"Man alive, this is evidence—positive evidence!" exclaimed Lennard, staring at me. "It supplies the motive for the murder, and it is obvious that Canning committed the crime."

"I would not dare to state an opinion," I said smoothly; "but if I did do so, Lennard, I should say that it seems altogether too obvious!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Statement of Mr. Frank Canning.

IN spite of the evidence, I was far from being convinced that Frank Canning was the murderer of Sir Hugh Dorrington.

There seemed to be a false note somewhere.

On the surface the evidence was overwhelming, for Canning had been caught absolutely red-handed. It was not only a fact that he had been on the spot at the very moment of the crime, but he had been captured by Sergeant Barrett with the fatal revolver in his hand, and with his wrist badly gashed.

In addition, Canning had been masked. Everything, in fact, pointed to the one incontrovertible fact that the young man had killed Sir Hugh, and that he had been fleeing from the scene of his crime.

Often enough I had investigated cases where an innocent man had been wrongly accused, because of circumstantial evidence. But this evidence was not circumstantial—the murderer had been caught within two minutes of the crime.

At least, Canning had been caught. Was he the murderer? I had not seen the man yet, and I could form no opinion as to his character. But all these facts were too straightforward—too obvious. As I had told Lennard, I did not count much upon the fact that Canning was Sir Hugh's heir.

I reasoned the thing out in my mind.

Supposing that Canning had decided to kill his uncle? Would he have come to the house disguised only in a simple cloth mask? Would he have been insane enough to smash a win-

dow, creating a great noise, and fire a heavy revolver through the aperture? It wasn't good enough—and I wasn't convinced.

A man who plans to murder another man does not act as though he had merely come to deliver a horsewhipping. He takes elaborate precautions. And Canning had taken none. He had run towards the street, instead of doubling back into the heavily wooded garden of Arundel Lodge. Canning had acted exactly as though he had been chasing somebody—and he had made that statement to the sergeant.

Again, supposing Canning had arranged to shoot Sir Hugh for the sake of the fortune which would come to him? He would have gone to work in a very different manner to this. It was the sort of crime which is committed by somebody driven to a state of extreme desperation.

And Canning had not been desperate, according to all accounts. It had already been ascertained that he was in no financial difficulties; on the contrary, he was in a very comfortable position, with excellent prospects, and his friends were countless. He had lived a quiet, upright life, and was, I believe, engaged to be married.

What earthly reason could he have had for murdering his uncle? The prospect of inheriting the fortune? I hardly thought so. The matter of the crimson pool was puzzling, too. That quantity of blood could not have dripped to the floor in a second, and it was scarcely feasible to suppose that Canning had deliberately held his arm through the broken glass, for the express purpose of allowing his wound to bleed on to the floor!

The case was complete; but there was a flaw.

I was quite anxious to see Canning, to hear what he had to say, and to examine his wound. But I had no right to see Canning, and I certainly should not presume to interfere with Lennard, friendly as we were.

As it happened, however, an opportunity soon came.

Inspector Price announced that the prisoner was anxious to make a statement. He had been formally warned, but he persisted. And Lennard at once decided to hear what Canning had to say.

"If he tells any lies it will be the worse for him," he remarked grimly. "You'd better bring him in, Mr. Price."

We were seated in the apartment which Lennard had turned into his temporary headquarters. The superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department had already paid a brief visit, but had departed after finding that the chief-inspector had the case well in hand.

"Just one point," I remarked, while we were waiting. "Who will succeed to the title?"

"Oh, a brother, I believe."

"Then this brother will get the title, but no money?"

"He doesn't need any money, according to what I have been told," replied the chief-inspector. "He's a big ironmaster in the Midlands, I think, with a few odd millions of his own. Sir Hugh's pile would be a thimbleful to him."

I nodded, and decided to verify the matter for myself. I further learned that the deceased Sir Hugh's brother was at present in America.

Frank Canning was brought in by Inspector Price, and I regarded him closely and keenly—and my first impression was entirely favourable. Canning was a young man, with fair, curly hair, and with the stature of a young giant. He was an excellent example of British manhood, and there was a frankness about his expression which was not marred by the angry glint in his eyes. He glanced from one to the other of us, but said nothing.

"Well, my dear young friend, you seem to have got yourself into a tangle," said Lennard gently. "You wish to make a statement, I understand? You fully realise, of course, that such a statement will be taken down, and that it may be used in evidence?"

"I've been told that two or three times already," interrupted Canning impatiently. "May I know whom I am addressing?"

"My name is Lennard, and I am a chief-inspector of Scotland Yard," replied Lennard. "This gentleman is Mr. Sexton Blake—but you needn't take any notice of him. He isn't supposed to be here."

"Don't mind me at all," I added genially.

"You are treating me rather queerly," said Canning. "You believe that I murdered my uncle, don't you? And yet you pretend to be good-natured—"

"Really, we mustn't waste time like this,"

interjected Lennard. "Please keep to the matter in hand, Mr. Canning."

The prisoner nodded.

"Before making that statement, I'm just going to say a few words about my position," he exclaimed steadily. "I know as well as you do that I'm in a tight corner, and I know that appearances are against me. I was fool enough to blunder into the arms of a wooden-headed police-sergeant, and he, like a dolt, was grabbing hold of my collar before I could understand what his game was. The fact that a revolver was in my hand, and that I was masked, seemed to convince him that I was the murderer. As a matter of fact, I was chasing the murderer at that very moment, and I believe I should have got him if I hadn't been stopped."

He spoke with some indignation, but Lennard was quite unmoved. I noticed that Canning's right wrist was bound with a handkerchief, and that several small blood-stains were showing through the white linen. But there was no sign of any very serious wound, such as might have been expected from the amount of blood upon the library floor.

"Please continue, Mr. Canning," said the inspector.

"I know well enough that you are sneering at me," said the young man. "I'm in a deuce of a hole, and I'm fully aware of it. But if you had an ounce of sense you would know that I shouldn't kill my uncle—"

"We are not concerned with what you wouldn't do, Mr. Canning," interrupted Lennard quietly. "We have to deal with concrete facts. You were discovered upon these premises in very suspicious circumstances, and personally I strongly advise you to reserve any statement until your trial—"

"It's madness!" shouted Canning angrily. "Trial! Do you mean to say that I'm going to be dragged before a judge and jury? You seem to have taken it for granted that I am the murderer—and I'll explain where you are wrong. At the very moment of the murder I was talking to my uncle within the library."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Lennard.

"Yes, indeed!" shouted Canning. "You don't believe me, I can see. Sir Hugh and I were talking, and I had crossed over to one of the bookcases in order to take down a volume. I was reaching for it when one of the windows was smashed, and I was extremely startled to see the barrel of a revolver projecting through the jagged hole. The thing was so sudden that I was taken aback, but I became alive to the fact that the revolver was pointing straight at my uncle. But even as I was making a leap towards the window the trigger was pulled, and I saw Sir Hugh fall forward."

"Could you be seen from outside?" I put in.

"No, I don't think so," replied Canning. "The bookcase was on the same wall as the French windows, and I was completely hidden from the man who held the revolver. But he soon became aware of my presence, for, although I was too late to prevent the weapon being fired, I seized the man's wrist and held it—intending, if possible, to keep him prisoner until help came."

"But surely the servants heard something of the uproar?" suggested the inspector.

"I don't know whether the servants did or not, but I fancy they were in ignorance of the whole business," said the suspected man. "The library is quite removed from the servants' quarters, and there is a heavy, baize-covered door in the hall, which shuts out practically all sound—Sir Hugh was very particular about being quiet. As I was saying, I seized the murderer's wrist, and he attempted to free himself. In doing so his arm descended upon the jagged glass with considerable force, and a very serious gash was inflicted—at least, I believe so."

"Why do you believe so?"

"For the simple reason that the blood simply spurted out in a stream," replied Frank Canning. "I could gain no glimpse of the man, for he was outside in the darkness. Panic seized him, and he struggled with tremendous desperation, and drew my own wrist across the glass-edge, cutting it badly. The momentary pain forced me to relax my grip, and the next second the fellow had gone; but he left the revolver in my hand."

"And you gave chase?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you leave by the French windows?" demanded Lennard sharply.

"Because they were locked, and the key wasn't there," was the prompt reply. "One glance was sufficient, so I tore out into the hall, opened the front door, and dashed round the house. I was just in time to hear

the scoundrel forcing his way through some bushes on the other side of the lawn. But before I could follow him I ran into the arms of that fool of a sergeant."

"With the revolver still in your hand?"

"Yes. And I told the sergeant again and again that the murderer was escaping," said Canning hotly. "The idiot wouldn't listen to me, but took it for granted that I was the murderer myself. Of course, the real culprit succeeded in getting clear away."

"Did you leave the front door open?"

"I believe it closed to behind me, and latched itself."

The inspector nodded grimly.

"So you cannot actually prove that you were within the building?" he asked. "And there is just one point which you would greatly oblige me by clearing up. According to your story, Mr. Canning, you were conversing with your uncle, a highly respectable gentleman. Do you wish me to believe that you were wearing a cloth mask during that interview?"

Canning started.

"That's got nothing to do with this affair," he muttered.

"Why were you wearing that mask?"

"I tell you it has nothing to do with this business at all!" replied Canning hotly. "What is more, I shall explain nothing further. I've told you the absolute truth, and I can't do more. As for the mask, the reason for my wearing it was an absolutely private matter between my uncle and myself."

"And you have nothing more to say?"

"Nothing."

"Very well," said the inspector. "You will be removed at once to Bow Street, and you will be brought before the magistrate in the morning. If you are innocent, you have nothing to fear."

"But you think I am guilty?" said Canning, his eyes blazing. "You will find that you are greatly mistaken, and that you are committing an outrage by placing me under arrest. However, I can't expect anything else, I suppose. I always understood that the police were dense, and now I know it!"

And with that angry shot Frank Canning took his departure, escorted by the police inspector. After he had gone Lennard rose to his feet and selected a cigarette from his well-filled case. He set a match to it, and puffed away for a few moments before speaking.

"What do you think of that for a yarn?" he asked at last. "Of course, the fellow was trying to wriggle out of it—"

"Just one moment!" I exclaimed quickly.

"Excuse me a minute, old man!" I hurried out, and returned within three or four minutes. The inspector regarded me curiously.

"What did you rush away for?" he asked.

"I took a great liberty and secured a few drops of Canning's blood," I replied. "He was most obliging and granted my request without any ado. And I also took the liberty, Lennard, of telling Price that I had your permission."

The inspector grinned.

"I don't care if you've taken a gallon of his blood," he replied. "What's the idea of it, Blake? I'm hanged if I can see what you're driving at. The man's guilty—every atom of evidence we've received goes to prove it. His own story was faked up. I expect he thought he could throw dust into our eyes."

"I believe he has succeeded in my case," I remarked drily. "At all events, Lennard, I am willing to wager that Canning was speaking the truth. He didn't kill his uncle, and if you wish to get hold of the real murderer you'll find it necessary to adopt different tactics. That's just a tip, and don't get offended because I've given it to you."

"I value your advice exceedingly, Blake," replied the inspector candidly. "But really, I think you're on the wrong track this time. Do you know that all the servants have been questioned, examined, and cross-examined?"

I nodded.

"I think you undertook that task while I was having a chat with the divisional surgeon," I answered. "The result supported the evidence against Canning, didn't it?"

"My dear man, Canning hasn't a leg to stand on, he's made himself out to be a liar," was the inspector's reply. "Not only the butler, but the housemaids and others declare that Sir Hugh had been alone all the evening, and that no visitor was admitted at all."

"Sir Hugh was not chained to his chair," I remarked.

"You mean that he could have admitted

Canning himself?" asked Lennard. "That won't do, Blake. Sir Hugh has never done such a thing within the memory of every servant in the house. What's more, the butler and the others swear that they never set eyes on Canning until this evening—after the crime. He certainly wasn't in the library with Sir Hugh before the murder. The butler has stated his willingness to swear on oath that the old man was absolutely alone. What does that mean? Why, that it was Canning who approached the window, that it was Canning who smashed the glass and fired the shot. It was a mad thing to do, and I don't pretend to understand why he did it. But the fact remains that Canning is the culprit."

"All very convincing, and most interesting," I agreed. "But there is a fatal flaw in your argument, Lennard. It is a fact, is it not, that a heavy baize-covered door completely shuts off the servants' quarters from this section of the house?"

"What of it?"

"It simply proves the testimony of the servants can hardly be regarded as reliable," I replied quietly. "They are positive that Sir Hugh was alone all the evening; they are quite willing to swear to it. But they don't know, Lennard—they don't know. They only go so far as their personal knowledge, and, that, in simple language, means that Canning was not admitted by the front-door. But the library is provided with French windows—"

"They were locked."

"And could have been unlocked in a moment," I retorted. "In fact, Lennard, it is quite easy to imagine that Sir Hugh admitted his nephew by means of the French windows, and locked them afterwards, taking the key out and placing it in his own pocket, or in some spot not yet discovered. There is absolutely nothing to positively prove that those windows were not used. That's all I've got to say, and I hope you won't think that I'm presuming. Strictly speaking, I'm an intruder, but I sha'n't worry you any longer. I'm going to clear out."

The inspector took my hand warmly.

"Well, your arguments sound all right, Blake, but they don't carry weight. You've been voicing a theory!" he exclaimed. "On the other side of the picture we have facts to go upon, and facts are what we want. I dare say you'll be interested in the course of this case."

"Very interested," I replied. "I intend to—"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir—"

We turned and found the butler at the door. He was an elderly man, and his expression was one of mingled grief and nervousness. At a glance I knew that his evidence had been given in good faith. He was as honest as the day, and was nearly off his head with worry at the tragedy.

"Well, Bodkin?" said Lennard sharply.

"There's a young lady just arrived, sir—"

"The deuce! A young lady?" ejaculated the inspector. "Who is she? What's her name? What does she want?"

"She has given the name of Miss Gladys Ashley, sir, and she has asked to see the gentleman in charge."

"That's me, I suppose?" said Lennard. "All right, Bodkin. I'll see what she wants. Excuse me a moment, Blake!"

He passed out of the room, and returned in about seven minutes' time, clenching his fists and shaking them in the air with exasperation.

"What do you think of it?" he demanded with a groan. "Just when I'm in the midst of all this work this girl comes bothering here, and simply won't go away until I've assured her that Canning is innocent!"

I chuckled.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"Trouble!" repeated the chief-inspector. "Miss Ashley is Canning's fiancée. I believe, a perfect sweet girl, but girls of all sorts are a nuisance in a time like this. How she learned the news I don't know; it was all over South Kensington within half an hour, I suppose, and it must have trickled through to her. Anyhow, she knows that Sir Hugh has been killed, and that Canning is under arrest, and she is sitting in another room as firm as a rock. She told me to my face that it's sheer madness to touch Canning, and she has refused to leave until I assure her that everything will come all right."

"You're in a hole, my dear fellow," I said firmly.

"I can't boot her out," complained the inspector plaintively. "By Jove! I'll tell you what," he added briskly. "Come along

with me, Blake, and I'll introduce you. You're a masterpiece when it comes to soothing people, and you can take her off in a taxi and see her home."

