Project Gutenberg's The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, by Arthur Conan Doyle

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THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

by

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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ADVENTURE I. A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA

I.

To Sherlock Holmes she is always THE woman. I have seldom heard

him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses

and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt

any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that

one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but

admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect

reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a

lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never

spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They

were admirable things for the observer--excellent for drawing the

veil from men's motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner

to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely

adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which

might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. Grit in a

sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power

lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a

nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and

that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable

memory.

I had seen little of Holmes lately. My marriage had drifted us

away from each other. My own complete happiness, and the

home-centred interests which rise up around the man who first

finds himself master of his own establishment, were sufficient to

absorb all my attention, while Holmes, who loathed every form of

society with his whole Bohemian soul, remained in our lodgings in

Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from

week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the

drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature. He was still,

as ever, deeply attracted by the study of crime, and occupied his

immense faculties and extraordinary powers of observation in

following out those clues, and clearing up those mysteries which

had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police. From time

to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons

to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up

of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee,

and finally of the mission which he had accomplished so

delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland.

Beyond these signs of his activity, however, which I merely

shared with all the readers of the daily press, I knew little of

my former friend and companion.

One night--it was on the twentieth of March, 1888--I was

returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to

civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street. As I

passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated

in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the

Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes

again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers.

His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw

his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against

the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head

sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who

knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their

own story. He was at work again. He had risen out of his

drug-created dreams and was hot upon the scent of some new

problem. I rang the bell and was shown up to the chamber which

had formerly been in part my own.

His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I

think, to see me. With hardly a word spoken, but with a kindly

eye, he waved me to an armchair, threw across his case of cigars,

and indicated a spirit case and a gasogene in the corner. Then he

stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular

introspective fashion.

"Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have

put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you."

"Seven!" I answered.

"Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more,

I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not

tell me that you intended to go into harness."

"Then, how do you know?"

"I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting

yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and

careless servant girl?"

"My dear Holmes," said I, "this is too much. You would certainly

have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true

that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful

mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can't imagine how you

deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has

given her notice, but there, again, I fail to see how you work it

out."

He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands

together.

"It is simplicity itself," said he; "my eyes tell me that on the

inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it,

the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they

have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round

the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it.

Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile

weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting

specimen of the London slavey. As to your practice, if a

gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of iodoform, with a black

mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge

on the right side of his top-hat to show where he has secreted

his stethoscope, I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce

him to be an active member of the medical profession."

I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his

process of deduction. "When I hear you give your reasons," I

remarked, "the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously

simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each

successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you

explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good

as yours."

"Quite so," he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing

himself down into an armchair. "You see, but you do not observe.

The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen

the steps which lead up from the hall to this room."

"Frequently."

"How often?"

"Well, some hundreds of times."

"Then how many are there?"

"How many? I don't know."

"Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is

just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps,

because I have both seen and observed. By-the-way, since you are

interested in these little problems, and since you are good

enough to chronicle one or two of my trifling experiences, you

may be interested in this." He threw over a sheet of thick,

pink-tinted note-paper which had been lying open upon the table.

"It came by the last post," said he. "Read it aloud."

The note was undated, and without either signature or address.

"There will call upon you to-night, at a quarter to eight

o'clock," it said, "a gentleman who desires to consult you upon a

matter of the very deepest moment. Your recent services to one of

the royal houses of Europe have shown that you are one who may

safely be trusted with matters which are of an importance which

can hardly be exaggerated. This account of you we have from all

quarters received. Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do

not take it amiss if your visitor wear a mask."

"This is indeed a mystery," I remarked. "What do you imagine that

it means?"

"I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before

one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit

theories, instead of theories to suit facts. But the note itself.

What do you deduce from it?"

I carefully examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was

written.

"The man who wrote it was presumably well to do," I remarked,

endeavouring to imitate my companion's processes. "Such paper

could not be bought under half a crown a packet. It is peculiarly

strong and stiff."

"Peculiar--that is the very word," said Holmes. "It is not an

English paper at all. Hold it up to the light."

I did so, and saw a large "E" with a small "g," a "P," and a

large "G" with a small "t" woven into the texture of the paper.

"What do you make of that?" asked Holmes.

"The name of the maker, no doubt; or his monogram, rather."

"Not at all. The 'G' with the small 't' stands for

'Gesellschaft,' which is the German for 'Company.' It is a

customary contraction like our 'Co.' 'P,' of course, stands for

'Papier.' Now for the 'Eg.' Let us glance at our Continental

Gazetteer." He took down a heavy brown volume from his shelves.

"Eglow, Eglonitz--here we are, Egria. It is in a German-speaking

country--in Bohemia, not far from Carlsbad. 'Remarkable as being

the scene of the death of Wallenstein, and for its numerous

glass-factories and paper-mills.' Ha, ha, my boy, what do you

make of that?" His eyes sparkled, and he sent up a great blue

triumphant cloud from his cigarette.

"The paper was made in Bohemia," I said.

"Precisely. And the man who wrote the note is a German. Do you

note the peculiar construction of the sentence--'This account of

you we have from all quarters received.' A Frenchman or Russian

could not have written that. It is the German who is so

uncourteous to his verbs. It only remains, therefore, to discover

what is wanted by this German who writes upon Bohemian paper and

prefers wearing a mask to showing his face. And here he comes, if

I am not mistaken, to resolve all our doubts."

As he spoke there was the sharp sound of horses' hoofs and

grating wheels against the curb, followed by a sharp pull at the

bell. Holmes whistled.

"A pair, by the sound," said he. "Yes," he continued, glancing

out of the window. "A nice little brougham and a pair of

beauties. A hundred and fifty guineas apiece. There's money in

this case, Watson, if there is nothing else."

"I think that I had better go, Holmes."

"Not a bit, Doctor. Stay where you are. I am lost without my

Boswell. And this promises to be interesting. It would be a pity

to miss it."

"But your client--"

"Never mind him. I may want your help, and so may he. Here he

comes. Sit down in that armchair, Doctor, and give us your best

attention."

A slow and heavy step, which had been heard upon the stairs and

in the passage, paused immediately outside the door. Then there

was a loud and authoritative tap.

"Come in!" said Holmes.

A man entered who could hardly have been less than six feet six

inches in height, with the chest and limbs of a Hercules. His

dress was rich with a richness which would, in England, be looked

upon as akin to bad taste. Heavy bands of astrakhan were slashed

across the sleeves and fronts of his double-breasted coat, while

the deep blue cloak which was thrown over his shoulders was lined

with flame-coloured silk and secured at the neck with a brooch

which consisted of a single flaming beryl. Boots which extended

halfway up his calves, and which were trimmed at the tops with

rich brown fur, completed the impression of barbaric opulence

which was suggested by his whole appearance. He carried a

broad-brimmed hat in his hand, while he wore across the upper

part of his face, extending down past the cheekbones, a black

vizard mask, which he had apparently adjusted that very moment,

for his hand was still raised to it as he entered. From the lower

part of the face he appeared to be a man of strong character,

with a thick, hanging lip, and a long, straight chin suggestive

of resolution pushed to the length of obstinacy.

"You had my note?" he asked with a deep harsh voice and a

strongly marked German accent. "I told you that I would call." He

looked from one to the other of us, as if uncertain which to

address.

"Pray take a seat," said Holmes. "This is my friend and

colleague, Dr. Watson, who is occasionally good enough to help me

in my cases. Whom have I the honour to address?"

"You may address me as the Count Von Kramm, a Bohemian nobleman.

I understand that this gentleman, your friend, is a man of honour

and discretion, whom I may trust with a matter of the most

extreme importance. If not, I should much prefer to communicate

with you alone."

I rose to go, but Holmes caught me by the wrist and pushed me

back into my chair. "It is both, or none," said he. "You may say

before this gentleman anything which you may say to me."

The Count shrugged his broad shoulders. "Then I must begin," said

he, "by binding you both to absolute secrecy for two years; at

the end of that time the matter will be of no importance. At

present it is not too much to say that it is of such weight it

may have an influence upon European history."

"I promise," said Holmes.

"And I."

"You will excuse this mask," continued our strange visitor. "The

august person who employs me wishes his agent to be unknown to

you, and I may confess at once that the title by which I have

just called myself is not exactly my own."

"I was aware of it," said Holmes dryly.

"The circumstances are of great delicacy, and every precaution

has to be taken to quench what might grow to be an immense

scandal and seriously compromise one of the reigning families of

Europe. To speak plainly, the matter implicates the great House

of Ormstein, hereditary kings of Bohemia."

"I was also aware of that," murmured Holmes, settling himself

down in his armchair and closing his eyes.

Our visitor glanced with some apparent surprise at the languid,

lounging figure of the man who had been no doubt depicted to him

as the most incisive reasoner and most energetic agent in Europe.