"So that's the way you're shifting your troubles, is it?" I exclaimed. "Well, you've put up with my presence for long enough, Lennard, and I'll get out of your debt by performing this little service. After all, seeing a very pretty girl home is not such an ordeal—that is, if she is pretty!"

"My dear chap, she's a picture!" declared the inspector eagerly.

He was intensely anxious to get rid of his unwelcome visitor. Lennard was a blunt individual, and he always detested interference when hard at work. This girl didn't mean to interfere, but she was doing so unconsciously.

I found that the inspector's description of her was quite unworthy. Miss Gladys Ashley was really one of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen, and her beauty was only intensified by the anxious light which shone in her dark eyes. Trim and neat, dressed with quiet taste, she formed a very sweet picture.

"Allow me to introduce Mr. Sexton Blake," said Lennard cheerfully. "This is Miss Gladys Ashley, Blake."

The girl took my hand impulsively.

"Oh, I've heard of you, Mr. Blake!" she exclaimed, "but I did not know that you were connected with the police."

"I am not!" I replied. "I am merely an onlooker here."

"Mr. Blake has kindly consented to see you home, Miss Ashley," said the inspector hastily. "He will explain everything to you in the taxicab—one has already been whistled for, and I believe it has been waiting at the gate."

Somewhat or other we were bundled off. The girl was frankly confused, and it was not until the taxi was on the move that she realised that the police had deliberately got rid of her.

"Oh, how cruel of them!" she exclaimed indignantly. "I believe you were a party to it, Mr. Blake—"

"You are accusing me unjustly," I hastened to explain. "I can assure you, Miss Ashley, that I have been made an unwilling accomplice. But you must allow me to remark that it is far better to remain calm. Mr. Canning is at Bow Street Police Station, and you cannot possibly have any communication with him this evening. The evidence against him is overwhelming—"

"He is innocent! I will swear that he is innocent!" panted the girl hotly. "Oh, how can they believe that he killed his own uncle?" She turned to me squarely. "Do you think that Frank committed the murder, Mr. Blake?"

"No; I am convinced of his innocence," I replied quietly.

"How splendid of you!" she cried, gripping my arm impulsively. "Oh, Mr. Blake, will you prove that Frank is not guilty? Will you accept a commission from me to investigate this case, and discover the truth?"

My reply was prompt.

"I shall be only too pleased to do so," I said quietly. "I will be quite frank, Miss Ashley, and tell you that I have been hoping for such an opportunity. The case has interested me exceedingly, but I could not very well intrude. Now, however, I have your commission to work on Mr. Canning's behalf. If there is anything that you can tell me—any information that you can supply—I shall be extremely glad."

"Yes, Mr. Blake, there is something," she replied hesitatingly. "Something which I can tell you, but which I should hesitate to tell the police. But, oh, you will treat it confidentially; won't you? It is so very, very private, and I don't know what would happen if the police found out—"

"One moment, Miss Ashley," I interposed. "Is this private matter you refer to directly connected with the tragedy at Arundel Lodge?"

"Yes, I believe it is."

"Then I shall certainly ask you to confide in me," I replied. "You may be fully assured, Miss Ashley, that your confidence will be treated as sacred. I am not an official detective, and I only make disclosures which are necessary—and none at all when I have given my word not to do so."

"Thank you, Mr. Blake," said the girl softly. "I live at No. 10, Avon Square, Bayswater, but I'm sure I don't know how my mother will take this news, or how she will receive you. I am quite sure mother will go into hysterics—"

"You must allow me to solve the difficulty," I put in. "I think it would be far better, Miss Ashley, if you accompanied me to my own consulting room in Baker Street. I should much prefer this, since my assistant, Tinker, will be on hand to take any shorthand notes I may think necessary. Tinker is to be trusted implicitly, and you need have no fear."

One minute later our taxicab was speeding towards Baker Street.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

An Important Discovery.

MISS GLADYS ASHLEY found Tinker to be an extremely painstaking attendant. He invited her to be seated in the most comfortable chair, he rushed into an adjoining room and fetched cushions, and he positively insisted upon her taking off her hat and laying back in ease and comfort.

Tinker has an exceptionally keen eye for beauty, and as a knight he is always extremely gallant and attentive. I could see that the young rascal was much impressed by the winsome nature of our visitor, and his expression was serious when he learned that her fiancé was under arrest for murder.

"Why, it's mad, sir!" he declared. "Those fatheaded police are always doing something silly, and Scotland Yard's just as bad—"

"Scotland Yard, my dear Tinker, is an exceedingly valuable institution," I put in. "But even Scotland Yard is liable to make mistakes occasionally. And really I have not brought Miss Ashley here so that she may be edified by a recital of the official detective force's shortcomings, as voiced by you."

"Sorry, sir!" said Tinker humbly.

He noticed that Miss Ashley was regarding him thoughtfully, and he retired in some little confusion to the other side of the table and pretended to be extremely busy sharpening his pencil, which already possessed a point like a needle.

Tinker had been wondering what had become of me, but now that he knew he was greatly interested. And I was quite prepared for some facetious remark from him, as soon as Miss Ashley had taken her departure.

"Now, Miss Ashley, I am ready," I remarked smoothly.

"I really don't know how to tell you, Mr. Blake," she said, clasping her delicate hands together. "Oh, but I am sure you would like to smoke, and I don't mind at all. I should like you to."

"You are very thoughtful," I smiled. "Push the box over, Tinker!"

I really believe her quick eyes had noticed that I had been gazing absently at the cigarette-box. As a matter of fact, I didn't particularly want to smoke, but I lighted a cigarette at once.

"Frank didn't meet his uncle until recently," said the girl. "I think they met for the first time just about a week ago—"

"The very first time?" I asked.

"Oh, well, I suppose they met when Frank was quite a child, but he doesn't remember it," replied Gladys. "Old Sir Hugh Dorrington entered Frank's office quite unexpectedly, and practically introduced himself."

"What is your fiancé's profession?" I inquired.

"Oh, didn't you know? He is an architect, and has already been wonderfully successful," said my fair client. "His office is in Victoria Street, and he has really more work than he can comfortably manage. Frank told me a lot about that interview with his uncle, and it seems that Sir Hugh made a very startling request. I was terribly frightened at first."

"Frightened?" I repeated curiously.

"Yes, Mr. Blake."

"But why?"

"Because Sir Hugh wanted Frank to break into a man's house!" replied the girl, leaning forward in her chair. "Doesn't it sound terrible?"

"It all depends upon the object in view," I replied. "Can you tell me what Sir Hugh wanted Mr. Canning to obtain?"

"And I suppose it was a kind of a joke?" put in Tinker. "Breaking into a friend's house, or something?"

The girl shook her head decidedly.

"Oh, no, nothing like that!" she replied. "It was to be dreadfully serious, and Frank was to really burgle a house—"

U. J.—No. 774.

"Burgle!" echoed Tinker, shocked.

"You really cannot mean what you say, Miss Ashley," I protested.

"But I do—really I do!" she exclaimed earnestly. "That is why I was so frightened. Frank treated it as a joke, but I know very well it was extremely serious. He even told me that he might be put in prison if discovered. And he went to Arundel Lodge this evening in order to have a talk with Sir Hugh, so that the details could be arranged."

"So he told you that he was visiting his uncle this evening?" I asked quickly.

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "But I couldn't tell that to the police, could I?"

"Why not, Miss Ashley?" asked Tinker. "You needn't have mentioned anything about the burglary, and the information would have been evidence—"

The girl shook her head wisely.

"Would they have believed me?" she asked, with just a slight smile. "You mustn't forget that I'm engaged to Mr. Canning, and the police would not have credited my statement. And, besides, I daren't speak because they would have asked me ever so many questions, and I should have been forced to tell why Frank had gone to his uncle. Those official detectives make you say things you really don't intend to say."

I smiled grimly.

"I am glad to observe that you were astute enough to keep silent, Miss Ashley," I remarked. "It was certainly far wiser to make no mention of this projected burglary. I confess I am totally surprised. It is surely sufficiently astonishing to learn that a highly respectable baronet should engage the services of his nephew—also highly respectable—for the purpose of committing a burglary. I am quite sure that you have more to tell me, my dear young lady."

"But I haven't!" she protested. "Last night Frank promised to tell me more later on, but I can't see him now, and so I am still terribly puzzled myself. All I know, Mr. Blake, is that Frank was to obtain a bundle of papers—documents of some kind—which are really of no value or importance to anybody except Sir Hugh himself and the man who now possesses them."

"Thank goodness!" murmured Tinker. "I thought it was a real burglary—pinching diamonds or something of that sort. I'll bet I know the truth!" he added, with a knowing shake of his head.

"Well, Tinker, and what is it?" I demanded promptly.

"Why, it's some beastly blackmailing business," replied Tinker. "This scoundrel—I don't know who he is, but he must be a scoundrel—has got the papers, and Sir Hugh was just about fed-up. And so he decided to take a leaf out of the rotter's book by pinching the papers!"

"You put it very concisely, and I really think that your shot is not far from the mark, young 'un," I observed. "However, we don't know for certain, and we must not anticipate. Do you know, Miss Ashley, if Sir Hugh was fearing some exposure or other?"

"Yes, I think he was, Mr. Blake."

"You think?"

"Oh, I can't be sure!" she protested, looking worried. "Frank did not tell me everything, and I am only judging by just what he said. I may be quite wrong, but if you are to prove Frank's innocence you must know all that there is to be known, mustn't you?"

"Precisely," I agreed. "I am very pleased, Miss Ashley, that you realise the importance of these details. You must allow me to remark that you are singularly clear-headed in this most trying ordeal. For I know well enough that you are suffering considerably. When a man is arrested on a charge of murder he is in a very bad predicament—even though entirely innocent. The great difficulty is to prove his innocence to the satisfaction of the police—and that is what we are out to do. Every atom of evidence, so far, is overwhelmingly against Mr. Canning, and I am afraid we have a stiff task before us. However, you may rely upon my putting every effort forward to get at the truth."

The girl looked at me rather wonderingly.

"But why do you so firmly believe in his innocence?" she inquired. "You have just said that all the evidence is against him, and yet you believe that he is innocent. Do you really mean it, Mr. Blake?"

"I do really mean it," I replied quietly. "The police at present are merely hovering on the surface, if I may so put it. Superficially, there are enough proofs to condemn your fiancé at once, but I have not yet even

glimpsed at the actual inner meaning of what occurred this evening at Arundel Lodge. I do know, however, that Canning did not fire the fatal shot, and that his story regarding a struggle with the murderer was perfectly true. I speak as I feel, and not because I have had any evidence of his innocence. No matter what further facts the police bring to light, I shall still adhere to my original opinion."

Miss Ashley's eyes sparkled.

"How splendid of you, Mr. Blake!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I don't wonder that people speak so glowingly of you—people who know you, I mean. You have lightened my heart wonderfully, and I feel sure that you will have Frank released within a day or two."

But I shook my head quickly.

"Come, come, we must not hope for such a quick result," I said. "You must be patient, Miss Ashley. I warn you that two or three weeks may pass before the result is achieved. On the other hand, I may conclude the affair within twenty-four hours. It all depends upon how the investigation proceeds. But you must be prepared to wait. And now, one more question, please. Do you know where this burglary was to occur?"

"No, I have no idea."

"Then do you know the name of the man to whom the house belongs?"

"No—I don't know anything further."

I could see that she was perfectly frank, and that nothing was being kept from me. I tossed my cigarette end into the fireplace and lay back.

"That is rather unfortunate," I remarked.

"My inquiry would be greatly narrowed if I could discover those points. For I am quite convinced that there is a close connection between the proposed burglary and the murder of Sir Hugh. You may rest assured, Miss Ashley, that your fiancé is in no actual danger. I give you my word that I will get him out of his present difficulty sooner or later."

And I rose to my feet as an indication that the interview was at an end. The girl rose, too, and impulsively held out her small hand.

"How thankful I am that I met you, Mr. Blake," she said, with a grateful glow in her splendid eyes. "I really don't know how to express my thanks—"

"Please reserve that until I have accomplished something worthy of your gratitude," I interrupted smilingly. "And don't worry, Miss Ashley. Go straight home, and try to forget this unfortunate affair."

"I know you don't mean that, Mr. Blake," she said quietly. "I shall worry terribly. But the knowledge that you believe in Frank's innocence, and that you will be working your hardest to secure his release, has taken a dreadful load off my mind. Oh, thank you very, very much, Mr. Blake."

Gladys Ashley commenced the task of securing her hat, using the consulting-room mirror with a little smile of apology. Tinker closed his note-book and rose to his feet.

"May I—that is to say—will you grant me the pleasure of seeing you home, Miss Ashley?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, but I don't want to trouble—"

"It will be a pleasure, Miss Ashley," declared Tinker.

"You must really accept Tinker's gallant offer," I smiled. "I was about to suggest the same thing, Miss Ashley, but Tinker forestalled me. I can assure you, he will be only too delighted with the honour."

"Delighted isn't the word," said Tinker promptly.

She thanked us, and Tinker shot a triumphant glance at me. I am very much afraid that, had Miss Ashley not been so extremely pretty, Tinker would not have been so anxious to escort her home. Tinker's gallantry is always more marked when a very sweet girl is concerned.

I was glad to get rid of them—I hope that does not sound too blunt—for I had other ideas in mind. I switched off the consulting-room lights and entered my well-equipped laboratory.

Before proceeding with the actual investigation I was determined to make very thorough tests with the two specimens of blood I had obtained—one from the pool on the library floor, and the other from Frank Canning's wound.

The police held the opinion that the two were identical—that the blood on the library floor was Canning's—but my own idea was quite different. I did not see how such an amount of blood could have flowed from Canning's comparatively slight wound. And I was quite convinced, in fact, that the pool of blood was the result of another wound altogether—on somebody else.

The tests I was now about to make would conclusively settle the point.

I was soon deeply immersed in the experiment. It was not such a very long affair, although I used very thorough methods of my own. And I had completed the tests just as Tinker made his appearance. He entered the laboratory, looking very pleased with himself.

"Ripping girl, gov'nor," he remarked. "Consumptive, Tinker—undoubtedly consumptive," I said absently.

"What!" roared Tinker. "You must be mad, sir! Fancy saying that a ripping girl like Miss Ashley is consumptive! Why, her cheeks are beautifully rosy, and she's as healthy as—any girl could be!"

"What on earth are you talking about, Tinker?" I demanded testily.

"Didn't you say that Miss Ashley is consumptive?"

I laughed.

"No, I did not," I replied. "I regret to say, young 'un, that you have a somewhat bad habit of bursting in upon me when I am deeply engrossed. I was not referring to Miss Ashley at all, but to the character of this blood."

Tinker looked relieved.

"How was I to know that?" he demanded. "Talking about bad habits, what price you, gov'nor? You're always speaking your thoughts out loud, and then you expect me to understand what you're driving at. But, I say, I caught you nicely this evening, didn't I?"

"You caught me?" I repeated.

"Coming home in taxicabs with pretty girls—"

"You cheeky young rascal!" I interrupted sternly. "There was only one taxicab, Tinker, and only one pretty girl. But you have nothing whatever to say on that subject, surely? And you must not be so flip-pant. Miss Ashley is in sore distress, and we must work our hardest in order to prove the innocence of Frank Canning."

"But is Canning really innocent, sir?" asked Tinker seriously.

"Even if I had had a few doubts previously—which I certainly had not—the result of my little experiment is quite conclusive," I replied. "I have not had an opportunity of telling the full details, Tinker, and you may like to hear them."

"Rather, gov'nor," said Tinker. "Pedro's anxious, too. Look at him on the hearthrug listening to every word you're saying."

"Never mind Pedro," I said briskly. "Pedro takes no interest in anything except his tummy—unless he happens to be hot on the trail. Listen carefully, Tinker, and then tell me your candid opinion."

It only took me five minutes to acquaint Tinker with the actual facts. He listened with great interest, and finally looked very wise.

"Well, gov'nor, I must say that old Lennard did the right thing," he remarked. "The inspector couldn't very well let Canning go after finding him on the scene of the murder with a revolver in his hand, and with his face masked. But, still, that cut couldn't have bled inside the library, could it? Canning wouldn't have been such an ass as to hold his wrist through the broken window-pane, just to let it bleed on to the floor. No, there's something wrong there—and Canning's yarn about a second man is true, in my opinion."

"And I have proved it to be true," I said with satisfaction. "While you were engaged in the delightful occupation of escorting Miss Ashley to Bayswater I made exhaustive blood tests, Tinker. The result is entirely satisfactory. Canning's blood is absolutely healthy, but the sample I took from the floor proves beyond all shadow of doubt that the man who shed the blood is suffering from consumption in a severe form."

Tinker whistled.

"Phew! That's rather conclusive—eh?" he asked. "What are you going to do, sir? That ought to be enough to get Canning released, I should think."

"It ought to be, but I'm afraid it won't be," I remarked. "The police are not so ready to release a man once they have got hold of him. However, we will do our best. These proofs will satisfy the most doubtful expert, and I will give Lennard a tip to the effect that he is wasting time by attempting to prove Canning's guilt. The actual murderer is a man with a badly gashed wrist, suffering from tuberculosis."

I donned my hat and made for the door. Tinker, without waiting to be asked, followed my example, and we both left the house together. By a piece of luck we obtained a taxi almost at once, and were soon speeding towards Scotland Yard.

"It is quite likely that Lennard won't be there," I remarked. "However, we shall

probably be able to get on his track, and I feel it my duty to acquaint him with the facts I have just established."

Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, however, was at Scotland Yard when we arrived. He was busily setting other people to work, organising all sorts of investigations which, to his official mind, were necessary. Frank Canning's past life was to be probed in every detail, and no stone was to be left unturned in the discovering of the facts.

"Back again," said Lennard briskly. "And Tinker this time, too. Well, Blake, you are still of the same opinion?"

"I am," I replied. "And I can add, Lennard, that Canning's story of the second man was perfectly true."

"I'm not quite sure about that—"

"I can conclusively prove it."

"The deuce you can!" ejaculated Lennard, staring.

"Prove it to the hilt," said Tinker cheerfully. "You see, Mr. Lennard, when a case like this comes along it needs the gov'nor to put you on the right track—"

"Cheeky young bouncer!" growled the inspector. "Well, Blake?"

"I have established the fact that the pool of blood in the library of Arundel Lodge reveals distinct traces of bacillus, which can only prove that the original owner of the blood is suffering from consumption," I replied quietly. "Canning's blood is absolutely healthy. You know what that means."

"That Canning didn't spill the blood?"

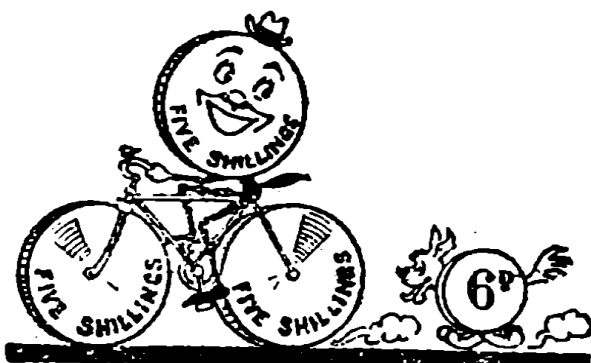
"Exactly."

The chief-inspector looked doubtful.

"I can take your word, Blake," he said.

"But our men will have to verify your evidence. So that's why you gave me that tube of blood? Did you suspect the truth then?"

"I knew nothing about the disease," I



Counting the dog, we make
FIFTEEN-AND-SIXPENCE,
and we are off to buy a War
Savings Certificate.

"Won't you make up a party
and come too?"

answered. "But I certainly suspected that Canning's story of a second man was true. It was true, Lennard."

Lennard paced up and down a few times.

"Well, I'm glad of the tip," he said at length. "But we can't do anything further just now, Blake. According to your theory, we have to search for a man with a cut wrist, suffering from consumption?"

"Precisely."

"And so you'll allow Mr. Canning to go," remarked Tinker casually.

"And so we shall do nothing of the sort," retorted Lennard. "Canning is too deeply implicated in this affair, whether he actually fired the fatal shot or not. It is quite probable that he had an accomplice with him, and it was this man who lost the diseased blood. He managed to get away, but Canning was caught. We'll stick tight to him, Blake, until you can produce more conclusive evidence. But you needn't worry," he added drily. "Scotland Yard is capable of finding out the truth."

I laughed.

"I can quite believe it," I replied. "But you will have no compunction in keeping Canning in custody for weeks, in bringing him before the magistrate, and committing him for trial. Then, later on, you'll grant him a free pardon—for something he didn't do! I want to effect his release at once."

"And the gov'nor'll do it, too!" declared Tinker.

"I sincerely hope so," said Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard gravely. "If you succeed in getting Canning out of our hands by tomorrow night I'll stand you a swell supper at the Savoy!"

"I'll think out the menu, old man," I replied smoothly. "And I'll take mercy on you, and won't make it mount up to more than twenty pounds!"

And with that little indication of my confidence I strolled with Tinker down the green-painted passage, and emerged from Scotland Yard. And then we met with one of the most splendid pieces of luck which had ever come our way.

In short, we ran into my old friend, Mr. Nelson Lee, of Gray's Inn Road. And, although Lee knew nothing whatever about the Arundel Lodge murder, he was in possession of certain information which was destined to make that little Savoy supper a positive certainty.

I do not intend to describe our meeting just at the moment, for it is necessary to set down the facts of a little adventure which occurred to Nelson Lee and Nipper even while I was commencing my investigations at the scene of the murder.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

An Adventure of the Night.

COINCIDENCE is a remarkable thing, and it certainly was a coincidence that Nelson Lee and his cheerful young assistant happened to be on the Romford Road that evening. And coincidence went even further, for it delivered Nelson Lee into my hands, in a manner of speaking, just at the very moment when I most needed him.

Mr. Thomas Carr was actually the original cause of the interesting series of events, for that kindly gentleman had invited Nelson Lee and Nipper to stay a day or two with him at his home in Brentwood.

They had enjoyed their visit, and started away in the evening, intending to journey up to London in their comfortable touring-car. It was quite a short run, and Lee was in a cheerful mood.

"We'll have a little supper at one of the swell restaurants, Nipper," he said genially, as they left Brentwood behind them. "Might as well finish up the day in style—eh?"

Nipper chuckled.

"Rather, sir," he agreed promptly. "We might be too late for a theatre, but a nice little supper won't come amiss."

At this period Nelson Lee and Nipper had not retired to St. Frank's Cottage, in Sussex, where they are located at the present time. This particular adventure took place while my friends were living in Gray's Inn Road.

They anticipated no excitement on the short run up to London. The evening was fine, and the moon was well up, glowing its silvery light down upon the countryside. The air was mild in the extreme, and neither Lee nor Nipper were particularly wrapped up—they merely wore dust-coats.

"We shall be in town in well under an hour, gov'nor," remarked Nipper, as they proceeded along the somewhat lonely stretch of high-road between Brentwood and Romford. After Romford there was no more country, since London has stretched its tentacles out practically to the old Essex town.

But this stretch was very quiet indeed. Between Brentwood and Romford there is no village of any size, except, perhaps, Harold Wood; but that is tucked away behind the main road, and I dare say hundreds of people who pass that way never suspect its existence.

Nelson Lee's car was speeding along at a nice comfortable pace—that is to say, about thirty miles per hour. This, of course, was really exceeding the recognised speed limit, but the latter is notoriously absurd. No well-built car travels comfortably under twenty-five miles an hour.

"Motor-bike coming, sir," remarked Nipper presently.

"So I observe," said Lee. "And he appears to be sticking to the centre of the road, too."

The motor-cyclist was approaching them from the direction of London at some considerable speed. Nipper could not see distinctly, but it seemed to him that the machine was running somewhat erratically, as though badly controlled. And the next moment a very startling thing happened.

The motor-cycle was about two hundred yards distant, and Lee had steered well over to the near side, when the man upon the cycle suddenly fell forward over his handle-bars. It was no voluntary movement, as both Lee and Nipper saw at once. If any further proof was necessary the next second proved it.

"Great Scott!" yelled Nipper.

For the bicycle, out of control, swerved on to the grass border of the road, crashed into the hedge, and the rider was flung



Bargrave produced a ball of stout cord, and prepared to tie the girl securely in a chair. She realised that resistance was useless. (See page 13.)

clean over the handle-bars into a heap upon a mass of thick bushes.

The whole thing had occurred in less than three seconds. Lee jammed his brakes on and pulled the car up twenty yards further on. Both he and Nipper looked back, but there was no movement or sound, except a hissing, which no doubt proceeded from the engine, caused, probably, by escaping petrol dripping upon the heated cylinder radiators.

"Rather a bad smash, I'm afraid," said Nelson Lee crisply.

"But I can't understand it, guv'nor," ejaculated Nipper. "There was nothing in the way—"

"The man appeared to lose his head, I believe," interjected Lee. "Either that, or he fainted on the saddle. Didn't you notice the way he fell forward? He'll be badly smashed up, I fear."

By this time the pair were running back along the dusty road. They soon arrived at the spot. The motor-cycle was a powerful machine, and it lay on its side apparently intact, although the front mudguard and the foot-rests were bent and twisted.

The unfortunate rider lay a clear ten feet beyond, this fact alone testifying to the force of his fall. Both Lee and Nipper saw during the first moment that affairs were not so bad as they at first believed.

For they now saw that the man had fallen upon the thick bush, which had undoubtedly broken his fall, and had probably saved his life. He sprawled there motionless, half on his side.

"Help me to put him on to the grass, Nipper," said Lee briskly.

They lifted the man clear and laid him full length upon the dry grass. So far as they could see in the moonlight the stranger was elderly and of slight figure. He was attired in light summer overalls, and a cap with ear-flaps. His face was clean-shaven, and deathly pale.

Several ugly scratches, however, marred his cheeks, and they were already bleeding slightly. While Nelson Lee was making a quick examination, Nipper strolled over to the motor-bicycle and looked at it with interest.

"No bones broken, Nipper," remarked Lee. "I fancy— Why, where have you go to, young 'un?"

Nipper suddenly gave a yell.

"Come and look at this, sir!" he shouted.

U. J.—No. 774.

"There's blood over the whole bicycle! Splashes and smears of it on the handle-bars and frame, and the top of the tank is simply smothered!"

If Nipper had expected Lee to be surprised, he was disappointed.

"I am not surprised," exclaimed the detective. "If you will come here Nipper, you will immediately see where the blood came from—and you will understand why the man fainted on the saddle. It's a wonder he got as far as this."

Nipper went quickly over to his master and gazed down.

"Surprisingly enough, the fall scarcely hurt him," said Lee. "No doubt that is due to the fact that he fell limply, and that the main shock was avoided by those bushes. But this is what I want you to look at, my lad."

Nelson Lee was holding the stranger's right arm. The hand was sticky with blood, which had run down from beneath a rough bandage which was bound round the wrist. This bandage was literally wringing wet, and deep red.

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Nipper, in an awed voice. "There must be a pretty serious wound under that bandage, sir. I suppose he fainted from loss of blood?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But what was the silly ass thinking about?" demanded Nipper. "Didn't he have more sense than to ride with a wound of that sort? It was absolutely asking for trouble—and now he's found it!"

"When you've done talking, Nipper, you might as well make yourself useful," exclaimed Lee quickly. "Where's your electric torch?"

"Here, sir."

Nipper pulled it out, and switched it on. By the aid of the powerful light Nelson Lee unfastened the bandage—which, upon examination, proved to be nothing but an ordinary linen handkerchief. The wound beneath was revealed as an ugly, deep gash on the wrist. Close beside it were numerous other cuts, and Lee regarded them frowningly.

"Queer!" he murmured. "It almost looks as though the man had cut himself upon a razor, with deliberate intent. And I'm afraid a vein has been severed. See, the blood is still flowing even now, although he must have lost quarts."

"Well, I've no sympathy for a man who

neglects himself like that!" said Nipper. "He'd no right to be riding a motor-bike in that condition. He was either dotty, or half off his head with fright."

Nelson Lee was rapidly attending to the wound. He sent Nipper off quickly to the car in order to obtain a first-aid equipment, which was always carried in the locker. Lint and bandages were applied, and Nelson Lee made a quick but thorough job of it. And then he thoughtfully lit a cigarette.

"I'm inclined to think your last guess was correct, Nipper," he said slowly.

"What was that, sir? I forget."

"About the man receiving a fright," said Lee. "Mind, it is only guesswork, but I should say that the man met with an accident farther up the road. He took a corner too sharply, or something like that, and crashed through somebody's window."

"But that would have killed him!" protested Nipper.

"Not at all. He had probably come to an almost dead stop by the time he reached the window—there are plenty of cottages absolutely upon the road," said Lee. "Supposing this man had just pulled up in time to avoid a bad smash? In striving to save himself he flung his hand forward, and pushed it through a pane of glass—these ugly cuts being the result. Scared by the affair, and not wishing to face the consequences, he simply rode away—probably thinking that his own injury was not serious. At all events, I can think of no other explanation."

"He'll explain himself when he comes to, sir."

"Which won't be for an hour or two, at the least," replied Lee. "I really think, Nipper, that we had better look in his pockets to discover his identity. We can't leave the poor fellow lying here, at all events."

A thorough search of the man's pockets, however, was barren of results. This was rather surprising, for people generally carry a pocket-book, or cards, or letters. But here there was nothing—nothing except some loose cash, a packet of cigarettes, and a box of matches. And it was hardly possible to establish the man's identity by the aid of those articles.

"What about his watch, sir?" asked Nipper. "There might be something engraved—"

"Quite probably; but he doesn't happen to be wearing a watch," interrupted Lee. "No, my lad, there is nothing. But you may as well have a look at the bicycle; there might be something in the tool-bags."

Nipper went off. But he discovered that the tool-bags contained nothing except what they had been designed for. The motor-cyclist was not even carrying the necessary licence. Nelson Lee nodded when he learned this—for he had fully expected the licence to be on the bicycle, a practice quite commonly adopted by some motor-cyclists.