Holmes slowly reopened his eyes and looked impatiently at his

gigantic client.

"If your Majesty would condescend to state your case," he

remarked, "I should be better able to advise you."

The man sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room in

uncontrollable agitation. Then, with a gesture of desperation, he

tore the mask from his face and hurled it upon the ground. "You

are right," he cried; "I am the King. Why should I attempt to

conceal it?"

"Why, indeed?" murmured Holmes. "Your Majesty had not spoken

before I was aware that I was addressing Wilhelm Gottsreich

Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and

hereditary King of Bohemia."

"But you can understand," said our strange visitor, sitting down

once more and passing his hand over his high white forehead, "you

can understand that I am not accustomed to doing such business in

my own person. Yet the matter was so delicate that I could not

confide it to an agent without putting myself in his power. I

have come incognito from Prague for the purpose of consulting

you."

"Then, pray consult," said Holmes, shutting his eyes once more.

"The facts are briefly these: Some five years ago, during a

lengthy visit to Warsaw, I made the acquaintance of the well-known

adventuress, Irene Adler. The name is no doubt familiar to you."

"Kindly look her up in my index, Doctor," murmured Holmes without

opening his eyes. For many years he had adopted a system of

docketing all paragraphs concerning men and things, so that it

was difficult to name a subject or a person on which he could not

at once furnish information. In this case I found her biography

sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a

staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea

fishes.

"Let me see!" said Holmes. "Hum! Born in New Jersey in the year

1858. Contralto--hum! La Scala, hum! Prima donna Imperial Opera

of Warsaw--yes! Retired from operatic stage--ha! Living in

London--quite so! Your Majesty, as I understand, became entangled

with this young person, wrote her some compromising letters, and

is now desirous of getting those letters back."

"Precisely so. But how--"

"Was there a secret marriage?"

"None."

"No legal papers or certificates?"

"None."

"Then I fail to follow your Majesty. If this young person should

produce her letters for blackmailing or other purposes, how is

she to prove their authenticity?"

"There is the writing."

"Pooh, pooh! Forgery."

"My private note-paper."

"Stolen."

"My own seal."

"Imitated."

"My photograph."

"Bought."

"We were both in the photograph."

"Oh, dear! That is very bad! Your Majesty has indeed committed an

indiscretion."

"I was mad--insane."

"You have compromised yourself seriously."

"I was only Crown Prince then. I was young. I am but thirty now."

"It must be recovered."

"We have tried and failed."

"Your Majesty must pay. It must be bought."

"She will not sell."

"Stolen, then."

"Five attempts have been made. Twice burglars in my pay ransacked

her house. Once we diverted her luggage when she travelled. Twice

she has been waylaid. There has been no result."

"No sign of it?"

"Absolutely none."

Holmes laughed. "It is quite a pretty little problem," said he.

"But a very serious one to me," returned the King reproachfully.

"Very, indeed. And what does she propose to do with the

photograph?"

"To ruin me."

"But how?"

"I am about to be married."

"So I have heard."

"To Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, second daughter of the

King of Scandinavia. You may know the strict principles of her

family. She is herself the very soul of delicacy. A shadow of a

doubt as to my conduct would bring the matter to an end."

"And Irene Adler?"

"Threatens to send them the photograph. And she will do it. I

know that she will do it. You do not know her, but she has a soul

of steel. She has the face of the most beautiful of women, and

the mind of the most resolute of men. Rather than I should marry

another woman, there are no lengths to which she would not

go--none."

"You are sure that she has not sent it yet?"

"I am sure."

"And why?"

"Because she has said that she would send it on the day when the

betrothal was publicly proclaimed. That will be next Monday."

"Oh, then we have three days yet," said Holmes with a yawn. "That

is very fortunate, as I have one or two matters of importance to

look into just at present. Your Majesty will, of course, stay in

London for the present?"

"Certainly. You will find me at the Langham under the name of the

Count Von Kramm."

"Then I shall drop you a line to let you know how we progress."

"Pray do so. I shall be all anxiety."

"Then, as to money?"

"You have carte blanche."

"Absolutely?"

"I tell you that I would give one of the provinces of my kingdom

to have that photograph."

"And for present expenses?"

The King took a heavy chamois leather bag from under his cloak

and laid it on the table.

"There are three hundred pounds in gold and seven hundred in

notes," he said.

Holmes scribbled a receipt upon a sheet of his note-book and

handed it to him.

"And Mademoiselle's address?" he asked.

"Is Briony Lodge, Serpentine Avenue, St. John's Wood."

Holmes took a note of it. "One other question," said he. "Was the

photograph a cabinet?"

"It was."

"Then, good-night, your Majesty, and I trust that we shall soon

have some good news for you. And good-night, Watson," he added,

as the wheels of the royal brougham rolled down the street. "If

you will be good enough to call to-morrow afternoon at three

o'clock I should like to chat this little matter over with you."

II.

At three o'clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had

not yet returned. The landlady informed me that he had left the

house shortly after eight o'clock in the morning. I sat down

beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him,

however long he might be. I was already deeply interested in his

inquiry, for, though it was surrounded by none of the grim and

strange features which were associated with the two crimes which

I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the

exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own.

Indeed, apart from the nature of the investigation which my

friend had on hand, there was something in his masterly grasp of

a situation, and his keen, incisive reasoning, which made it a

pleasure to me to study his system of work, and to follow the

quick, subtle methods by which he disentangled the most

inextricable mysteries. So accustomed was I to his invariable

success that the very possibility of his failing had ceased to

enter into my head.

It was close upon four before the door opened, and a

drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an

inflamed face and disreputable clothes, walked into the room.

Accustomed as I was to my friend's amazing powers in the use of

disguises, I had to look three times before I was certain that it

was indeed he. With a nod he vanished into the bedroom, whence he

emerged in five minutes tweed-suited and respectable, as of old.

Putting his hands into his pockets, he stretched out his legs in

front of the fire and laughed heartily for some minutes.

"Well, really!" he cried, and then he choked and laughed again

until he was obliged to lie back, limp and helpless, in the

chair.

"What is it?"

"It's quite too funny. I am sure you could never guess how I

employed my morning, or what I ended by doing."

"I can't imagine. I suppose that you have been watching the

habits, and perhaps the house, of Miss Irene Adler."

"Quite so; but the sequel was rather unusual. I will tell you,

however. I left the house a little after eight o'clock this

morning in the character of a groom out of work. There is a

wonderful sympathy and freemasonry among horsey men. Be one of

them, and you will know all that there is to know. I soon found

Briony Lodge. It is a bijou villa, with a garden at the back, but

built out in front right up to the road, two stories. Chubb lock

to the door. Large sitting-room on the right side, well

furnished, with long windows almost to the floor, and those

preposterous English window fasteners which a child could open.

Behind there was nothing remarkable, save that the passage window

could be reached from the top of the coach-house. I walked round

it and examined it closely from every point of view, but without

noting anything else of interest.

"I then lounged down the street and found, as I expected, that

there was a mews in a lane which runs down by one wall of the

garden. I lent the ostlers a hand in rubbing down their horses,

and received in exchange twopence, a glass of half and half, two

fills of shag tobacco, and as much information as I could desire

about Miss Adler, to say nothing of half a dozen other people in

the neighbourhood in whom I was not in the least interested, but

whose biographies I was compelled to listen to."

"And what of Irene Adler?" I asked.

"Oh, she has turned all the men's heads down in that part. She is

the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet. So say the

Serpentine-mews, to a man. She lives quietly, sings at concerts,

drives out at five every day, and returns at seven sharp for

dinner. Seldom goes out at other times, except when she sings.

Has only one male visitor, but a good deal of him. He is dark,

handsome, and dashing, never calls less than once a day, and

often twice. He is a Mr. Godfrey Norton, of the Inner Temple. See

the advantages of a cabman as a confidant. They had driven him

home a dozen times from Serpentine-mews, and knew all about him.

When I had listened to all they had to tell, I began to walk up

and down near Briony Lodge once more, and to think over my plan

of campaign.

"This Godfrey Norton was evidently an important factor in the

matter. He was a lawyer. That sounded ominous. What was the

relation between them, and what the object of his repeated

visits? Was she his client, his friend, or his mistress? If the

former, she had probably transferred the photograph to his

keeping. If the latter, it was less likely. On the issue of this

question depended whether I should continue my work at Briony

Lodge, or turn my attention to the gentleman's chambers in the

Temple. It was a delicate point, and it widened the field of my

inquiry. I fear that I bore you with these details, but I have to

let you see my little difficulties, if you are to understand the

situation."

"I am following you closely," I answered.