"An added reason why the man fled without waiting to have his wound attended to," observed the detective. "He knew he had no licence—and that would have meant trouble. But I have found something after all, Nipper."

Lee displayed a somewhat crumpled visiting-card. Upon it, in the light of the electric torch, Nipper read the words: "Daniel Bargrave, 35, Fernwood Grove, Fulham, S.W."

"Where did you find it, sir?" he asked. "It wasn't on him just now."

"It was, Nipper. It was down in the lining of his waistcoat. Of course, this man may not be Mr. Daniel Bargrave at all—" Lee paused. "One moment. We will try to make sure of the fact."

He bent over the unconscious man, and attempted to examine the back of his shirt, with the object of finding some initials on the linen. This proving fruitless, Nipper gingerly looked at the blood-soaked handkerchief. And there, sure enough, in one corner, were the initials "D. B."

"Well, we know that the gentleman is named Bargrave, and that his residence is in Fulham," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "I can't help thinking, Nipper, that there is every appearance that the man deliberately came out without carrying anything which would betray his identity—he was unconscious of the fact that one of his cards had slipped through a hole in his waistcoat pocket. The pocket, I may as well say, is quite intact, having evidently been sewn up again. I only felt the card by accident."

"What about the handkerchief, sir?"

"He probably overlooked the fact that his initials were upon it," answered Lee. "But, really, we ought not to be making these surmises. This man needs medical attention

—or at least a complete rest and quietness. His wrist must be bathed and properly attended to—

"Hadn't we better take him along to Fulham?"

"I hardly think so," replied Lee, glancing at his watch. "There is always the possibility of finding the house empty, and we don't want Mr. Bargrave on our hands. Moreover, the long journey wouldn't do him any good. We had far better take him back to Brentwood, and leave him in safe hands for the night."

"Hospital, guv'nor?"

"No; we will impose upon the generosity and good nature of our excellent friend, Mr. Carr. I have no doubt that he will be only too willing to give this unfortunate gentleman a bed for the night. At all events, we will go back to Mr. Carr's without delay. If he does not care for the idea, he can at least direct us to a good private hospital."

Upon the whole, this was far the wisest course to pursue. Nelson Lee could see that Bargrave was in rather a bad way—and men have expired before now as the result of loss of blood and shock. It would be a most unpleasant thing to be forced to deliver a dead body to the police—and Lee might even have some difficulty in proving that the accident had not been caused by his car.

To get the man into a bed at once was the best policy.

And within five minutes Nelson Lee's car was gliding smoothly and steadily back towards Brentwood. Mr. Bargrave's motor-cycle was left in the ditch beside the road, concealed by bushes. It was a heavy machine, and far too cumbersome to place upon the motor-car.

Mr. Carr's house, fortunately, lay on the southern outskirts of Brentwood, so it was

not necessary to travel through the town. Carr himself was a stout, genial individual, who had known Lee for many years.

He was surprised to see his late guests back again, and his smile vanished when he learned the facts. As Lee had surmised, Mr. Carr was only too pleased to extend his hospitality to the unfortunate Mr. Bargrave.

"Certainly—certainly!" he exclaimed. "Bring the poor man in. Good gracious me! There must be seven or eight beds upstairs that aren't being used. No, no! I don't mind in the least, Lee—not in the least. Bring him in at once!"

"I'd better warn you that he is unconscious."

"All the more reason to make haste," declared Mr. Carr. "I once had a bad spill myself, and a perfect stranger took me in and gave me a bed, and fed me like a prince. I don't forget the gratitude I felt on that occasion, and I'm simply bound to act in a similar manner now that the position is reversed. Bring him in, Lee!"

"It's jolly good of you, Carr," said Nelson Lee heartily.

He and Nipper carried Mr. Bargrave into the house, and he was taken straight upstairs, undressed, and put into bed. Carr was for sending at once for the doctor, but Lee shook his head.

"I don't think it's necessary, after all," he said. "The man's pulse is fairly strong, and he will certainly recover before morning. Complete rest is all he wants; a doctor could do no more good than I can."

Hot water and sponges were brought, and Lee attended to the wound with all the skill of a trained surgeon. And then, breathing evenly, Mr. Bargrave was left in bed, with one of Carr's manservants sitting in the room

on watch. Carr was a most conscientious man, and extremely kind-hearted.

"He'll be all right, Lee," he declared. "I'll have a doctor in in the morning—just to make sure, you know. I'm really sorry for the poor man. He must have had a bad spill."

"You must drop me a line," said Lee. "Bargrave will tell you exactly what happened, and I should like to hear his explanation. It's quite sporting of you, Carr, to take this stranger into your house—"

"Nonsense—nonsense!" interrupted Carr. "Sporting he hanged! It's humane, Lee—nothing else. I don't happen to be hard-hearted."

Five minutes later Nelson Lee and Nipper once more set out for London. Lee had told Carr about the motor-bicycle, and exactly where it could be found. It would lay in the ditch for the night, and would be quite safe there, being concealed.

This time there were no adventures, and Lee and Nipper entered London much later than they had anticipated, but still in time for that little West End supper. They were proceeding slowly through Trafalgar Square, in the rear of a motor-bus, when Nipper made a sudden ejaculation.

"Hi! Pull up, guv'nor!" he said, tugging at his master's sleeve. "I've just spotted Tinker—yes, Mr. Blake, too!"

He leaned over the side of the car and waved his hand.

"Ahoy there, Tinker, old son!" he yelled.

Tinker and I were walking along briskly, discussing the Arundel Lodge murder, and we both heard Nipper's hail. Coming to a halt, we turned our heads and saw Nelson Lee's car just drawing towards the kerb.

"Hallo, Blake!" said Lee cheerfully. "Nipper and I are just going to put the



"I seized the hand that had fired the shot, but it tore itself away! I had nothing to do with the murder!"
This was the story Canning told the police.

car up, and then indulge in some supper. Perhaps you'll join us—"

"Sorry, old man," I replied, taking Nelson Lee's hand. "Tinker and I are rather busy this evening, and we can't spare time to think of our appetites. We're just off to Baker Street."

"Then you'd better jump in," said Lee. "Shift out of the way, Nipper—get behind with Tinker, and you can chatter to your heart's content."

Nipper grinned, hopped out of the front seat, and joined Tinker in the tonneau. Tinker, of course, at once told his friend all about the murder case, and the pair were quite animated.

"Just come up from Brentwood," explained Lee, as we glided forward. "Anything particularly important on, Blake?"

"A murder case," I replied shortly. "At the present moment, Lee, I happen to be looking for a consumptive individual who is suffering from a very badly gashed right wrist."

Nelson Lee almost started.

"By Jove, that's queer!" he exclaimed—"infernally queer! By a strange chance, Nipper and I have just had an adventure with a man with a gashed wrist. And the whole affair was somewhat mysterious, too."

I rubbed my chin.

"I'm afraid it's too much to hope that there is any connection," I said. "All the same, I shall be glad to hear what happened, Lee. This is a strange world, and there is just a chance that you accidentally ran across the very man I'm anxious to lay fingers on. Tell me all about it when we get to Baker Street."

And I must confess that I felt just a tiny thrill run through me. Was I, by sheer good luck, to get on the track straightway?

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

On the Trail of the Murderer.

TINKER was very excited by the time Baker Street was reached. As Nelson Lee pulled the car up Tinker bent over and grasped my shoulder.

"I say, guv'nor, has Mr. Lee told you?" he asked, his eyes gleaming. "Mr. Lee and Nipper ran across the very man we're after!"

"I have received a hint, young 'un," I replied smoothly. "But we will wait until we get up into our consulting-room, and then we can exchange notes comfortably. I suspect that the result will be interesting."

Nelson Lee decided to leave his car outside, for we should probably want it again soon. And then we entered the house, and I led the way into my consulting-room. It was some little time since I had seen Lee, and I was particularly interested in this meeting, because it promised to develop in the most satisfactory manner.

"Sit down, Lee," I said briskly. "Help yourself to one of those cigars. Tinker, you lazy beggar, mix Mr. Lee a whisky and soda, and give Nipper some lemonade. They both look pretty thirsty."

Tinker did the thing thoroughly, and mixed two whiskies and poured out two lemonades. Having disposed of these, we settled ourselves comfortably into chairs, and I told my attentive visitors the main facts concerning the murder of Sir Hugh Dorrington at Arundel Lodge, and the predicament of Frank Canning.

"Canning did not commit the murder," I concluded. "From my own investigations, and from the information supplied by Miss Gladys Ashley—which I am not allowed to divulge even to you—I am positively convinced that Canning is the victim of unfortunate circumstances. He happened to be on the scene at the time of the crime, and actually had a short tussle with the real murderer. This man is suffering from consumption, and his right wrist is so severely cut by the broken glass that it is certain that he has lost a great amount of blood."

Nelson Lee and Nipper exchanged glances.

"I believe I can lay fingers on your man at once, Blake," said Lee, bending forward. "Nipper and I met him on the road between Brentwood and Romford—he was motor-cycling, and fainted on the saddle from loss of blood. A search of his pockets revealed the fact that he had come out devoid of all papers or documents which could establish his identity—at least, he intended to do so. And such a thing as this can be no mere coincidence. He was fleeing from

U. J.—No. 774.

London, and the time of our meeting coincides with the time of the murder; he would have had just sufficient time to reach the spot where we met. There can be no doubt, Blake."

I nodded thoughtfully.

"Let me hear the details," I said.

Nelson Lee supplied them, and I, too, felt that there could be no doubt in the matter whatever. By a sheer accident—by a stroke of good luck—Lee and Nipper had run across the murderer of Sir Hugh Dorrington. And he was now lying unconscious in Mr. Thomas Carr's house at Brentwood.

"Why, it's easy, guv'nor," said Tinker cheerfully. "We've just got to go to Brentwood, and there's an end of our case. We shall have to give Mr. Lee and Nipper a penny each for this job!"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I do not value my services so highly, Tinker," he said, with great gravity. "I would not dream of accepting such an enormous fee. Nipper, being a mercenary young bouncer, will no doubt jump at the chance—and collar my share in addition, in all probability!"

"Tuppence!" grinned Nipper. "It's a fortune to me—provided you tack on about a thousand quid at the end of it. But what's to be done, Mr. Blake? I suppose you'll pop down to Brentwood?"

"Undoubtedly," I replied. "This man's name, I understand, is Bargrave, and his residence is at Fulham. Well, we won't bother about that just now. The main thing is to get the man himself. If we are wrong in our surmise—which, I think, is scarcely possible—we shall do no harm, and only a couple of hours will have been wasted. Tinker, you'd better ring up for our car to be brought round from the garage—" "That's not necessary," interposed Nelson Lee calmly. "My car is waiting below, and there's quite a load of petrol on board. If I shouldn't be a bother, Blake, I should like to drive you down."

"By all means," I said readily. "It's good of you to trouble yourself, Lee. And you will be useful, too, for you can introduce me to the kind Mr. Carr. But what on earth is the matter with Nipper?"

Nipper turned red.

"I—I was only thinking, sir," he said, in some confusion.

"You were looking rather miserable!"

"The greedy young beggar was thinking about his inside!" chuckled Nelson Lee. "He can see a nice little supper fading away into nothingness. But cheer up, Nipper, this affair is far more interesting than a dozen suppers."

Nipper grinned, and without any further delay we started off. But Tinker took the precaution to loot Mrs. Bardell's larder, and to obtain a large supply of food—of various kinds. And while Lee and I sat in the front seats of the car, Nipper and Tinker and Pedro indulged in a most disgraceful "gorge"—to use Tinker's own term—in the tonneau. They had the decency, however, to leave a few odds-and-ends for us.

The trip to Brentwood was a comparatively short one. In a good car the journey can be done in forty minutes, or slightly under.

It was nearly eleven by the time we arrived, and Lee fully anticipated that Mr. Carr would be in bed. Lights in the lower windows, however, indicated the contrary, and when we hammered at the door it was opened by a stout, genial-looking individual, who could be none other than Mr. Carr himself.

"Well, upon my soul!" he exclaimed. "I'm hanged if you're not back again, Lee! This time you'll stop, I can assure you. Come in—come in. Some friends with you, eh? The more the merrier!"

We trooped in, and Tinker and I were introduced.

"My head will be turning before long," declared Mr. Carr. "Four celebrities in the house at the same time! I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. Blake. Is it possible that you have come down in connection with that poor fellow who was in my house—"

"Was in your house?" echoed Lee quickly.

Mr. Carr smiled.

"Precisely," he replied. "I wish you had been here, Lee. The poor man was amazingly upset, and insisted upon getting up—"

"Getting up!" I ejaculated. "Has he gone?"

"Over half an hour ago," nodded Mr. Carr. "You see, he—"

"Gone!" echoed Tinker, taking a deep breath. "Well, that proves it, guv'nor! What a piece of rotten luck!"

"I am awfully sorry to trouble you in

this way, Mr. Carr, but will you be good enough to tell me precisely what happened?" I said crisply. "There is not a second to lose, and I must urge you to tell me the exact facts. The man whom you harboured in this house—unwittingly enough—is, to the best of my belief, a fugitive murderer!"

Mr. Thomas Carr sat down abruptly.

"Good gracious me!" he exclaimed, in alarm. "You—you don't mean to say so, Mr. Blake? What is to become of me? Shall I be arrested for—"

I laughed.

"My dear sir, the police will never know about your part in the affair, and if they do you need fear nothing," I replied. "Your action was one of sheer generosity, and you are to be highly commended for your kind action in giving a bed to a perfect stranger. But the fact remains that Bargrave is a hunted criminal. The very fact that he has fled is most significant. I gather that he must have been totally unfit for travelling?"

"Oh, totally—totally," agreed Mr. Carr, recovering his composure rapidly. "I urged the man to stay—I did everything I possibly could. This information you have given me throws a very comprehensive light upon his doggedness. He came to himself, Lee, about an hour after you had gone. I went in to him, and was rather struck by his frightened attitude."

"Was he in full possession of his wits at once?" asked Lee.

"Not quite at once," was the reply. "For about ten minutes he talked sheer nonsense—made incoherent remarks about somebody named Dorrington."

"That is most interesting," I said grimly. "Anything further, Mr. Carr?"

"Yes. He babbled on about jaggling his wrist upon a broken window-pane—but that only coincided with what Lee had already told me," said Carr. "But Bargrave also muttered words which gave me the impression that he had sustained his injuries in a struggle. But it was really none of my business, and I did not even attempt to question him. A draught of brandy, I believe, brought him into full consciousness, for he at once insisted upon knowing who I was, what house he was in, and where it was located. I told him that you had picked him up in the road, Lee; and then he remembered fainting in the saddle."

"Did he appear startled when he heard my name?" asked Lee.

"Now that you come to mention it, there was a scared look in his eyes," said Carr. "I can understand now, but at the time I thought it was merely the effects of the accident. I told him that he was to lay quiet until the morning, when a doctor would attend him. He thanked me very courteously, but insisted upon getting up and continuing his journey. I did my best to dissuade him, but he persisted. And as he seemed quite strong, I allowed him to go. I didn't dream that the man was wanted by the police—"

"Of course not, Mr. Carr. You had no idea of such a thing," I interrupted. "Did you tell the man where his bicycle lay?"