"I was still balancing the matter in my mind when a hansom cab

drove up to Briony Lodge, and a gentleman sprang out. He was a

remarkably handsome man, dark, aquiline, and moustached--evidently

the man of whom I had heard. He appeared to be in a

great hurry, shouted to the cabman to wait, and brushed past the

maid who opened the door with the air of a man who was thoroughly

at home.

"He was in the house about half an hour, and I could catch

glimpses of him in the windows of the sitting-room, pacing up and

down, talking excitedly, and waving his arms. Of her I could see

nothing. Presently he emerged, looking even more flurried than

before. As he stepped up to the cab, he pulled a gold watch from

his pocket and looked at it earnestly, 'Drive like the devil,' he

shouted, 'first to Gross & Hankey's in Regent Street, and then to

the Church of St. Monica in the Edgeware Road. Half a guinea if

you do it in twenty minutes!'

"Away they went, and I was just wondering whether I should not do

well to follow them when up the lane came a neat little landau,

the coachman with his coat only half-buttoned, and his tie under

his ear, while all the tags of his harness were sticking out of

the buckles. It hadn't pulled up before she shot out of the hall

door and into it. I only caught a glimpse of her at the moment,

but she was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for.

"'The Church of St. Monica, John,' she cried, 'and half a

sovereign if you reach it in twenty minutes.'

"This was quite too good to lose, Watson. I was just balancing

whether I should run for it, or whether I should perch behind her

landau when a cab came through the street. The driver looked

twice at such a shabby fare, but I jumped in before he could

object. 'The Church of St. Monica,' said I, 'and half a sovereign

if you reach it in twenty minutes.' It was twenty-five minutes to

twelve, and of course it was clear enough what was in the wind.

"My cabby drove fast. I don't think I ever drove faster, but the

others were there before us. The cab and the landau with their

steaming horses were in front of the door when I arrived. I paid

the man and hurried into the church. There was not a soul there

save the two whom I had followed and a surpliced clergyman, who

seemed to be expostulating with them. They were all three

standing in a knot in front of the altar. I lounged up the side

aisle like any other idler who has dropped into a church.

Suddenly, to my surprise, the three at the altar faced round to

me, and Godfrey Norton came running as hard as he could towards

me.

"'Thank God,' he cried. 'You'll do. Come! Come!'

"'What then?' I asked.

"'Come, man, come, only three minutes, or it won't be legal.'

"I was half-dragged up to the altar, and before I knew where I was

I found myself mumbling responses which were whispered in my ear,

and vouching for things of which I knew nothing, and generally

assisting in the secure tying up of Irene Adler, spinster, to

Godfrey Norton, bachelor. It was all done in an instant, and

there was the gentleman thanking me on the one side and the lady

on the other, while the clergyman beamed on me in front. It was

the most preposterous position in which I ever found myself in my

life, and it was the thought of it that started me laughing just

now. It seems that there had been some informality about their

license, that the clergyman absolutely refused to marry them

without a witness of some sort, and that my lucky appearance

saved the bridegroom from having to sally out into the streets in

search of a best man. The bride gave me a sovereign, and I mean

to wear it on my watch-chain in memory of the occasion."

"This is a very unexpected turn of affairs," said I; "and what

then?"

"Well, I found my plans very seriously menaced. It looked as if

the pair might take an immediate departure, and so necessitate

very prompt and energetic measures on my part. At the church

door, however, they separated, he driving back to the Temple, and

she to her own house. 'I shall drive out in the park at five as

usual,' she said as she left him. I heard no more. They drove

away in different directions, and I went off to make my own

arrangements."

"Which are?"

"Some cold beef and a glass of beer," he answered, ringing the

bell. "I have been too busy to think of food, and I am likely to

be busier still this evening. By the way, Doctor, I shall want

your co-operation."

"I shall be delighted."

"You don't mind breaking the law?"

"Not in the least."

"Nor running a chance of arrest?"

"Not in a good cause."

"Oh, the cause is excellent!"

"Then I am your man."

"I was sure that I might rely on you."

"But what is it you wish?"

"When Mrs. Turner has brought in the tray I will make it clear to

you. Now," he said as he turned hungrily on the simple fare that

our landlady had provided, "I must discuss it while I eat, for I

have not much time. It is nearly five now. In two hours we must

be on the scene of action. Miss Irene, or Madame, rather, returns

from her drive at seven. We must be at Briony Lodge to meet her."

"And what then?"

"You must leave that to me. I have already arranged what is to

occur. There is only one point on which I must insist. You must

not interfere, come what may. You understand?"

"I am to be neutral?"

"To do nothing whatever. There will probably be some small

unpleasantness. Do not join in it. It will end in my being

conveyed into the house. Four or five minutes afterwards the

sitting-room window will open. You are to station yourself close

to that open window."

"Yes."

"You are to watch me, for I will be visible to you."

"Yes."

"And when I raise my hand--so--you will throw into the room what

I give you to throw, and will, at the same time, raise the cry of

fire. You quite follow me?"

"Entirely."

"It is nothing very formidable," he said, taking a long cigar-shaped

roll from his pocket. "It is an ordinary plumber's smoke-rocket,

fitted with a cap at either end to make it self-lighting.

Your task is confined to that. When you raise your cry of fire,

it will be taken up by quite a number of people. You may then

walk to the end of the street, and I will rejoin you in ten

minutes. I hope that I have made myself clear?"

"I am to remain neutral, to get near the window, to watch you,

and at the signal to throw in this object, then to raise the cry

of fire, and to wait you at the corner of the street."

"Precisely."

"Then you may entirely rely on me."

"That is excellent. I think, perhaps, it is almost time that I

prepare for the new role I have to play."

He disappeared into his bedroom and returned in a few minutes in

the character of an amiable and simple-minded Nonconformist

clergyman. His broad black hat, his baggy trousers, his white

tie, his sympathetic smile, and general look of peering and

benevolent curiosity were such as Mr. John Hare alone could have

equalled. It was not merely that Holmes changed his costume. His

expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every

fresh part that he assumed. The stage lost a fine actor, even as

science lost an acute reasoner, when he became a specialist in

crime.

It was a quarter past six when we left Baker Street, and it still

wanted ten minutes to the hour when we found ourselves in

Serpentine Avenue. It was already dusk, and the lamps were just

being lighted as we paced up and down in front of Briony Lodge,

waiting for the coming of its occupant. The house was just such

as I had pictured it from Sherlock Holmes' succinct description,

but the locality appeared to be less private than I expected. On

the contrary, for a small street in a quiet neighbourhood, it was

remarkably animated. There was a group of shabbily dressed men

smoking and laughing in a corner, a scissors-grinder with his

wheel, two guardsmen who were flirting with a nurse-girl, and

several well-dressed young men who were lounging up and down with

cigars in their mouths.

"You see," remarked Holmes, as we paced to and fro in front of

the house, "this marriage rather simplifies matters. The

photograph becomes a double-edged weapon now. The chances are

that she would be as averse to its being seen by Mr. Godfrey

Norton, as our client is to its coming to the eyes of his

princess. Now the question is, Where are we to find the

photograph?"

"Where, indeed?"

"It is most unlikely that she carries it about with her. It is

cabinet size. Too large for easy concealment about a woman's

dress. She knows that the King is capable of having her waylaid

and searched. Two attempts of the sort have already been made. We

may take it, then, that she does not carry it about with her."

"Where, then?"

"Her banker or her lawyer. There is that double possibility. But

I am inclined to think neither. Women are naturally secretive,

and they like to do their own secreting. Why should she hand it

over to anyone else? She could trust her own guardianship, but

she could not tell what indirect or political influence might be

brought to bear upon a business man. Besides, remember that she

had resolved to use it within a few days. It must be where she

can lay her hands upon it. It must be in her own house."

"But it has twice been burgled."

"Pshaw! They did not know how to look."

"But how will you look?"

"I will not look."

"What then?"

"I will get her to show me."

"But she will refuse."

"She will not be able to. But I hear the rumble of wheels. It is

her carriage. Now carry out my orders to the letter."

As he spoke the gleam of the side-lights of a carriage came round

the curve of the avenue. It was a smart little landau which

rattled up to the door of Briony Lodge. As it pulled up, one of

the loafing men at the corner dashed forward to open the door in

the hope of earning a copper, but was elbowed away by another

loafer, who had rushed up with the same intention. A fierce

quarrel broke out, which was increased by the two guardsmen, who

took sides with one of the loungers, and by the scissors-grinder,

who was equally hot upon the other side. A blow was struck, and

in an instant the lady, who had stepped from her carriage, was

the centre of a little knot of flushed and struggling men, who

struck savagely at each other with their fists and sticks. Holmes

dashed into the crowd to protect the lady; but just as he reached

her he gave a cry and dropped to the ground, with the blood

running freely down his face. At his fall the guardsmen took to

their heels in one direction and the loungers in the other, while

a number of better-dressed people, who had watched the scuffle

without taking part in it, crowded in to help the lady and to

attend to the injured man. Irene Adler, as I will still call her,

had hurried up the steps; but she stood at the top with her

superb figure outlined against the lights of the hall, looking

back into the street.

"Is the poor gentleman much hurt?" she asked.

"He is dead," cried several voices.

"No, no, there's life in him!" shouted another. "But he'll be

gone before you can get him to hospital."

"He's a brave fellow," said a woman. "They would have had the

lady's purse and watch if it hadn't been for him. They were a

gang, and a rough one, too. Ah, he's breathing now."

"He can't lie in the street. May we bring him in, marm?"

"Surely. Bring him into the sitting-room. There is a comfortable

sofa. This way, please!"

Slowly and solemnly he was borne into Briony Lodge and laid out

in the principal room, while I still observed the proceedings

from my post by the window. The lamps had been lit, but the

blinds had not been drawn, so that I could see Holmes as he lay

upon the couch. I do not know whether he was seized with

compunction at that moment for the part he was playing, but I

know that I never felt more heartily ashamed of myself in my life

than when I saw the beautiful creature against whom I was

conspiring, or the grace and kindliness with which she waited

upon the injured man. And yet it would be the blackest treachery

to Holmes to draw back now from the part which he had intrusted

to me. I hardened my heart, and took the smoke-rocket from under

my ulster. After all, I thought, we are not injuring her. We are

but preventing her from injuring another.

Holmes had sat up upon the couch, and I saw him motion like a man

who is in need of air. A maid rushed across and threw open the

window. At the same instant I saw him raise his hand and at the

signal I tossed my rocket into the room with a cry of "Fire!" The

word was no sooner out of my mouth than the whole crowd of

spectators, well dressed and ill--gentlemen, ostlers, and

servant-maids--joined in a general shriek of "Fire!" Thick clouds

of smoke curled through the room and out at the open window. I

caught a glimpse of rushing figures, and a moment later the voice

of Holmes from within assuring them that it was a false alarm.

Slipping through the shouting crowd I made my way to the corner

of the street, and in ten minutes was rejoiced to find my

friend's arm in mine, and to get away from the scene of uproar.

He walked swiftly and in silence for some few minutes until we

had turned down one of the quiet streets which lead towards the

Edgeware Road.

"You did it very nicely, Doctor," he remarked. "Nothing could

have been better. It is all right."

"You have the photograph?"

"I know where it is."

"And how did you find out?"

"She showed me, as I told you she would."

"I am still in the dark."

"I do not wish to make a mystery," said he, laughing. "The matter

was perfectly simple. You, of course, saw that everyone in the

street was an accomplice. They were all engaged for the evening."

"I guessed as much."

"Then, when the row broke out, I had a little moist red paint in

the palm of my hand. I rushed forward, fell down, clapped my hand

to my face, and became a piteous spectacle. It is an old trick."

"That also I could fathom."

"Then they carried me in. She was bound to have me in. What else

could she do? And into her sitting-room, which was the very room

which I suspected. It lay between that and her bedroom, and I was

determined to see which. They laid me on a couch, I motioned for

air, they were compelled to open the window, and you had your

chance."

"How did that help you?"

"It was all-important. When a woman thinks that her house is on

fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she

values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have

more than once taken advantage of it. In the case of the

Darlington substitution scandal it was of use to me, and also in

the Arnsworth Castle business. A married woman grabs at her baby;

an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box. Now it was clear to

me that our lady of to-day had nothing in the house more precious

to her than what we are in quest of. She would rush to secure it.

The alarm of fire was admirably done. The smoke and shouting were

enough to shake nerves of steel. She responded beautifully. The

photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the

right bell-pull. She was there in an instant, and I caught a

glimpse of it as she half-drew it out. When I cried out that it

was a false alarm, she replaced it, glanced at the rocket, rushed

from the room, and I have not seen her since. I rose, and, making

my excuses, escaped from the house. I hesitated whether to

attempt to secure the photograph at once; but the coachman had

come in, and as he was watching me narrowly it seemed safer to

wait. A little over-precipitance may ruin all."

"And now?" I asked.

"Our quest is practically finished. I shall call with the King

to-morrow, and with you, if you care to come with us. We will be

shown into the sitting-room to wait for the lady, but it is

probable that when she comes she may find neither us nor the

photograph. It might be a satisfaction to his Majesty to regain

it with his own hands."

"And when will you call?"

"At eight in the morning. She will not be up, so that we shall

have a clear field. Besides, we must be prompt, for this marriage

may mean a complete change in her life and habits. I must wire to

the King without delay."

We had reached Baker Street and had stopped at the door. He was

searching his pockets for the key when someone passing said:

"Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes."

There were several people on the pavement at the time, but the

greeting appeared to come from a slim youth in an ulster who had

hurried by.

"I've heard that voice before," said Holmes, staring down the

dimly lit street. "Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have

been."

III.

I slept at Baker Street that night, and we were engaged upon our

toast and coffee in the morning when the King of Bohemia rushed

into the room.

"You have really got it!" he cried, grasping Sherlock Holmes by

either shoulder and looking eagerly into his face.

"Not yet."

"But you have hopes?"

"I have hopes."

"Then, come. I am all impatience to be gone."

"We must have a cab."

"No, my brougham is waiting."

"Then that will simplify matters." We descended and started off

once more for Briony Lodge.

"Irene Adler is married," remarked Holmes.

"Married! When?"

"Yesterday."

"But to whom?"

"To an English lawyer named Norton."

"But she could not love him."

"I am in hopes that she does."

"And why in hopes?"

"Because it would spare your Majesty all fear of future

annoyance. If the lady loves her husband, she does not love your

Majesty. If she does not love your Majesty, there is no reason

why she should interfere with your Majesty's plan."

"It is true. And yet--Well! I wish she had been of my own

station! What a queen she would have made!" He relapsed into a

moody silence, which was not broken until we drew up in

Serpentine Avenue.

The door of Briony Lodge was open, and an elderly woman stood

upon the steps. She watched us with a sardonic eye as we stepped

from the brougham.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I believe?" said she.

"I am Mr. Holmes," answered my companion, looking at her with a

questioning and rather startled gaze.

"Indeed! My mistress told me that you were likely to call. She

left this morning with her husband by the 5:15 train from Charing

Cross for the Continent."

"What!" Sherlock Holmes staggered back, white with chagrin and

surprise. "Do you mean that she has left England?"

"Never to return."

"And the papers?" asked the King hoarsely. "All is lost."

"We shall see." He pushed past the servant and rushed into the

drawing-room, followed by the King and myself. The furniture was

scattered about in every direction, with dismantled shelves and

open drawers, as if the lady had hurriedly ransacked them before

her flight. Holmes rushed at the bell-pull, tore back a small

sliding shutter, and, plunging in his hand, pulled out a

photograph and a letter. The photograph was of Irene Adler

herself in evening dress, the letter was superscribed to

"Sherlock Holmes, Esq. To be left till called for." My friend

tore it open and we all three read it together. It was dated at

midnight of the preceding night and ran in this way:

"MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES,--You really did it very well. You

took me in completely. Until after the alarm of fire, I had not a

suspicion. But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I

began to think. I had been warned against you months ago. I had

been told that if the King employed an agent it would certainly

be you. And your address had been given me. Yet, with all this,

you made me reveal what you wanted to know. Even after I became

suspicious, I found it hard to think evil of such a dear, kind

old clergyman. But, you know, I have been trained as an actress

myself. Male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage

of the freedom which it gives. I sent John, the coachman, to

watch you, ran up stairs, got into my walking-clothes, as I call

them, and came down just as you departed.

"Well, I followed you to your door, and so made sure that I was

really an object of interest to the celebrated Mr. Sherlock

Holmes. Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night, and

started for the Temple to see my husband.

"We both thought the best resource was flight, when pursued by

so formidable an antagonist; so you will find the nest empty when

you call to-morrow. As to the photograph, your client may rest in

peace. I love and am loved by a better man than he. The King may

do what he will without hindrance from one whom he has cruelly

wronged. I keep it only to safeguard myself, and to preserve a

weapon which will always secure me from any steps which he might

take in the future. I leave a photograph which he might care to

possess; and I remain, dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes,

"Very truly yours,

"IRENE NORTON, née ADLER."

"What a woman--oh, what a woman!" cried the King of Bohemia, when

we had all three read this epistle. "Did I not tell you how quick

and resolute she was? Would she not have made an admirable queen?

Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?"

"From what I have seen of the lady she seems indeed to be on a

very different level to your Majesty," said Holmes coldly. "I am

sorry that I have not been able to bring your Majesty's business

to a more successful conclusion."

"On the contrary, my dear sir," cried the King; "nothing could be

more successful. I know that her word is inviolate. The

photograph is now as safe as if it were in the fire."