"Yes."

"And he went to fetch it?"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Carr. "He explained that it was most necessary for him to get on to Colchester without delay, and the bicycle was probably smashed. I assured him that it was not, but he preferred to go by train. Moreover, he felt that he had had quite enough of motor-cycling for one night, and would not care to trust himself to the machine again."

"What train did he go by?" I asked, glancing at my watch.

"The ten-forty-five," said Mr. Carr.

"Only twenty-five minutes ago," I said quickly. "Yet the station is quite a little distance from here, I believe—"

"Oh, I sent him in my little car," explained the other. "Gibson took him—Gibson's my man—and he arrived back only a few moments before you came. He saw Bargrave into the train, and Bargrave gave him a sovereign for himself. And that is really all I know, Mr. Blake. Considering the man's condition when he was brought here, it was most astonishing that he could find sufficient strength for a night journey."

"It was the strength of sheer desperation, my dear sir," I declared. "The man was mortally afraid that he would be traced to this house, and he has fled, regardless of his physical condition, intending to put as many miles between himself and Brentwood as possible."

"What shall we do, sir?" asked Tinker.

"You and I will run straight to the station

in Lee's car," I replied promptly. "The train cannot have reached Colchester yet, and we shall just have time to wire through a warning. The police can search the train at Colchester—it ought to be easy for them to pick out Bargrave, considering his injury."

"And he can't have left the train," put in Carr. "Colchester is the first stopping place, after Brentwood—it runs straight through Chelmsford."

"That is excellent," I commented. "You remain here, Lee. There's no need for us all to go to the station. Give Mr. Carr the details; I am sure he will be interested."

"I shall, indeed," said our host.

There was not a second to waste, and Tinker and I were off almost at once. I was considerably chagrined, but there was no sense in grumbling—and, after all, we were hot on the trail of the murderer. For there was no doubt in my mind that Mr. Daniel Bargrave, of Fernwood Grove, Fulham, was the man who had killed Sir Hugh Dorrington.

He was weak and ill, and quite incapable of adopting any daring ruses. It ought to be a simple matter to have him arrested in Colchester. It was a great pity we had not arrived in time to prevent the flight.

I succeeded in awakening the police very thoroughly, and an inspector accompanied me to the station. Here the telegraph was set to work, after we had made certain inquiries—corroborating Mr. Carr's statements.

Then followed a wait, tedious and aggravating. But, at last, a long message came through from Colchester. In brief, there was no man answering to Bargrave's description on the Norwich mail. The train had been thoroughly searched, but the result was a blank.

The inspector was quite angry. He accused me of wasting his time, and the time of the Colchester police. As he pointed out, my information must have been wrong, since the train had not stopped once, from any cause—we made sure of that—between Brentwood and Colchester. And, since Bargrave was not in the train at Colchester, it stood to reason that he had not entered at Brentwood. That argument was unassailable—at least, it seemed so to the inspector.

He went off, leaving Tinker and I at the station. We had drawn a blank, and Tinker's face was rather long.

"Looks as if Carr deliberately told us wrong, guv'nor," he said. "I reckon——"

"Nonsense!" I snapped sharply.

"Eh?"

"Mr. Carr is a gentleman, and he told us the truth, too. Bargrave left this station by the Norwich mail train."

"Then the police missed him at Colchester."

"No; certainly not."

"Oh, well," said Tinker sarcastically. "I suppose the chap jumped out somewhere along the line—with the train going at about sixty miles an hour? It ought to be easy to pick up his remains——"

"Confound you, Tinker, don't be such a young ass!" I interjected curtly. "Bargrave merely performed a trick—a feint."

"He fainted on his motor-bike——" began Tinker.

"If you interrupt again, I'll kick you!" I threatened. "Go back in the car at once, and fetch Pedro——"

"But what for, sir?" asked Tinker, serenely ignoring my dire threat, which, as he knew well enough, was quite hollow. "What's the good of fetching Pedro? He has his uses, but he can't chase railway trains!"

"Look here, young 'un, Bargrave wasn't on the train when it arrived at Colchester," I said crisply. "That means that he either jumped out of the train just before arriving at Colchester, or that he jumped out just after the train started from here. The latter is certainly the most likely."

"Why is it, sir?"

"What a fellow you are for asking questions!" I exclaimed impatiently. "Why? Because Colchester is a big station, and this is a comparatively small one. Bargrave would have had no difficulty at all in slipping out on to the footboard, and dropping on to the permanent way—even taking into account his weakened condition. He was desperate, and wanted to throw any possible pursuers off the scent. The police, as you have seen, were completely hoodwinked."

"Yes, sir, and so am I!" confessed Tinker. "I'm blessed if I can quite get the hang of it. What was the good of Bargrave trying such a trick? There's no other train to-night——"

"But he knows that his motor-cycle is on the main road," I put in. "We will not

leave it to chance, though. Pedro will probably be able to lead us on the right track. If my surmise is correct, we ought to pick up Bargrave's trail just outside the station, along the line. You'd better bring one of the man's discarded bandages, too; it'll be useful to Pedro, particularly if there is blood on it. And make haste, Tinker."

"Right, sir," he said briskly.

"Bring Lee and Nipper back with you," I added. "Tell them what has happened as you are coming along. Don't waste a moment."

Tinker went off in the car, and from the reckless manner in which he careered down the road I judged that he wouldn't waste much time. I interviewed the stationmaster, again. He was a most courteous gentleman, and readily granted the small requests I made of him.

Fully five minutes in advance of the time I calculated Tinker returned, bringing Nelson Lee and Nipper and Pedro. He was also in possession of a blood-stained bandage, which Bargrave had left behind.

"You know what's happened, Lee?" I asked rapidly. "Good! Tinker and I are going to pick up the trail, if we can. And I want you to do me a favour."

"Anything you like, Blake," said Lee, at once.

"Thanks. This feint on Bargrave's part is rather smart," I went on. "He wants it to appear that he has gone on to Colchester, whereas his real intention, obviously, is to double back. He is weak and ill, and it is quite likely that he has made for his own home, believing that he has smothered the trail. It would be foolish for us all to rush to Fulham, just on the off-chance; but Tinker and I can manage affairs at this end. If you will take the car and speed back to London, you could have a look round Bargrave's house at Fulham. It'll probably be a waste of time, but there's no harm in having two strings to our bow."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"You are quite right, old man," he said. "Nipper and I will start off at once. I hope you'll be successful down here, but there's no telling. And if Bargrave has dodged home, we shall trap him nicely."

Lee was a man of action, and within two minutes he and Nipper had started. I felt more comfortable then, and turned to Tinker, who was holding tight to Pedro.

"Come on, young 'un," I said shortly.

We went on to the deserted platform, and then down upon the permanent way. The moonlight enabled us to see quite sufficiently for our needs; and, as the hour was so late, there were no onlookers except the stationmaster and a solitary signalman.

For the first five minutes Pedro searched round in vain, his nose to the ground. Then, with a sudden throaty bay of satisfaction, he started off towards the embankment, dragging Tinker.

"Splendid!" I exclaimed exultantly. "My shot was correct, Tinker. Bargrave left the train as it was leaving the station."

There was no further doubt on the point, and Pedro had a strong scent to follow. He led the way onwards until we struck a road, and then proceeded along it. Within ten minutes we were on the main highway, making towards Romford.

"The motor-bike, guv'nor," said Tinker breathlessly.

"Undoubtedly."

"We shall be too late—he's had a good start, and we sha'n't see a sign of him," went on Tinker. "Might as well give up hope——"

"You seem to forget, my lad, that the machine is by no means fit for riding," I interjected. "According to what Lee said, the bicycle is a powerful, heavy one—and it is lying in a ditch. Have you ever tried to get a motor-bike out of a ditch, Tinker—single-handed?"

Tinker grinned.

"I have!" he said feelingly. "I've tried many times, guv'nor, and I've generally failed. And Bargrave isn't precisely a Hercules, is he? We may find him making strenuous efforts to lug the jigger up into the road. It'll be rather rich if he asks us to lend a hand!"

The distance to the spot where the motor-bicycle had been left was just about two miles out of Brentwood. Lee had described the place to me, and it could not be mistaken.

Lee had taken note of the trees and other little peculiarities of that strip of roadway, and I recognised it at once. Pedro was still going strong, but now he was ob-

viously excited, showing that he was nearing his quarry.

"Hallo!" breathed Tinker suddenly.

"Look there, sir!"

I looked, and saw a figure moving in the centre of the road. There was something else, too—something which could only be the motor-bicycle. Bargrave had succeeded in getting the machine out of the ditch, and was just about to start off! How he had struggled over that task we never knew; but it must have been terrible, and he had only succeeded because desperation lent him strength.

"By Jove! Listen to that!" I shouted quickly.

Just as we were breaking into a trot the powerful engine of the motor-cycle gave one or two preliminary barks. Bargrave had thrust down the kick-starter, and was already throwing his leg over the saddle. With feelings which were really too deep for words, I realised that the man was about to escape before our eyes—for, even by running hard, we could not hope to arrive in time.

But just then the engine behaved as even the best engines will behave occasionally. It gave one or two coughs, and then abruptly stopped. Possibly Bargrave, in his agitation, had jerked the throttle-lever the wrong way.

"Run, Tinker!" I shouted. "Back, Pedro—back!"

The old dog understood well enough, but he disregarded my command in his excitement. He raced forward as fast as the leash would allow him. I saw Bargrave twist round in his saddle of the stationary bicycle, and something glittered in the moonlight.

Crack!

It was the spiteful bark of a Smith and Wesson, and the wonder is that I am now alive to set down these facts. For the bullet was aimed with remarkable accuracy, considering Bargrave's condition and the haste with which he had levelled the weapon.

In short, the bullet went clean through my hat, and made a neat furrow in my skin on the left side of the head. A mere graze, and not at all serious—but the effect, at the moment, was such that I was quite incapable of further action. I ran on, dizzy, and then fell headlong, totally dazed.

Tinker, probably thinking that I was seriously "winged," gave a bellow of fury, and rushed on. Bargrave had got the engine going by this time, and the machine glided away just as Tinker arrived on the spot. He made one flying leap, and landed squarely on the carrier.

"Stop, you brute—stop!" roared Tinker. "If you don't pull up, I'll blow a hole through your back!"

Not being in possession of a revolver, he thrust his finger into the man's back, thinking that the ruse would succeed.

"Curse you, boy!" snarled Bargrave harshly, his voice shrill with excitement.

The bicycle was now going at some speed, and Tinker's position was by no means so advantageous as he had first supposed. Bargrave swerved across the road giddily, and then caused the machine to wobble in the most horrible manner. Tinker, taken off his guard by the move, gave a wild yell, and toppled over backwards.

He hit the ground with great force, rolled over and over, and then sat up dazedly, smothered with dust, grazed in a dozen places, half-blinded and half-choked.

"Oh, my only hat!" he gasped painfully.

He could see nothing, but he heard the steady throb of the motor-cycle growing fainter and fainter. And I, two hundred yards further back, heard the sound, too. A most ignominious set-back, indeed!

Tinker and I were both lying upon the road, knocked out for the moment, and our would-be quarry was shooting away into the night.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

What Happened at No. 35, Fernwood Grove, Fulham.

MEANWHILE, other events were happening in London.

Of course, a million and one different events were happening in that vast city; but I am referring to those events which were connected with the Arundel Lodge murder.

And, in this instance, my fair client, Miss Gladys Ashley, was the principal mover in the game.

In order to describe the events of this remarkable case in their proper sequence, I am bound to leave Tinker and myself upon the Romford Road, and shift the scene to Bayswater. Here, at No. 1, Avon Square, Miss Ashley was labouring under considerable excitement.

After her interview with me at Baker Street, she had taxied home, escorted by Tinker. For fully an hour after that she was telling her mother all about the dreadful affair, and, naturally enough, she finished up by crying her eyes out—to use a well-worn but absurd expression. That cry really did her a lot of good, for it brought relief.

The girl, in fact, was unnerved by all that had occurred, and she felt thoroughly tired in body and mind. What she needed more than anything else was a long sleep, and her mother quietly urged her to go up to bed without delay, and to leave all worrying until the morning.

This advice, of course, was quite excellent, but it was impracticable. A girl whose lover is in prison charged with murder can hardly be expected to sleep peacefully. Gladys looked on the worst side of the picture, and imagined the unfortunate Canning to be lying upon a truckle-bed, with a plank in lieu of a mattress, and in a stone-walled cell of about six feet square.

As a matter of fact, Canning was quite comfortable in an excellent bed, and with almost everything he needed. He had only been detained, and was not even charged with crime yet. But the girl was unfamiliar with police methods, and pictured them as being fashioned after the style of the Spanish Inquisition—at least, she did so in her present frame of mind.

And, having reached her bed-room, she made no attempt to undress, but sat in a deep armchair, her hands clasped in her lap, thinking of the most terrible possibilities. At last, after her thoughts had reached the scaffold, she rose to her feet with an angry shake of her pretty shoulders.

"Oh, how foolish I am!" she exclaimed softly. "Frank will come to no harm—I know it. I shall take mother's advice, and—Oh!"

She had walked over to the dressing-table with the intention of examining her tear-stained eyes in the mirror, and she saw, upon the little square dish of the trinket-set a letter, and the handwriting upon it was Frank Canning's. She picked it up eagerly.

"Why didn't mother tell me?" she wondered. "And I have been sitting there all this while without knowing it!"

That letter, as a matter of fact, had arrived by the last post. Mrs. Ashley had intended giving it to her daughter as soon as she came in, but she had forgotten all about it in the worry and excitement of the terrible news.

She had brought the letter up when she accompanied Gladys to her bed-room, again intending to tell her about it. But, having laid it down preparatory to kissing her daughter, she had passed out of the room without thinking of it again. For that reason the girl knew nothing of its presence until this moment.

It was particularly welcome at such a moment as this. She took it over to the armchair, sat down, and then removed the notepaper from the envelope. Naturally it received one or two kisses before she started reading it.

It is not possible for me to give the full text of the letter, for there were certain private matters contained in it which were no concern of mine, and which Miss Ashley did not think it necessary to show me.

The page which did interest me, however, was handed to me by the girl after the case had been brought to a conclusion. I give it here because it is necessary in order to make the thread of the narrative complete.

Gladys was rather excited as she read the words. They had been written by Canning during the morning, long before he had any notion that he would be placed under arrest for murder.

And, following out his promise, he gave his fiancée some further information concerning the burglary he was to perform on behalf of Sir Hugh Dorrington. He treated the matter as a great joke.

"Of course you'll be worried," the letter ran. "But, my dear little girl, there's no need for you to concern yourself. I don't suppose there will be a ha'porth of danger in the enterprise. I have learned that the scene of my nefarious burglary is to be in

Fernwood Grove, Fulham—No. 35, to be exact. This is the residence of a cheerful gentleman named Daniel Bargrave, and my job is to get hold of a bundle of papers which are tied round with pretty pink ribbon—or tape, perhaps.