"I am glad to hear your Majesty say so."

"I am immensely indebted to you. Pray tell me in what way I can

reward you. This ring--" He slipped an emerald snake ring from

his finger and held it out upon the palm of his hand.

"Your Majesty has something which I should value even more

highly," said Holmes.

"You have but to name it."

"This photograph!"

The King stared at him in amazement.

"Irene's photograph!" he cried. "Certainly, if you wish it."

"I thank your Majesty. Then there is no more to be done in the

matter. I have the honour to wish you a very good-morning." He

bowed, and, turning away without observing the hand which the

King had stretched out to him, he set off in my company for his

chambers.

And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom

of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were

beaten by a woman's wit. He used to make merry over the

cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And

when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her

photograph, it is always under the honourable title of the woman.

ADVENTURE II. THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

I had called upon my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, one day in the

autumn of last year and found him in deep conversation with a

very stout, florid-faced, elderly gentleman with fiery red hair.

With an apology for my intrusion, I was about to withdraw when

Holmes pulled me abruptly into the room and closed the door

behind me.

"You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear

Watson," he said cordially.

"I was afraid that you were engaged."

"So I am. Very much so."

"Then I can wait in the next room."

"Not at all. This gentleman, Mr. Wilson, has been my partner and

helper in many of my most successful cases, and I have no

doubt that he will be of the utmost use to me in yours also."

The stout gentleman half rose from his chair and gave a bob of

greeting, with a quick little questioning glance from his small

fat-encircled eyes.

"Try the settee," said Holmes, relapsing into his armchair and

putting his fingertips together, as was his custom when in

judicial moods. "I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love

of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum

routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by

the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if you

will excuse my saying so, somewhat to embellish so many of my own

little adventures."

"Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me," I

observed.

"You will remember that I remarked the other day, just before we

went into the very simple problem presented by Miss Mary

Sutherland, that for strange effects and extraordinary

combinations we must go to life itself, which is always far more

daring than any effort of the imagination."

"A proposition which I took the liberty of doubting."

"You did, Doctor, but none the less you must come round to my

view, for otherwise I shall keep on piling fact upon fact on you

until your reason breaks down under them and acknowledges me to

be right. Now, Mr. Jabez Wilson here has been good enough to call

upon me this morning, and to begin a narrative which promises to

be one of the most singular which I have listened to for some

time. You have heard me remark that the strangest and most unique

things are very often connected not with the larger but with the

smaller crimes, and occasionally, indeed, where there is room for

doubt whether any positive crime has been committed. As far as I

have heard it is impossible for me to say whether the present

case is an instance of crime or not, but the course of events is

certainly among the most singular that I have ever listened to.

Perhaps, Mr. Wilson, you would have the great kindness to

recommence your narrative. I ask you not merely because my friend

Dr. Watson has not heard the opening part but also because the

peculiar nature of the story makes me anxious to have every

possible detail from your lips. As a rule, when I have heard some

slight indication of the course of events, I am able to guide

myself by the thousands of other similar cases which occur to my

memory. In the present instance I am forced to admit that the

facts are, to the best of my belief, unique."

The portly client puffed out his chest with an appearance of some

little pride and pulled a dirty and wrinkled newspaper from the

inside pocket of his greatcoat. As he glanced down the

advertisement column, with his head thrust forward and the paper

flattened out upon his knee, I took a good look at the man and

endeavoured, after the fashion of my companion, to read the

indications which might be presented by his dress or appearance.

I did not gain very much, however, by my inspection. Our visitor

bore every mark of being an average commonplace British

tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. He wore rather baggy grey

shepherd's check trousers, a not over-clean black frock-coat,

unbuttoned in the front, and a drab waistcoat with a heavy brassy

Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as

an ornament. A frayed top-hat and a faded brown overcoat with a

wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him. Altogether,

look as I would, there was nothing remarkable about the man save

his blazing red head, and the expression of extreme chagrin and

discontent upon his features.

Sherlock Holmes' quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook

his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glances.

"Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual

labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has

been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of

writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

Mr. Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger

upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion.

"How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mr.

Holmes?" he asked. "How did you know, for example, that I did

manual labour. It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's

carpenter."

"Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger

than your left. You have worked with it, and the muscles are more

developed."

"Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?"

"I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that,

especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you

use an arc-and-compass breastpin."

"Ah, of course, I forgot that. But the writing?"

"What else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for

five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the

elbow where you rest it upon the desk?"

"Well, but China?"

"The fish that you have tattooed immediately above your right

wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small

study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature

of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a

delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I

see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter

becomes even more simple."

Mr. Jabez Wilson laughed heavily. "Well, I never!" said he. "I

thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see

that there was nothing in it, after all."

"I begin to think, Watson," said Holmes, "that I make a mistake

in explaining. 'Omne ignotum pro magnifico,' you know, and my

poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I

am so candid. Can you not find the advertisement, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, I have got it now," he answered with his thick red finger

planted halfway down the column. "Here it is. This is what began

it all. You just read it for yourself, sir."

I took the paper from him and read as follows:

"TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE: On account of the bequest of the late

Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, U. S. A., there is now

another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a

salary of 4 pounds a week for purely nominal services. All

red-headed men who are sound in body and mind and above the age

of twenty-one years, are eligible. Apply in person on Monday, at

eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7

Pope's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth does this mean?" I ejaculated after I had twice

read over the extraordinary announcement.

Holmes chuckled and wriggled in his chair, as was his habit when

in high spirits. "It is a little off the beaten track, isn't it?"

said he. "And now, Mr. Wilson, off you go at scratch and tell us

all about yourself, your household, and the effect which this

advertisement had upon your fortunes. You will first make a note,

Doctor, of the paper and the date."

"It is The Morning Chronicle of April 27, 1890. Just two months

ago."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Wilson?"

"Well, it is just as I have been telling you, Mr. Sherlock

Holmes," said Jabez Wilson, mopping his forehead; "I have a small

pawnbroker's business at Coburg Square, near the City. It's not a

very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than

just give me a living. I used to be able to keep two assistants,

but now I only keep one; and I would have a job to pay him but

that he is willing to come for half wages so as to learn the

business."

"What is the name of this obliging youth?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth,

either. It's hard to say his age. I should not wish a smarter

assistant, Mr. Holmes; and I know very well that he could better

himself and earn twice what I am able to give him. But, after

all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"

"Why, indeed? You seem most fortunate in having an employé who

comes under the full market price. It is not a common experience

among employers in this age. I don't know that your assistant is

not as remarkable as your advertisement."

"Oh, he has his faults, too," said Mr. Wilson. "Never was such a

fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought

to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar

like a rabbit into its hole to develop his pictures. That is his

main fault, but on the whole he's a good worker. There's no vice

in him."

"He is still with you, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. He and a girl of fourteen, who does a bit of simple

cooking and keeps the place clean--that's all I have in the

house, for I am a widower and never had any family. We live very

quietly, sir, the three of us; and we keep a roof over our heads

and pay our debts, if we do nothing more.

"The first thing that put us out was that advertisement.

Spaulding, he came down into the office just this day eight

weeks, with this very paper in his hand, and he says:

"'I wish to the Lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.'

"'Why that?' I asks.

"'Why,' says he, 'here's another vacancy on the League of the

Red-headed Men. It's worth quite a little fortune to any man who

gets it, and I understand that there are more vacancies than

there are men, so that the trustees are at their wits' end what

to do with the money. If my hair would only change colour, here's

a nice little crib all ready for me to step into.'

"'Why, what is it, then?' I asked. You see, Mr. Holmes, I am a

very stay-at-home man, and as my business came to me instead of

my having to go to it, I was often weeks on end without putting

my foot over the door-mat. In that way I didn't know much of what

was going on outside, and I was always glad of a bit of news.

"'Have you never heard of the League of the Red-headed Men?' he

asked with his eyes open.

"'Never.'

"'Why, I wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one

of the vacancies.'

"'And what are they worth?' I asked.

"'Oh, merely a couple of hundred a year, but the work is slight,

and it need not interfere very much with one's other

occupations.'

"Well, you can easily think that that made me prick up my ears,

for the business has not been over-good for some years, and an

extra couple of hundred would have been very handy.

"'Tell me all about it,' said I.

"'Well,' said he, showing me the advertisement, 'you can see for

yourself that the League has a vacancy, and there is the address

where you should apply for particulars. As far as I can make out,

the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah

Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. He was himself

red-headed, and he had a great sympathy for all red-headed men;

so when he died it was found that he had left his enormous

fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the

interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of

that colour. From all I hear it is splendid pay and very little to

do.'

"'But,' said I, 'there would be millions of red-headed men who

would apply.'

"'Not so many as you might think,' he answered. 'You see it is

really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. This American had

started from London when he was young, and he wanted to do the

old town a good turn. Then, again, I have heard it is no use your

applying if your hair is light red, or dark red, or anything but

real bright, blazing, fiery red. Now, if you cared to apply, Mr.

Wilson, you would just walk in; but perhaps it would hardly be

worth your while to put yourself out of the way for the sake of a

few hundred pounds.'

"Now, it is a fact, gentlemen, as you may see for yourselves,

that my hair is of a very full and rich tint, so that it seemed

to me that if there was to be any competition in the matter I

stood as good a chance as any man that I had ever met. Vincent

Spaulding seemed to know so much about it that I thought he might

prove useful, so I just ordered him to put up the shutters for

the day and to come right away with me. He was very willing to

have a holiday, so we shut the business up and started off for

the address that was given us in the advertisement.

"I never hope to see such a sight as that again, Mr. Holmes. From

north, south, east, and west every man who had a shade of red in

his hair had tramped into the city to answer the advertisement.

Fleet Street was choked with red-headed folk, and Pope's Court

looked like a coster's orange barrow. I should not have thought

there were so many in the whole country as were brought together

by that single advertisement. Every shade of colour they

were--straw, lemon, orange, brick, Irish-setter, liver, clay;

but, as Spaulding said, there were not many who had the real

vivid flame-coloured tint. When I saw how many were waiting, I

would have given it up in despair; but Spaulding would not hear

of it. How he did it I could not imagine, but he pushed and

pulled and butted until he got me through the crowd, and right up

to the steps which led to the office. There was a double stream

upon the stair, some going up in hope, and some coming back

dejected; but we wedged in as well as we could and soon found

ourselves in the office."

"Your experience has been a most entertaining one," remarked

Holmes as his client paused and refreshed his memory with a huge

pinch of snuff. "Pray continue your very interesting statement."

"There was nothing in the office but a couple of wooden chairs

and a deal table, behind which sat a small man with a head that

was even redder than mine. He said a few words to each candidate

as he came up, and then he always managed to find some fault in

them which would disqualify them. Getting a vacancy did not seem

to be such a very easy matter, after all. However, when our turn

came the little man was much more favourable to me than to any of

the others, and he closed the door as we entered, so that he

might have a private word with us.

"'This is Mr. Jabez Wilson,' said my assistant, 'and he is

willing to fill a vacancy in the League.'

"'And he is admirably suited for it,' the other answered. 'He has

every requirement. I cannot recall when I have seen anything so

fine.' He took a step backward, cocked his head on one side, and

gazed at my hair until I felt quite bashful. Then suddenly he

plunged forward, wrung my hand, and congratulated me warmly on my

success.

"'It would be injustice to hesitate,' said he. 'You will,

however, I am sure, excuse me for taking an obvious precaution.'

With that he seized my hair in both his hands, and tugged until I

yelled with the pain. 'There is water in your eyes,' said he as

he released me. 'I perceive that all is as it should be. But we

have to be careful, for we have twice been deceived by wigs and

once by paint. I could tell you tales of cobbler's wax which

would disgust you with human nature.' He stepped over to the

window and shouted through it at the top of his voice that the

vacancy was filled. A groan of disappointment came up from below,

and the folk all trooped away in different directions until there

was not a red-head to be seen except my own and that of the

manager.

"'My name,' said he, 'is Mr. Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of

the pensioners upon the fund left by our noble benefactor. Are

you a married man, Mr. Wilson? Have you a family?'

"I answered that I had not.

"His face fell immediately.

"'Dear me!' he said gravely, 'that is very serious indeed! I am

sorry to hear you say that. The fund was, of course, for the

propagation and spread of the red-heads as well as for their

maintenance. It is exceedingly unfortunate that you should be a

bachelor.'

"My face lengthened at this, Mr. Holmes, for I thought that I was

not to have the vacancy after all; but after thinking it over for

a few minutes he said that it would be all right.

"'In the case of another,' said he, 'the objection might be

fatal, but we must stretch a point in favour of a man with such a

head of hair as yours. When shall you be able to enter upon your

new duties?'

"'Well, it is a little awkward, for I have a business already,'

said I.

"'Oh, never mind about that, Mr. Wilson!' said Vincent Spaulding.

'I should be able to look after that for you.'

"'What would be the hours?' I asked.

"'Ten to two.'

"Now a pawnbroker's business is mostly done of an evening, Mr.

Holmes, especially Thursday and Friday evening, which is just

before pay-day; so it would suit me very well to earn a little in

the mornings. Besides, I knew that my assistant was a good man,

and that he would see to anything that turned up.

"'That would suit me very well,' said I. 'And the pay?'

"'Is 4 pounds a week.'

"'And the work?'

"'Is purely nominal.'

"'What do you call purely nominal?'

"'Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the

building, the whole time. If you leave, you forfeit your whole

position forever. The will is very clear upon that point. You

don't comply with the conditions if you budge from the office

during that time.'

"'It's only four hours a day, and I should not think of leaving,'

said I.

"'No excuse will avail,' said Mr. Duncan Ross; 'neither sickness

nor business nor anything else. There you must stay, or you lose

your billet.'

"'And the work?'

"'Is to copy out the "Encyclopaedia Britannica." There is the first

volume of it in that press. You must find your own ink, pens, and

blotting-paper, but we provide this table and chair. Will you be

ready to-morrow?'

"'Certainly,' I answered.

"'Then, good-bye, Mr. Jabez Wilson, and let me congratulate you

once more on the important position which you have been fortunate

enough to gain.' He bowed me out of the room and I went home with

my assistant, hardly knowing what to say or do, I was so pleased

at my own good fortune.

"Well, I thought over the matter all day, and by evening I was in

low spirits again; for I had quite persuaded myself that the

whole affair must be some great hoax or fraud, though what its

object might be I could not imagine. It seemed altogether past

belief that anyone could make such a will, or that they would pay

such a sum for doing anything so simple as copying out the

'Encyclopaedia Britannica.' Vincent Spaulding did what he could to

cheer me up, but by bedtime I had reasoned myself out of the

whole thing. However, in the morning I determined to have a look

at it anyhow, so I bought a penny bottle of ink, and with a

quill-pen, and seven sheets of foolscap paper, I started off for

Pope's Court.

"Well, to my surprise and delight, everything was as right as

possible. The table was set out ready for me, and Mr. Duncan Ross

was there to see that I got fairly to work. He started me off

upon the letter A, and then he left me; but he would drop in from

time to time to see that all was right with me. At two o'clock he

bade me good-day, complimented me upon the amount that I had

written, and locked the door of the office after me.

"This went on day after day, Mr. Holmes, and on Saturday the

manager came in and planked down four golden sovereigns for my

week's work. It was the same next week, and the same the week

after. Every morning I was there at ten, and every afternoon I

left at two. By degrees Mr. Duncan Ross took to coming in only

once of a morning, and then, after a time, he did not come in at

all. Still, of course, I never dared to leave the room for an

instant, for I was not sure when he might come, and the billet

was such a good one, and suited me so well, that I would not risk

the loss of it.

"Eight weeks passed away like this, and I had written about

Abbots and Archery and Armour and Architecture and Attica, and

hoped with diligence that I might get on to the B's before very

long. It cost me something in foolscap, and I had pretty nearly

filled a shelf with my writings. And then suddenly the whole

business came to an end."

"To an end?"

"Yes, sir. And no later than this morning. I went to my work as

usual at ten o'clock, but the door was shut and locked, with a

little square of cardboard hammered on to the middle of the

panel with a tack. Here it is, and you can read for yourself."

He held up a piece of white cardboard about the size of a sheet

of note-paper. It read in this fashion:

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

IS

DISSOLVED.

October 9, 1890.

Sherlock Holmes and I surveyed this curt announcement and the

rueful face behind it, until the comical side of the affair so

completely overtopped every other consideration that we both

burst out into a roar of laughter.

"I cannot see that there is anything very funny," cried our

client, flushing up to the roots of his flaming head. "If you can

do nothing better than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere."

"No, no," cried Holmes, shoving him back into the chair from

which he had half risen. "I really wouldn't miss your case for

the world. It is most refreshingly unusual. But there is, if you

will excuse my saying so, something just a little funny about it.

Pray what steps did you take when you found the card upon the

door?"

"I was staggered, sir. I did not know what to do. Then I called

at the offices round, but none of them seemed to know anything

about it. Finally, I went to the landlord, who is an accountant

living on the ground-floor, and I asked him if he could tell me

what had become of the Red-headed League. He said that he had

never heard of any such body. Then I asked him who Mr. Duncan

Ross was. He answered that the name was new to him.

"'Well,' said I, 'the gentleman at No. 4.'

"'What, the red-headed man?'

"'Yes.'

"'Oh,' said he, 'his name was William Morris. He was a solicitor

and was using my room as a temporary convenience until his new

premises were ready. He moved out yesterday.'