"I know most of the details, although I am to have another chat with Sir Hugh this evening, as you know. I'll tell you all about the papers when I see you to-morrow, darling. They are contained in an inlaid bureau in Bargrave's library. I can't make any mistake, because the window is the only one with the old-fashioned sashes; all of the others are of the lattice pattern.

"Don't breathe a word about this affair, or I'll have a most dire revenge upon you later on. It's only a trifle, Gladys, and there's really no danger of my getting into trouble. The house is empty, except for Bargrave himself, and I shall take good care to get busy when he's safely out of the way. And I don't mind doing the job a bit, because Bargrave is about the most unmitigated scoundrel unhung. It's pretty certain that he will be out of London to-night; that's why I'm going to make final arrangements with Sir Hugh. I want to get the thing over."

There was quite a deal of information in those three paragraphs, and Gladys knew well enough that it would be of great assistance to me. She remembered that I had asked her particularly for the name of the man, and the locality of his residence. And now, quite unexpectedly, she knew both.

"Oh, I must tell Mr. Blake," she murmured quickly. "He badly wants this information, and it might be ever so valuable to him. What a pity there's no telephone here."

She thought a few seconds, glanced at her watch, and then came to a decision. Gladys Ashley was a girl of action, and had a strong will of her own. The hour was late, but there were plenty of taxicabs still about, and, in any case, motor-buses.

The girl was already fully dressed, so she merely slipped her hat and jacket on, seized her bag, and passed quietly downstairs. Her idea was to go to Baker Street, and get back without letting her mother know, for Mrs. Ashley would certainly have endeavoured to persuade the girl to stay at home.

Gladys got out without difficulty, but was unsuccessful in obtaining a taxi. However, a motor-bus was soon bowling towards Baker Street, and the girl arrived sooner than she had anticipated.

Of course, she found Tinker and I were absent—at that particular time, in fact, we were over at Brentwood. Mrs. Bardell had retired to rest, and there was no answer to the girl's urgent ring.

"Oh, how annoying!" she murmured, compressing her lips. "It will have to wait until the morning, after all, and I know that Mr. Blake wants this information. What a pity I can't find him."

She waited on the other side of the road for a bus which would take her home. Having boarded it, she sat there very disappointed. The conductress came along and collected the fares from Gladys and another passenger who had entered at the same time.

"Fulham, please," said the other passenger.

The girl looked very thoughtful. So this bus was going to Fulham! Fernwood Grove was in Fulham, and she knew well enough that Frank had been unable to obtain those papers which were so vitally important.

Of course, Sir Hugh was dead now, but that meant very little difference. Bargrave was a scoundrel, and it was quite likely that he would make use of the documents even now. And Frank had told her how dreadfully important it was that the papers should be obtained.

And, since Frank was in the hands of the police, it was quite certain that he would be unable to perform his mission. Furthermore, Bargrave was out of London this evening, and his house was empty and deserted.

In her present excited state the girl was inclined to be reckless, and she actually conceived the daring idea of taking the documents herself!

The more she thought of it the more her determination grew. She was just longing to do something, to help in this mysterious business. And it would be simply splendid if she could hand Frank the documents when he was released. He must be worrying about them, and it would be an immense relief to know that the work had been accomplished.

And so, without really considering the risky nature of her venture, she impulsively made up her mind to go to Fernwood Grove, and to perform the work which Frank was unable to do.

She knew everything. She knew that the house was deserted; she knew which window to go to; she knew that the papers were contained in an inlaid bureau. Oh, it was surprisingly simple.

And she took another ticket and went to Fulham.

The conductress was able to set her down at the very end of Fernwood Grove. And as she walked down the quiet thoroughfare her determination was not quite so strong. It didn't seem so easy now. Sitting in the bus she felt capable of anything. But this darkness and silence rather unnerved her.

However, she made up her mind, and she would not ignominiously turn tail and go back. Fernwood Grove was a very select residential thoroughfare, with large houses on either side of the road, each house standing within its own grounds.

No. 35 was smaller than the others, and thick trees grew in the front garden. Having already decided what to do, the girl entered the gateway without hesitation. It looked better than waiting about in a state of indecision. Although, if it came to that, there was not a soul to watch her movements.

The house showed no light whatever, and this was added proof that Frank's information was correct—that Bargrave was not at home. The house, although old-fashioned, had been recently re-fitted, for all the front windows were of modern type, and the paint-work was fresh.

She could see this easily, for the moon was shining high in the sky, and not a single cloud was to be seen. A gentle breeze rustled the trees, and everything seemed strangely desolate. But this, of course, was all the better.

With fast beating heart—but with a very firm tread—the girl walked down the side path until she came to a trellis-work gate. This opened without trouble, and she passed through to the rear garden.

The moon was not shining on the back of the house, but she had no difficulty in immediately locating the study window. This bore evidences of having been recently painted, for the woodwork was white; but it was a large, old-fashioned window, whilst all the others were new.

Creeping close, she saw that the window was only secured by means of a very usual fastening. There was quite an amount of play between the two sashes, and a strong knife would push the catch back immediately.

But she had no strong knife, and she wondered if she dare smash a hole in one of the windows. Would the noise be too great? Would she bring a policeman upon the scene?

She finally rejected the idea, but at once changed her mind, which, considering that she was a girl, was not at all surprising. It must be acknowledged, however, that she had an excellent idea for changing her mind.

As she stood there, a deep pucker upon her pretty forehead, she heard a lumbering noise, growing ever nearer. It was caused, probably, by a motor-lorry, or a steam-wagon. At all events, the vehicle was passing down Fernwood Grove at some speed, and the noise it created was considerable.

Here was an opportunity!

Gladys remembered having seen an old broomstick lying against the wall, and she quickly ran to the spot and fetched it. And just as the lorry was rattling past the house, and the noise was at its maximum, she thrust the end of the stick through the window near the catch.

Surprisingly enough, the smash caused hardly any noise. If she had done it accidentally the din would have been appalling. But she thrust the broomstick with such good effect that it merely broke a clean hole through at the bottom of the pane, although, of course, the glass was starred in every direction.

"Oh, how splendid!" she told herself, holding her hand to her breast. She was breathing rather heavily under the stress of the excitement, and although she tried to tell herself that she was calm, she was really very frightened.

But all thoughts of turning back were now banished. The noisy lorry lumbered into the distance, and all became silent. That slight crash of glass had passed unnoticed, unless, of course, there was somebody within the house.

The girl waited for five tense minutes, concealing herself behind the bushes. This was a wise precaution on her part, although it wasn't necessary. Nothing happened, and at last she crept out, approached the window, and climbed upon the broad sill. It was a perfectly easy matter for her to thrust her dainty little hand within the aperture and pull back the catch.

Then she raised the sash without a sound,

and dropped into the room. The darkness was pitiful, and the air felt close and stuffy after the breeze of the night. And now there was another difficulty: she had no matches, nor any light of any kind whatever. So she pulled the curtains aside and waited.

Her eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, and gradually she made out certain objects in the room—the table, chairs, and pieces of furniture against the wall. Her chief attention, however, was directed towards the ceiling. She was very satisfied when she saw a neat bunch of electric lamps hanging down.

The switch, of course, was over by the door. She could see it distinctly now, and she memorised its position, and then pulled the heavy curtains closely to, so that no streak of light would penetrate outside.

Then, picking her way gently, she crossed the room and felt along the wall for the switch. She thought that she would be able to find it at once, but a full minute had elapsed before her fingers came in contact with the little brass bulb.

She pressed the switch down, and then closed her eyes tightly. The sudden glare of light was overpowering, and it was quite impossible for her to see during the first few seconds. But when she finally looked round she saw that she had entered the right apartment, for there, against the opposite wall, stood a beautiful inlaid bureau.

The curtains did not need touching, and she felt satisfied that no light was escaping. The apartment was a most comfortable one, and Mr. Bargrave obviously did not suffer from lack of funds.

The girl merely bestowed a cursory glance round; her chief attention was directed upon the bureau. She stepped lightly over towards it, her heart beating faster than ever. The bureau was locked, but this did not matter much. Upon one of the walls hung an old-fashioned dagger, and the girl took it down and ruthlessly smashed open the bureau. At a time like this she could not stand upon ceremony.

The flap being down, numerous pigeon-holes were revealed. And there, staring her in the face, was a neat bundle of papers, bound round with pink tape. It was the only bundle bound in that manner, and she knew that she had obtained her prize.

She seized the bundle with a little cry of joy—and then the door opened.

Daniel Bargrave stood there, and there was a moment of tense silence as man and girl faced one another.

It was really a most dramatic moment.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Nelson Lee and Nipper to the Rescue.

GLADYS ASHLEY was the first to recover her voice.

Her heart had been beating so rapidly that it seemed to thud against her ribs, and she was filled with alarm and consternation. Yet she did not lose her head. Having had sufficient nerve to enter the house, she had nerve enough to face the consequences without flinching.

"What—what are you doing here?" she asked in a low voice.

Even as she asked the question she knew how absurd it was. It was for him to make that query. Bargrave stepped into the room, closed the door, and locked it. He was dressed in a light suit of summer motor-cycling overalls, and was covered with dust from head to foot.

His face was ghastly in its pallor, and the latter was greatly intensified by the livid scratches across the cheeks—received whilst falling into the bush just outside Brentwood.

"You will stay just where you are, my lady!" he exclaimed in an unsteady voice, producing a revolver. "No, don't move. You needn't tell me why you have broken into my house like a thief in the night. You came for those documents. Give them to me. Bring them over here."

The girl took a deep breath.

"I will not!" she exclaimed tensely. "If you do not let me go at once I will scream—"

"You may scream to your heart's content," interjected Bargrave. "Nobody will hear, and there is no escape for you. I have never met you before, but I gather I am correct in surmising that you are the fiancée of Mr. Frank Canning. Very well. You shall suffer for this deliberate attempt at robbery."

"You will hand me to the police?" asked Gladys steadily.

"No, I'm not going to be so foolish as

that," he replied. "I have no great liking for the police—particularly just now. You see, I am quite frank with you. I have committed one murder this evening, so it will make very little difference if I repeat the performance. My punishment, if caught, cannot be increased. And it is most necessary that you should be prevented from leaving this house."

The girl could hardly bring herself to believe that he was talking seriously. But there was a deadly note in his voice—a kind of heaviness which denoted bodily exhaustion. He was in such a condition that he cared little what he did, and was absolutely ruthless.

And the very fact that he had openly confessed to the girl that he had committed a murder proved that he had not the slightest intention of allowing her to get away. And she, realising her terrible peril, decided to make a break for liberty. She was strong—he was weak. There was quite a distinct chance of success.

Careless of the threatening revolver, she dashed to the window, thrust aside the curtains, and attempted to climb out into the open. She took with her the documents she had come to obtain.

"No you don't, young lady—no you don't!" exclaimed Bargrave harshly.

He tore aside the curtain, grasped Gladys round the waist, and pulled her bodily backwards, exerting a surprising amount of strength. She staggered, caught her feet in the folds of the curtain, and fell.

And before she could rise again Bargrave had whipped his handkerchief round her neat ankles, and she was rendered quite helpless for the moment. Somehow or other she managed to struggle into a chair. It was altogether too undignified to lay sprawling upon the floor.

"Oh, you brute—you brute!" she panted.

"Very possibly," agreed Bargrave. "If I were not a brute I should not be safe at this moment. I do not intend to question you, or to hold any further conversation. I know why you came, and that is sufficient."

He picked up the bundle of papers and laid it upon the table. Then he fetched a ball of stout cord from a cupboard, and proceeded to tie the girl so securely into the chair that there was no hope of her getting out again. She didn't resist for resistance would be useless, and said nothing.

In truth, the girl had ceased being frightened, and was only interested—in a horrified kind of manner. The deliberate nature in which Bargrave performed his work proved that his threat had been no idle one. And he was physically weakened, and his actions were sluggish. It was only with the greatest difficulty that he made use of his right arm. It was thick with bandages near the wrist, and blood-stains showed on many portions of his overalls.

"There! I don't think you will be able to do much harm," he exclaimed, with cold satisfaction. "In case you try to cry out, I may as well tell you that no sound uttered in this room can reach the street; and after a few minutes you will be quite incapable of uttering any sound whatever!"

He gave a short chuckle, which sounded ghastly in the girl's ears. She realised now that she had been most unwise in coming upon this mission. But she had obeyed an impulse, and must now face the consequences. As it happened, Bargrave voluntarily explained how he had arrived upon the scene.

"You didn't think you would be surprised, did you?" he exclaimed, as he peeled off his overalls. "I entered the house by the front door, and knew, on the instant, that something was wrong. For a streak of light was showing under this doorway, and I at once made investigations. It is a great pity that you interfered, my fine lady. You will not have many minutes in which to regret your action."

Having discarded his overalls, he revealed the fact that he was attired in a grey tweed suit which did not show the dust—for a certain amount had naturally found its way beneath the overalls.

He picked up the bundle of documents and stowed them into his breast-pocket. Then he walked to the bureau, pulled out a cash-box from the top drawer, and revealed the fact that it was stuffed with currency notes and silver.

He transferred the bulk of this to his own pockets, and then took a final look round. Even as he did so he swayed slightly, and Gladys half expected to see him fall in a faint. The pallor of his cheeks was even more intensified than before; he looked almost deathlike, and his eyes were burning feverishly.

As a matter of fact, Daniel Bargrave would have collapsed long since had the circumstances been ordinary. He was only maintaining sufficient strength to move about by sheer effort of will, and by the knowledge that it was vitally necessary for him to do so.

His next move was to see that the window was securely fastened. And he took the trouble to place a large sheet of paper over the jagged hole in the glass. Then he doffed his hat, and looked round.

"You are surprisingly quiet, for a member of the feminine sex," he remarked mockingly. "However, it is quite a relief, since I am in no mood for conversation. I came here to obtain a supply of funds—and now I will leave. But there is just one little task to perform beforehand."

He stepped over to the fireplace, reached down and closed the register. The room was supplied with a gas fire of a large pattern, and this stood out in the fireplace. Normally the fumes would pass up the chimney, but Bargrave had detached the elbow of iron piping. As a result, all the fumes would now pass into the room.

But this was not Bargrave's plan. He turned the gas full on—and did not light it! It hissed into the room loudly, and with great force.

"The weather is quite mild," he remarked. "I do not think we need a fire—eh? And the gas itself will soon send you into a delightfully dreamless sleep, from which there will be no awakening."

Gladys wanted to cry out in horror; she wanted to shout for help. But if she did so it would only give this vile brute satisfaction. And so, by a great effort, she managed to keep quiet, although she had turned deathly pale.

Bargrave walked across the room, switched out the light, and locked the door. Then he made his way down the dark hall, reached the front door, and let himself out. As he was walking down the broad steps he swayed again, but set his teeth and pulled himself together.

And at that exact moment a motor-car pulled up with a jerk precisely opposite his gateway. Two figures leapt out. Nelson Lee and Nipper had arrived! They had originally intended approaching with caution. But in the moonlight Lee had distinctly caught a glimpse of Bargrave closing the door.

Both Lee and Nipper entered the gateway, and hurried up the drive. Bargrave, who saw them, was under no delusion as to what this meant. He rapped out an angry snarl of exasperation, and fled.