"'Where could I find him?'

"'Oh, at his new offices. He did tell me the address. Yes, 17

King Edward Street, near St. Paul's.'

"I started off, Mr. Holmes, but when I got to that address it was

a manufactory of artificial knee-caps, and no one in it had ever

heard of either Mr. William Morris or Mr. Duncan Ross."

"And what did you do then?" asked Holmes.

"I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I took the advice of my

assistant. But he could not help me in any way. He could only say

that if I waited I should hear by post. But that was not quite

good enough, Mr. Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place

without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough

to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right

away to you."

"And you did very wisely," said Holmes. "Your case is an

exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it.

From what you have told me I think that it is possible that

graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear."

"Grave enough!" said Mr. Jabez Wilson. "Why, I have lost four

pound a week."

"As far as you are personally concerned," remarked Holmes, "I do

not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary

league. On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some

30 pounds, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have

gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. You have

lost nothing by them."

"No, sir. But I want to find out about them, and who they are,

and what their object was in playing this prank--if it was a

prank--upon me. It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it

cost them two and thirty pounds."

"We shall endeavour to clear up these points for you. And, first,

one or two questions, Mr. Wilson. This assistant of yours who

first called your attention to the advertisement--how long had he

been with you?"

"About a month then."

"How did he come?"

"In answer to an advertisement."

"Was he the only applicant?"

"No, I had a dozen."

"Why did you pick him?"

"Because he was handy and would come cheap."

"At half-wages, in fact."

"Yes."

"What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?"

"Small, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face,

though he's not short of thirty. Has a white splash of acid upon

his forehead."

Holmes sat up in his chair in considerable excitement. "I thought

as much," said he. "Have you ever observed that his ears are

pierced for earrings?"

"Yes, sir. He told me that a gipsy had done it for him when he

was a lad."

"Hum!" said Holmes, sinking back in deep thought. "He is still

with you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I have only just left him."

"And has your business been attended to in your absence?"

"Nothing to complain of, sir. There's never very much to do of a

morning."

"That will do, Mr. Wilson. I shall be happy to give you an

opinion upon the subject in the course of a day or two. To-day is

Saturday, and I hope that by Monday we may come to a conclusion."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes when our visitor had left us, "what

do you make of it all?"

"I make nothing of it," I answered frankly. "It is a most

mysterious business."

"As a rule," said Holmes, "the more bizarre a thing is the less

mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless

crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is

the most difficult to identify. But I must be prompt over this

matter."

"What are you going to do, then?" I asked.

"To smoke," he answered. "It is quite a three pipe problem, and I

beg that you won't speak to me for fifty minutes." He curled

himself up in his chair, with his thin knees drawn up to his

hawk-like nose, and there he sat with his eyes closed and his

black clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird.

I had come to the conclusion that he had dropped asleep, and

indeed was nodding myself, when he suddenly sprang out of his

chair with the gesture of a man who has made up his mind and put

his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

"Sarasate plays at the St. James's Hall this afternoon," he

remarked. "What do you think, Watson? Could your patients spare

you for a few hours?"

"I have nothing to do to-day. My practice is never very

absorbing."

"Then put on your hat and come. I am going through the City

first, and we can have some lunch on the way. I observe that

there is a good deal of German music on the programme, which is

rather more to my taste than Italian or French. It is

introspective, and I want to introspect. Come along!"

We travelled by the Underground as far as Aldersgate; and a short

walk took us to Saxe-Coburg Square, the scene of the singular

story which we had listened to in the morning. It was a poky,

little, shabby-genteel place, where four lines of dingy

two-storied brick houses looked out into a small railed-in

enclosure, where a lawn of weedy grass and a few clumps of faded

laurel-bushes made a hard fight against a smoke-laden and

uncongenial atmosphere. Three gilt balls and a brown board with

"JABEZ WILSON" in white letters, upon a corner house, announced

the place where our red-headed client carried on his business.

Sherlock Holmes stopped in front of it with his head on one side

and looked it all over, with his eyes shining brightly between

puckered lids. Then he walked slowly up the street, and then down

again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. Finally

he returned to the pawnbroker's, and, having thumped vigorously

upon the pavement with his stick two or three times, he went up

to the door and knocked. It was instantly opened by a

bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow, who asked him to step

in.

"Thank you," said Holmes, "I only wished to ask you how you would

go from here to the Strand."

"Third right, fourth left," answered the assistant promptly,

closing the door.

"Smart fellow, that," observed Holmes as we walked away. "He is,

in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring

I am not sure that he has not a claim to be third. I have known

something of him before."

"Evidently," said I, "Mr. Wilson's assistant counts for a good

deal in this mystery of the Red-headed League. I am sure that you

inquired your way merely in order that you might see him."

"Not him."

"What then?"

"The knees of his trousers."

"And what did you see?"

"What I expected to see."

"Why did you beat the pavement?"

"My dear doctor, this is a time for observation, not for talk. We

are spies in an enemy's country. We know something of Saxe-Coburg

Square. Let us now explore the parts which lie behind it."

The road in which we found ourselves as we turned round the

corner from the retired Saxe-Coburg Square presented as great a

contrast to it as the front of a picture does to the back. It was

one of the main arteries which conveyed the traffic of the City

to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the immense

stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inward and outward,

while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of

pedestrians. It was difficult to realise as we looked at the line

of fine shops and stately business premises that they really

abutted on the other side upon the faded and stagnant square

which we had just quitted.

"Let me see," said Holmes, standing at the corner and glancing

along the line, "I should like just to remember the order of the

houses here. It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of

London. There is Mortimer's, the tobacconist, the little

newspaper shop, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank,

the Vegetarian Restaurant, and McFarlane's carriage-building

depot. That carries us right on to the other block. And now,

Doctor, we've done our work, so it's time we had some play. A

sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where

all is sweetness and delicacy and harmony, and there are no

red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums."

My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a

very capable performer but a composer of no ordinary merit. All

the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect

happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the

music, while his gently smiling face and his languid, dreamy eyes

were as unlike those of Holmes the sleuth-hound, Holmes the

relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was

possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature

alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and

astuteness represented, as I have often thought, the reaction

against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally

predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from

extreme languor to devouring energy; and, as I knew well, he was

never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been

lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his

black-letter editions. Then it was that the lust of the chase

would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning

power would rise to the level of intuition, until those who were

unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a

man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals. When I saw him

that afternoon so enwrapped in the music at St. James's Hall I

felt that an evil time might be coming upon those whom he had set

himself to hunt down.

"You want to go home, no doubt, Doctor," he remarked as we

emerged.

"Yes, it would be as well."

"And I have some business to do which will take some hours. This

business at Coburg Square is serious."

"Why serious?"

"A considerable crime is in contemplation. I have every reason to

believe that we shall be in time to stop it. But to-day being

Saturday rather complicates matters. I shall want your help

to-night."

"At what time?"

"Ten will be early enough."

"I shall be at Baker Street at ten."

"Very well. And, I say, Doctor, there may be some little danger,

so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket." He waved his

hand, turned on his heel, and disappeared in an instant among the

crowd.

I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was

always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings

with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had

seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that

he saw clearly not only what had happened but what was about to

happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and

grotesque. As I drove home to my house in Kensington I thought

over it all, from the extraordinary story of the red-headed

copier of the "Encyclopaedia" down to the visit to Saxe-Coburg

Square, and the ominous words with which he had parted from me.

What was this nocturnal expedition, and why should I go armed?

Where were we going, and what were we to do? I had the hint from

Holmes that this smooth-faced pawnbroker's assistant was a

formidable man--a man who might play a deep game. I tried to

puzzle it out, but gave it up in despair and set the matter aside

until night should bring an explanation.

It was a quarter-past nine when I started from home and made my

way across the Park, and so through Oxford Street to Baker

Street. Two hansoms were standing at the door, and as I entered

the passage I heard the sound of voices from above. On entering

his room I found Holmes in animated conversation with two men,

one of whom I recognised as Peter Jones, the official police

agent, while the other was a long, thin, sad-faced man, with a

very shiny hat and oppressively respectable frock-coat.

"Ha! Our party is complete," said Holmes, buttoning up his

pea-jacket and taking his heavy hunting crop from the rack.

"Watson, I think you know Mr. Jones, of Scotland Yard? Let me

introduce you to Mr. Merryweather, who is to be our companion in

to-night's adventure."

"We're hunting in couples again, Doctor, you see," said Jones in

his consequential way. "Our friend here is a wonderful man for

starting a chase. All he wants is an old dog to help him to do

the running down."

"I hope a wild goose may not prove to be the end of our chase,"

observed Mr. Merryweather gloomily.