He raced across the grass, evidently intending to escape by means of another garden.

"After him!" shouted Nelson Lee quickly.

Nipper needed no bidding. He was running rapidly, and easily overhauling the fugitive. Lee himself was making similar efforts. And just then Bargrave stumbled forward—his foot had caught upon an unseen root—and he went crashing to the ground. He lay quite still.

When Lee and Nipper arrived they found the man upon his face. A few brief glances were sufficient to show that Bargrave was unconscious. The sudden excitement and the race for liberty had proved too much for him. He had fainted.

"Take hold, Nipper!" said Lee crisply.

"Well, this chap's a rummy customer," remarked Nipper. "This is the second time we've carried him about. But, I say, he's looking pretty bad now, sir. He wasn't so pale as this after the bike accident."

"The excitement has been telling on him," said Lee. "In my opinion, the man will be dead within a week—his body can't stand it. How on earth he has managed to keep up so long is a staggering mystery."

They carried him to the front steps, and here paused whilst Lee took the door-key from Bargrave's pocket. The detective felt something else, too.

"A revolver," he exclaimed. "I wonder where he obtained it? From within the house probably."

Lee was not aware that Bargrave had used that revolver upon Tinker and myself less than two hours before. We afterwards discovered that the weapon had been concealed in a little tool-bag almost hidden by the bicycle saddle. Nipper had overlooked this in his examination of the machine.

Bargrave was carried into the house, and the door was closed.

"Into this front room," said Lee. "No—we'd better go into one of the rear apartments, I think. Switch on your torch, Nipper."

Nipper did so, and the light revealed a door at the end of the hall.

"That room will do, young 'un—"
"There's a terrific niff of gas, sir," remarked Nipper, sniffing loudly. "Looks as though Bargrave—"

"Quiet—quiet!" interrupted Lee sharply.
"Help—oh, help!" came a distinct, choking cry from beyond the end door. It was in a girlish voice, and Lee and Nipper, exchanging rather startled glances, allowed Bargrave to sink to the floor without much ceremony. They had certainly not been expecting anything of this nature.

"That was a girl!" said Nipper quickly.
"Yes, and in sore distress, too!" was Lee's remark.

They both strode forward, flung open the door, and then started backwards. A great wave of gas surged out upon them, overpowering in its volume and odour. Nipper backed away, but Lee sprang forward, switched on the electric light, and instantly saw what the trouble was.

"Good heavens!" he muttered furiously.
"The brute—the infernal brute!"

"I'll open the window, guv'nor!" gasped Nipper.

He did so whilst his master turned off the gas, and flung back the register of the stove, allowing more draught to circulate through the room.

"Now, Nipper, lend a hand!" rapped out Lee.

But Nipper's knife was already out, slashing through the cords which bound Gladys Ashley to the chair. She was not unconscious, although dazed and terribly pale. And she was quite incapable of speech.

"Straight outside, Nipper," said Lee. "There's nothing wrong only partial asphyxiation, and fresh air is all she needs. Ten minutes of the night breeze will work wonders."

As it turned out, Gladys was fully conscious after five minutes had elapsed. And she was feeling dreadfully sick and ill. But this passed off fairly soon, and left only a bad headache.

"Oh, I don't know how to thank you!" she exclaimed fervently. "That terrible man meant to kill me. Will you call the police? He is the man who murdered Sir Hugh Dorrington—he actually told me so—"

"My name is Lee, and I am working in conjunction with Mr. Sexton Blake," explained the Gray's Inn Road detective. "I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Gladys Ashley?"

"Then—then we're not quite strangers?" said the girl eagerly.

"Mr. Blake mentioned your visit, and I am in full possession of all the facts," said Lee. "Nipper and I came here at Mr. Blake's request, on the off-chance of catching Bargrave. By a remarkable coincidence we arrived just as he was leaving the house."

"Then you captured him?"

"Nipper is with him now," explained the detective. "The man tried to escape, but collapsed. When you feel well enough to come indoors, Miss Ashley, we will exchange notes. You must not think me inquisitive if I ask you why you are in this house?"

"I shall tell you everything, Mr. Lee," said Gladys, almost tearfully. "Oh, I have been so foolish—and I really have no excuse to offer. I—I hope you won't think so very badly of me."

Exactly twenty minutes later Nelson Lee knew all that there was to be known. He did not think badly of Miss Ashley; on the contrary, he was of the opinion that Miss Ashley had displayed wonderful courage and determination—and he did not hesitate to tell her so.

The bundle of papers was secured, and Lee pocketed it. He made no attempt to examine the contents of the bundle. And he only took them because the girl requested him to do so.

"I feel that I have expressed my gratitude in a very poor fashion, Mr. Lee," said Gladys after a while. "You saved my life, and—"

"Really, Miss Ashley, I did nothing of the sort—if I may presume to contradict you," said Lee smoothly. "Nipper and I heard your cry and simply took you into the open air. There was nothing praiseworthy in that action, and I beg of you not to refer to the matter. And, upon the whole, I don't think it would be quite wise to let this aspect of the case be known to the police. You would

be subjected to much disagreeable examination, and there is really no need for you to appear in the case."

"I would much prefer to go home at once Mr. Lee," said the girl. "When I think of it all, I feel positively shocked. But I am very glad I came, because it must have delayed Bargrave for some little time—and that allowed you to capture him."

"Everything has worked very swimmingly," Lee agreed. "As for Bargrave himself, I am afraid we shall not get much out of him to-night. To my mind, he looks like a dying man, and there is just a possibility that he will go off without recovering consciousness—and that would be very awkward. I intend to send Nipper for the police ambulance at once, and have only delayed so that you may have the chance to get safely out of the way."

"You are very kind, Mr. Lee."

"Hallo, people!" exclaimed another voice. "Why, what the dickens—"

The new-comer was Tinker. He had just marched in, having been admitted by Nipper unknown to Lee. Nipper had gone out to fetch something from the car. And he was gratified by the sight of another car coming down the road—with myself at the wheel.

Tinker and I had had no idea that things were so satisfactory at Fernwood Grove, but we had come here because it offered the only possible point for continuing the investigation.

"Why, Tinker, this is splendid!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Where's your guv'nor? And what on earth have you been doing to your face?"

"Don't ask me—ask the surface of the Brentwood road!" replied Tinker. "I—I'm awfully sorry, Miss Ashley. I didn't know you were here, or I wouldn't have come in. Has anybody got a mask?"

It was some few moments before things were sorted out. Tinker didn't actually need a mask, but his face was badly grazed, and did not look improved by a layer of dust, and by the fact that he had had no opportunity of washing.

Within a very short time Lee had explained to me all that had occurred at this end, and I was extremely gratified. It was then my turn to describe the adventures of Tinker and I at Brentwood.

"We were both rather badly bowled over," I explained, after describing the excitement with Bargrave. "Tinker suffered the most, by far—for this graze on my head is a mere trifle. Tinker was half-stunned, and it's a wonder to me that his spine wasn't broken. It only adds to my conviction that he is mainly composed of indiarubber!"

"Steady on, guv'nor!" remarked Tinker. "I can stand a worse fall than that, I can tell you! But I want to see Bargrave—I'm quite anxious to plant my fist squarely upon his nose!"

"I'm afraid you can't have that satisfaction, Tinker," said Lee. "Bargrave has collapsed, and it's my belief that he's dying. You'd better come and have a look at him, Blake. But how did you get here so soon?"

"Walked back to Brentwood and hired a car," I replied shortly.

We passed into another room, leaving Tinker with Miss Ashley. And a very brief examination of Mr. Daniel Bargrave convinced me that Lee's diagnosis was correct. The fellow was terribly weak, and sinking rapidly.

"We mustn't waste a minute, Lee," I said briskly. "Pack Nipper off with Miss Ashley at once, and then we can fetch the police ambulance. I hope Bargrave won't die without making a statement—"

"By Jove! I believe he's coming to!" interjected Lee.

"I sincerely hope so," I said, bending over the unconscious man. "He's consumptive, Lee, and he's lost an enormous amount of blood. All this excitement, on top of such exhaustion, will prove fatal. He simply can't recover!"

As I spoke, Bargrave's eyelids flickered, and five minutes later he was fully conscious. Brandy had helped him to partially recover, but his eyes were feverish and glassy-looking.

"I thought you'd be in this affair, Lee," he exclaimed weakly. "It was a cursed misfortune that you ran across me on the Brentwood road. And Blake, too! Oh, yes, I recognise you! I'm not quite unconscious. And you needn't tell me that I'm going to die—I know it!"

"And perhaps you know that Mr. Frank Canning is in the hands of the police, and

that he is to be charged with the murder of Sir Hugh Dorrington?" I said quietly. "Perhaps you know that, Mr. Bargrave?"

He shook his head slightly.
"No, I didn't know that," he muttered. "I didn't want to get anybody else into trouble. Will you give me some more of that brandy? I've been a fool—I've been mad. This rushing about has killed me. I ought to have taken it quietly. But I flew into a panic— Thank you!"

He gulped the brandy down, and breathed heavily. Then he fell into a violent fit of coughing—coughing which was ghastly to listen to. But at last the paroxysm was over, and he lay back weakly.

"You are dying, Bargrave," I said, drawing my chair closer to him. "If you were not, you would be charged with attempted murder. It was your intention to kill Miss Ashley, and I believe you tried to kill me. Hadn't you better confess that you fired the fatal shot at Sir Hugh Dorrington?"

"I do confess it," said Bargrave. "It matters nothing to me—now. Yes, I killed the old man. I meant to. I went there especially to kill him. But my plans went wrong. Yes, yes, I will write it down."

It was a long, slow job; but Daniel Bargrave wrote a full confession of his crime, and signed it—in the presence of three witnesses. And after that there was much activity. At my suggestion, Lee and Nipper went along to Baker Street, so that we should be able to have a long talk afterwards. Miss Ashley begged that she might accompany them, for I had stated my intention of bringing Canning along, if it could be managed.

An ambulance was sent for, and Bargrave was taken away in a delirious condition. I fully expected him to die before the morning. As it turned out, the murderer passed out of this life just at dawn—beyond the reach of all earthly retribution.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Clearing Up the Details—Conclusion.

CHIEF DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR LENNARD was just on the point of going home when Tinker and I entered his office at Scotland Yard.

He was grumpy and ill-tempered, which wasn't very surprising. He had been hard at it since the hour of the murder, and he could not boast that he had discovered much. And he was greatly troubled by the thought that he had got hold of the wrong man.

"Hallo, you here again, Blake," he said growlingly. "This is no hour for respectable people to be out of bed. You're looking rather lively, aren't you? What's the matter? I'm dog-tired, and fed up to the neck!"

And Lennard yawned sleepily.

"There was a little question of a supper at the Savoy," I said briskly. "You gave me until to-morrow night, Lennard; but I'm an impatient beggar! I couldn't wait until then—"

"You haven't got Canning out of our hands yet!" interjected the chief-inspector. "He'll be out within thirty minutes!" I declared.

"Will he?" growled Lennard. "If an earthquake happens, perhaps—not without. I'm not in the mood for joking, Blake!"

"Neither am I," I replied. "But if you will pull yourself together, and wipe those sleep-tears from your eyes, I'll hand over the full confession of Mr. Daniel Bargrave, of Fernwood Grove, Fulham. Bargrave killed Sir Hugh Dorrington, and he has been good enough to write and sign a statement. You'll find it quite in order, old man. And Bargrave himself is in the infirmary—dying."

The inspector stared at me blankly.

"You're serious?" he demanded, compressing his lips.

"Read this," I answered.

Lenard took the confession, read it, and whistled. Then he listened without a word while I told the main facts. I did not think it necessary to mention that Miss Gladys Ashley had visited the house at Fulham, and that she had played a big part in capturing the murderer; she was not anxious to receive any credit.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Lennard at last. "This is good enough, of course. I'll stand you that supper willingly. I'm bothered

if I can understand how you got on the track so quickly. You've knocked spots off me this time, old man."

"And Canning will be released—at once?" I asked.

"I'll come along with you to Bow Street now," replied the inspector briskly. "I'll have the fellow released on my own responsibility. By George! This is splendid! I'm downright glad Canning is cleared."

We had the hired car with us, and we arrived at Bow Street in next to no time—after Lennard had stirred up a few people at Scotland Yard, and had been busy with the 'phone for a few minutes.

Canning, of course, had retired for the night; but he was up and dressed in record time. He received the glad news with sparkling eyes, and grasped my hand warmly.

"I knew that you would do wonders, Mr. Blake," he said with enthusiasm. "Directly I learned that you were on the scene, I felt sure that I was safe—although I didn't expect to be freed so quickly. These muddle-headed police—"

"Don't mind me," said Lennard. "I like compliments."

"I wasn't including you, Mr. Lennard," explained Canning, smiling. "It was that infernal police-sergeant who made me angry. He arrested me, you remember, while I was chasing the murderer. If I hadn't been stopped—"

"Well, it's no good blaming the poor man," said the inspector. "He did what he considered to be his duty, and you must admit that appearances were against you. I'm sorry you were detained, but you haven't come to any harm. Try, as the years roll by, to forgive me."

Canning grinned. "I've forgiven you already—and that sergeant, too," he declared. "I suppose you'll want me again, of course? There'll be an inquest, won't there?"

"Very probably," said Lennard drily. "Yes, we shall certainly want you again. But you needn't stop now. I know your address, and I'll let you know when you're wanted. Good-night, Mr. Canning."

We carried him off with us, and soon arrived at Baker Street. For fully ten minutes I engaged the attention of Nelson Lee and Nipper in my laboratory, and Tinker was doing his best to make himself look respectable. Meanwhile, of course, Canning and Miss Ashley had the consulting-room to themselves; and they full appreciated the little attention.

The girl was radiant when we returned. The colour had returned to her cheeks, and she showed no sign of her dreadful adventure in the gas-choked room at Fulham. The one fact that Canning was released—a free man—made her supremely happy.

"We have all taken part in this little affair," I said, when Lee and Canning and I had lighted cigars—with Miss Ashley's per-

mission. "It has been quite an exciting episode, and it is not quite cleared up yet. I shall be very glad, Mr. Canning, if you will fill in the gaps."

The young man nodded.

"Your hint isn't necessary, Mr. Blake," he said. "You want to know, of course, why I intended entering Bargrave's house, and what I was doing with Sir Hugh, wearing a mask? Well, I can tell you in a very few words. I'm terribly upset about my uncle's death; but all this other trouble has overshadowed it."

"Sir Hugh came into my office, in Victoria Street, about a week ago for the first time," went on Canning. "He was obliged to introduce himself to me, for I had not seen him since I was a little child. He was in great trouble, and came to me because he believed that I could help him. You may remember Mr. Reginald Dorrington, who occupied an important position in the late Government, some years ago?"

"The name is certainly familiar to me," I assented.

"Reginald Dorrington was my cousin, and Sir Hugh's son," explained Canning. "And now I intend to reveal a secret—a disgraceful, appalling secret. I know well enough that I can do so safely. Reginald proved unworthy of his trust. In short, he was mixed up in certain matters which stamped him a traitor to his country."

"Dear me!" I said gently. "Then he was, indeed, unworthy."

"My uncle's heart was nearly broken," proceeded Canning. "Reginald fled, although the actual truth was never made public. He fled to the United States, and retribution overtook him on the trip—for the vessel foundered in mid-Atlantic, with all hands. Reginald's wife was—and is—a good woman, the daughter of one of the best families in England. The world never knew the truth regarding Reginald Dorrington, and so his poor wife was never persecuted—as she certainly would have been persecuted if it had become known that her husband had been a traitor to his King."

"I really don't know when Daniel Bargrave first appeared, but I believe he approached my uncle soon after Reginald's death. Bargrave, it appears, had obtained possession of documents which proved—and proved to the hilt—that Reginald had been in the pay of a foreign Power, and that he had betrayed official secrets. Using these documents as a lever, Bargrave went to Sir Hugh. He demanded money, and threatened to publish the truth broadcast unless my uncle paid up."

"That's just what I suspected, sir," remarked Tinker, nodding. "Bargrave was a rotten blackmailer—a worm of the most beastly type."

"Your description is absolutely fitting, Tinker," said Canning. "Bargrave had my uncle in his power. For Sir Hugh had not

only his own name to think about; there was his son's wife—one of the sweetest women on earth. The family name would have been cast into the mire if Bargrave had carried out his vile threat."

"And Sir Hugh paid?"

"Times without number," said Canning. "My poor uncle has practically kept Bargrave in the greatest luxury for years. The scoundrel was always receiving money—and always demanding more. But just recently—within the last month, I believe—Sir Hugh obtained evidence which would positively convict Bargrave of criminal blackmail. He couldn't use that evidence while Bargrave possessed the documents."

"I quite understand," I said; and Nelson Lee nodded.

"And so my uncle came to me, and told me the whole miserable truth," explained Canning quietly. "He begged me to enter Bargrave's house, and obtain those papers. He gave me much information, and assured me that the task would not be difficult. With those papers burnt Bargrave would be helpless—and then Sir Hugh could prosecute."

"And you?" I asked. "What did you say?"

"I was furious at the whole affair," replied Canning. "I told my uncle he ought to have come to me before. I told him that I was only too delighted to help him, and instantly agreed to 'burgle' Bargrave's house. I was enthusiastic about it, and wanted to rush off that very night. But Sir Hugh calmed me down, and we agreed to meet this evening, to discuss the final plans. As you know, Bargrave came and killed my poor uncle before those plans could materialise."

"But not before Sir Hugh had made a fresh will, leaving all his money to you," I said. "Your uncle was evidently delighted with the splendid spirit in which you greeted his suggestion. Burglary of that sort, Mr. Canning, is quite permissible. Certainly you had no other avenue. As for Bargrave, it is quite evident that he discovered his danger, and he decided to shoot your uncle before he could produce the evidence. He thought that Sir Hugh was alone, and he would have probably been completely successful if you had not been present."

Gladys Ashley caught hold of Canning's arm.

"How glad I am you were there, Frank," she said softly. "It was dreadful at first; but everything is all right now, isn't it?"

"Yes, everything, little girl," replied Canning—"thanks to Mr. Blake and Mr. Lee. Bargrave killed my uncle, but he killed himself at the same time. He has reaped his full reward for his sins."

And that, I think, is all that need be said.

THE END.

THE RED RAIDERS!

A THRILLING NEW STORY OF BUFFALO BILL'S BOYHOOD.

By the Author of "The King of Scouts," etc., etc.

Specially written for the "Union Jack Library."

THE OPENING INSTALMENTS.

Bill Cody, or Buffalo Bill, whilst on a lone-some trapping expedition in the wildest parts of North America, rescues Sylvia Farrell from the clutches of an Indian trader, Gideon Starke, with whom, against her will, she engaged to be married. Cody takes her under his protection, and they make for a path through the Big Horn Mountains. They are attacked by Redskins whilst sheltering in a prospector's cabin. The boy manages to escape and return with cavalry, only to find the cabin burnt and Sylvia missing. Seeking round, they find the girl in an exhausted condition, just as a shot is fired and a mounted man falls.

(Now read on.)

Following the Trail.

He was dead, a bullet having penetrated his brain. The shot had been fired from the opposite side of the stream, and a curl of smoke, rising from a large copse of bushes

and stunted trees, indicated the spot from whence it had come.

"I'll settle with that varmint, sir!" cried a trooper named Kelly, who was noted as an Indian tracker and fighter. "Leave him to me! I'll get him!"

With that he dug spurs, and urged his horse into the shallow water. He went splashing across, and he had no more than reached the other bank when a painted warrior astride of a mustang appeared behind the copse of cover, riding to the west. And now the little party on the east bank—none of the others had joined the pursuit—beheld a thrilling spectacle that held them spellbound. The Sioux was losing in the race. The trooper gained on him, and rapidly at that, until he was within thirty yards. The Redskin drew rein and swung round. At the same instant Trooper Kelly stopped his steed, and both simultaneously discharged their weapons. The mustang fell, and the warrior, falling with it, scrambled to his feet unhurt, and levelled his gun. The soldier's rifle was as quickly to his shoulder. He fired first, and with a screech of agony

the Sioux bounded in the air, and dropped like a log. The spectators cheered loudly, and Sylvia, who had been watching the contest with fearsome fascination, excitedly clutched the lad's arm.

"Oh, he has killed him!" she cried. "He is a fine shot, that chap!" declared Bill Cody.

"Where is he going? To see if the Indian is dead?"

"I reckon he's going to him for something more than that, Sylvia. It's too far off for you to see, though."

Having reached the prostrate figure, Trooper McKay knelt by it, and drew a knife from his belt. There was a flash of curving steel, and a glimpse of a dangling, hairy object. The soldier rose to his feet, possessed of a trophy which it was the custom to take in those days.

He walked back several yards, to where he had left his horse when he dismounted, and then, instead of returning to his comrades, he held to the opposite direction, leading the animal by the bridle.

"Where is he going, sir?" one of the men inquired of the captain.

"He is looking for the trail, I imagine," Captain Crofter replied. "We will wait here till he comes back."

Trooper Kelly was still moving on, very slowly, and with lowered head. He paused now and again, and appeared to be scanning the ground. And at length, when he had got to a distance of half a mile, he passed over a low ridge, and was lost to sight.

"He must have had the trail of the band when he started," said Sergeant McKay. "Kelly is the smartest kind of a chap at

scouting and at reading Indian signs, and I'll bet he'll have something to tell us when he returns."

The clouds had cleared from the sky, and the sun was beating down fiercely. All the soldiers dismounted, and stretched themselves beneath the spreading boughs of the trees; and Sylvia, seated in the shadow of a boulder with the lad by her side, listened to an account of his night journey to Red Gulch, while the two gazed to the west.

More than an hour elapsed, and Captain Crofter was beginning to feel apprehensive when the absent trooper appeared over the crest of the ridge, astride of his horse. Riding at a gallop, he splashed across the stream, and drew rein. And, in silence, with all eyes bent upon him, he swung from the saddle, and exhibited what he had brought with him. He put on a flat stone a gun, a knife, and a tomahawk, and the keening scalp he had torn from the head of his victim. He next displayed to view a curiously-carved pipe of red-stone, and then drew from his pocket a string of wampum.

The captain frowned as he glanced at the ghastly trophy.

"You shouldn't have taken that," he said. "I don't like it."

"It's the usual thing, sir," Trooper Kelly replied. "I'm sorry if it's contrary to orders."

"Well, no, it isn't. I wish you wouldn't do it again, though. Where have you been so long, and what have you learned?"

"I've been a good stretch yonder, sir, and I've learned one or two things that won't be pleasant hearing. I reckon you won't be keen on chasing the Redskins. And, what's more, you'll agree with me that we had better be heading for the fort without wasting much time."

"What do you mean, Kelly? Explain yourself."

The trooper was filling his pipe. There was a grave expression on his face, and it was evident that he had something serious to communicate. He lit the tobacco, and pointed to the scalp.

"That's a Sioux trophy, sir, as you can see," he said quietly. "The Sioux whom I shot was with a band of thirty—I could tell that by the signs—and they rode to the westward from where I brought my warrior down. I followed their trail over the ridge and on for half a mile, until I discovered that another band of Sioux, who had come from the north, had joined the first lot. That's what they were, because I pushed along their tracks for a few yards, and picked up this bunch of Sioux wampum."

"How many of them were there?" inquired Captain Crofter. "Do you know?"

"I can tell you almost to a certainty, sir. There were, roughly, about six score of them."

"So many as that? Go on! What else?"

"I pushed westward for another half-mile, sir, and observed that a third band of Redskins, who also came from the north, had joined the two other bands. And they numbered about two score."

"Forty more Sioux, Kelly! The country must be swarming with them!"

"They weren't Sioux, sir, as it happens. The third lot were Pawnees."

"Pawnees!" echoed the captain. "You are mistaken, surely?"

"Indeed I am not, sir!" Trooper Kelly declared. "I am right, and there is the proof of it! Look at that red-stone pipe, which I found a little way along the third trail. It belonged to a Pawnee warrior. I can swear to that from the carving!"

There was a brief interval of silence. All of the men were keenly interested in what they had been told, and their faces showed chagrin and disappointment, though they were not inclined to be alarmed as yet. They were chagrined because it appeared now that they must abandon their hopes of a victorious fight with the Indians.

"This is aggravating news," said Captain Crofter. "Did the Pawnees join the united bands of Sioux, Kelly?"

"They did, sir," the trooper answered. "They all rode on to the west in one band. I held to their trail for a short distance, and then I returned."

"How long have they been on the move? You can give me an idea, I suppose?"

"As nearly as I can judge, sir, the first lot started three hours ago. There was no stop when they joined the second lot of Sioux, or when they fell in with the band of Pawnees."

"Well, I'm glad to think that they are not anywhere in the vicinity now. There are only a score of us, while the Redskins,

according to your calculations, number a hundred and ninety in all."

"Yes, sir; that's about right. You can depend on it."

Sylvia looked uneasily at the lad, who was rather troubled, as were his companions. The meaning of Trooper Kelly's statements was obvious to him, and so it was to the rest of the party, to whom he had that morning related the adventures he and the girl had met with before they reached the prospector's cabin. Various bands of Sioux had been scattered about the country, searching for the young fugitives. After their departure from the Pawnee camp Gideon Starke and Black Snake had, by means of smoke-signals, communicated with and joined one party of the Sioux, and had worked round with them to the valley behind the mountain barrier. As they were leaving the scene of their bloody work they had been joined by another and much larger band of Sioux, who had probably also read the smoke-signals. Not long afterwards they had fallen in with the chief Yellow Bear and his Pawnee warriors, and they had all joined company amicably and pushed on to the west. Such were the inferences to be drawn from the discoveries that had been made by the trooper from his knowledge of scouting. There were a couple of points, however, which had not occurred to any of the party excepting Kelly. Even Bill Cody had missed them, shrewd though he was.

"Confound the luck!" grumbled the captain, shrugging his shoulders irritably. "Everything has gone wrong with us this trip! Two hundred hostile Redskins! Even if the Pawnees were to strike out for themselves that would leave about a hundred and sixty of the Sioux. We can't give chase to them with such a small force. It's not to be thought of!"

"No, sir, it's not to be thought of," assented Sergeant McKay. "It would be sheer folly, and it would end in our being cut to bits."

"Well, sergeant, we must abandon the pursuit."

"Which it goes against the grain with me to do, sir. It can't be helped, though."

Trooper Kelly had been smoking in thoughtful silence, the while he scanned the horizon to the westward. He had been listening to the conversation, and his face was very grave as he swung round.

"It's more than a question of dropping the pursuit, sir," he said. "If you will take my advice you will make tracks for the fort at once."

"You think danger threatens us?" asked Captain Crofter.

"I do, sir, and for good reasons. Why didn't the Sioux, who massacred Mason and the prospector, look for the girl's trail? If they had they would have found it, and she would have been caught and carried off."

"I dare say they were under the impression that her body was in the ruins of the cabin, Kelly."

"I doubt if they were under that impression, sir. There is another point. Why was that Sioux warrior I shot left behind?"

"That's a poser for me, I will admit. I can't answer the question."

"It shouldn't be difficult, sir. I will give you my opinion, and I think you will take the same view that I do. You must remember that the Sioux saw the body of poor Mason in his uniform."

"Ah, that's true!" said the captain, with a troubled look creeping into his eyes as he spoke. "It is a significant point which stupidly did not occur to me. Go on!"

"Well, sir, I regard it in this way," Trooper Kelly continued. "Being aware that it was one of our soldiers they had killed, the Sioux would naturally have judged that there were a lot more of us somewhere in the neighbourhood, that Mason had wandered away from us, and that we would soon be coming to search for him. That is why they didn't waste any time in looking for the girl. It was in the hope of having a chance to set a trap for us that they hastily departed, leaving one of their number behind with instructions to watch for us, and to follow them up as soon as he had got a glimpse of us."

"It sounds plausible, Kelly. More than plausible. But why did the rascal so recklessly spoil his opportunity by firing that shot? I can't account for it."

"I can, sir. The Redskin expected us to arrive from the south, where we would have been in sight a long way off, and we took him by surprise when we rode quietly down to the valley from the east. Knowing that we would be coming over there, and that he

must be seen when he took to flight, he let fly at us from sheer devilry. He calculated on being able to escape on his mustang, but he had me to reckon with."

Trooper Kelly was right. There could be no doubt of it. His clear, logical arguments had struck conviction to every heart, and there was not a man but realised that the situation must be regarded as critical in the extreme. The Sioux and the Pawnees, having learned that there was a force of soldiers in the vicinity, were waiting for their slain messenger to bring them news of them, and they had possibly heard the shots that had been fired. That was improbable, else they should have appeared by now. But it was certain, at all events, that cunning, insidious peril was brewing.

"I am frightened," said Sylvia, who had overheard all of the conversation. "Are we in danger, Billie?"

"It looks a bit like it," the lad assented, trying to speak cheerfully. "I guess we'll pull through, though. The Redskins can't know where we are yet."

Captain Crofter was seriously alarmed, intrepid soldier though he was. He scanned the western horizon again with his glasses, and his brows were knit with anxiety as he lowered them.

"I wish I knew how near the red devils are to us, Kelly!" he muttered.

"I should judge that they are at a distance of half a dozen miles," the trooper replied. "They would hardly have gone farther than that."

"If they are no nearer we can give them the slip."

(To be continued.)

WARNING TO READERS.

Owing to the Government's Paper Restrictions it is **ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL** that you should give Your Newsagent a Standing Order for the **UNION JACK LIBRARY.**

YOU SHOULD ALL READ

Next Week's Magnificent Tale of Detective Work and Thrilling Adventure, entitled:

"THE CASE OF THE CLUBFOOTED MAN."

Prominent Parts are Played by The Bat and The Mysterious Mr. Reece, the Story being Specially Written for the **UNION JACK** by the Author of "The Lost Letter," "The Mid-Ocean Mystery," "The Amazing Mystery of Frederic Fennell," "The Bogus Bat," "A Case of Arson," etc., etc.

—:o:—

Don't fail to get it! By ordering in advance you ensure yourself a treat.