"You may place considerable confidence in Mr. Holmes, sir," said

the police agent loftily. "He has his own little methods, which

are, if he won't mind my saying so, just a little too theoretical

and fantastic, but he has the makings of a detective in him. It

is not too much to say that once or twice, as in that business of

the Sholto murder and the Agra treasure, he has been more nearly

correct than the official force."

"Oh, if you say so, Mr. Jones, it is all right," said the

stranger with deference. "Still, I confess that I miss my rubber.

It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I

have not had my rubber."

"I think you will find," said Sherlock Holmes, "that you will

play for a higher stake to-night than you have ever done yet, and

that the play will be more exciting. For you, Mr. Merryweather,

the stake will be some 30,000 pounds; and for you, Jones, it will

be the man upon whom you wish to lay your hands."

"John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. He's a

young man, Mr. Merryweather, but he is at the head of his

profession, and I would rather have my bracelets on him than on

any criminal in London. He's a remarkable man, is young John

Clay. His grandfather was a royal duke, and he himself has been

to Eton and Oxford. His brain is as cunning as his fingers, and

though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to

find the man himself. He'll crack a crib in Scotland one week,

and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next.

I've been on his track for years and have never set eyes on him

yet."

"I hope that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to-night.

I've had one or two little turns also with Mr. John Clay, and I

agree with you that he is at the head of his profession. It is

past ten, however, and quite time that we started. If you two

will take the first hansom, Watson and I will follow in the

second."

Sherlock Holmes was not very communicative during the long drive

and lay back in the cab humming the tunes which he had heard in

the afternoon. We rattled through an endless labyrinth of gas-lit

streets until we emerged into Farrington Street.

"We are close there now," my friend remarked. "This fellow

Merryweather is a bank director, and personally interested in the

matter. I thought it as well to have Jones with us also. He is

not a bad fellow, though an absolute imbecile in his profession.

He has one positive virtue. He is as brave as a bulldog and as

tenacious as a lobster if he gets his claws upon anyone. Here we

are, and they are waiting for us."

We had reached the same crowded thoroughfare in which we had

found ourselves in the morning. Our cabs were dismissed, and,

following the guidance of Mr. Merryweather, we passed down a

narrow passage and through a side door, which he opened for us.

Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive

iron gate. This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding

stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. Mr.

Merryweather stopped to light a lantern, and then conducted us

down a dark, earth-smelling passage, and so, after opening a

third door, into a huge vault or cellar, which was piled all

round with crates and massive boxes.

"You are not very vulnerable from above," Holmes remarked as he

held up the lantern and gazed about him.

"Nor from below," said Mr. Merryweather, striking his stick upon

the flags which lined the floor. "Why, dear me, it sounds quite

hollow!" he remarked, looking up in surprise.

"I must really ask you to be a little more quiet!" said Holmes

severely. "You have already imperilled the whole success of our

expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit

down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?"

The solemn Mr. Merryweather perched himself upon a crate, with a

very injured expression upon his face, while Holmes fell upon his

knees upon the floor and, with the lantern and a magnifying lens,

began to examine minutely the cracks between the stones. A few

seconds sufficed to satisfy him, for he sprang to his feet again

and put his glass in his pocket.

"We have at least an hour before us," he remarked, "for they can

hardly take any steps until the good pawnbroker is safely in bed.

Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their

work the longer time they will have for their escape. We are at

present, Doctor--as no doubt you have divined--in the cellar of

the City branch of one of the principal London banks. Mr.

Merryweather is the chairman of directors, and he will explain to

you that there are reasons why the more daring criminals of

London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at

present."

"It is our French gold," whispered the director. "We have had

several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it."

"Your French gold?"

"Yes. We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources

and borrowed for that purpose 30,000 napoleons from the Bank of

France. It has become known that we have never had occasion to

unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. The

crate upon which I sit contains 2,000 napoleons packed between

layers of lead foil. Our reserve of bullion is much larger at

present than is usually kept in a single branch office, and the

directors have had misgivings upon the subject."

"Which were very well justified," observed Holmes. "And now it is

time that we arranged our little plans. I expect that within an

hour matters will come to a head. In the meantime Mr.

Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern."

"And sit in the dark?"

"I am afraid so. I had brought a pack of cards in my pocket, and

I thought that, as we were a partie carrée, you might have your

rubber after all. But I see that the enemy's preparations have

gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light. And,

first of all, we must choose our positions. These are daring men,

and though we shall take them at a disadvantage, they may do us

some harm unless we are careful. I shall stand behind this crate,

and do you conceal yourselves behind those. Then, when I flash a

light upon them, close in swiftly. If they fire, Watson, have no

compunction about shooting them down."

I placed my revolver, cocked, upon the top of the wooden case

behind which I crouched. Holmes shot the slide across the front

of his lantern and left us in pitch darkness--such an absolute

darkness as I have never before experienced. The smell of hot

metal remained to assure us that the light was still there, ready

to flash out at a moment's notice. To me, with my nerves worked

up to a pitch of expectancy, there was something depressing and

subduing in the sudden gloom, and in the cold dank air of the

vault.

"They have but one retreat," whispered Holmes. "That is back

through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. I hope that you have

done what I asked you, Jones?"

"I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door."

"Then we have stopped all the holes. And now we must be silent

and wait."

What a time it seemed! From comparing notes afterwards it was but

an hour and a quarter, yet it appeared to me that the night must

have almost gone and the dawn be breaking above us. My limbs

were weary and stiff, for I feared to change my position; yet my

nerves were worked up to the highest pitch of tension, and my

hearing was so acute that I could not only hear the gentle

breathing of my companions, but I could distinguish the deeper,

heavier in-breath of the bulky Jones from the thin, sighing note

of the bank director. From my position I could look over the case

in the direction of the floor. Suddenly my eyes caught the glint

of a light.

At first it was but a lurid spark upon the stone pavement. Then

it lengthened out until it became a yellow line, and then,

without any warning or sound, a gash seemed to open and a hand

appeared, a white, almost womanly hand, which felt about in the

centre of the little area of light. For a minute or more the

hand, with its writhing fingers, protruded out of the floor. Then

it was withdrawn as suddenly as it appeared, and all was dark

again save the single lurid spark which marked a chink between

the stones.

Its disappearance, however, was but momentary. With a rending,

tearing sound, one of the broad, white stones turned over upon

its side and left a square, gaping hole, through which streamed

the light of a lantern. Over the edge there peeped a clean-cut,

boyish face, which looked keenly about it, and then, with a hand

on either side of the aperture, drew itself shoulder-high and

waist-high, until one knee rested upon the edge. In another

instant he stood at the side of the hole and was hauling after

him a companion, lithe and small like himself, with a pale face

and a shock of very red hair.

"It's all clear," he whispered. "Have you the chisel and the

bags? Great Scott! Jump, Archie, jump, and I'll swing for it!"

Sherlock Holmes had sprung out and seized the intruder by the

collar. The other dived down the hole, and I heard the sound of

rending cloth as Jones clutched at his skirts. The light flashed

upon the barrel of a revolver, but Holmes' hunting crop came

down on the man's wrist, and the pistol clinked upon the stone

floor.

"It's no use, John Clay," said Holmes blandly. "You have no

chance at all."

"So I see," the other answered with the utmost coolness. "I fancy

that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his

coat-tails."

"There are three men waiting for him at the door," said Holmes.

"Oh, indeed! You seem to have done the thing very completely. I

must compliment you."

"And I you," Holmes answered. "Your red-headed idea was very new

and effective."

"You'll see your pal again presently," said Jones. "He's quicker

at climbing down holes than I am. Just hold out while I fix the

derbies."

"I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands,"

remarked our prisoner as the handcuffs clattered upon his wrists.

"You may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. Have

the goodness, also, when you address me always to say 'sir' and

'please.'"

"All right," said Jones with a stare and a snigger. "Well, would

you please, sir, march upstairs, where we can get a cab to carry

your Highness to the police-station?"

"That is better," said John Clay serenely. He made a sweeping bow

to the three of us and walked quietly off in the custody of the

detective.

"Really, Mr. Holmes," said Mr. Merryweather as we followed them

from the cellar, "I do not know how the bank can thank you or

repay you. There is no doubt that you have detected and defeated

in the most complete manner one of the most determined attempts

at bank robbery that have ever come within my experience."

"I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr.

John Clay," said Holmes. "I have been at some small expense over

this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond

that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in

many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of

the Red-headed League."

"You see, Watson," he explained in the early hours of the morning

as we sat over a glass of whisky and soda in Baker Street, "it

was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible

object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of

the League, and the copying of the 'Encyclopaedia,' must be to get

this not over-bright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of

hours every day. It was a curious way of managing it, but,

really, it would be difficult to suggest a better. The method was

no doubt suggested to Clay's ingenious mind by the colour of his

accomplice's hair. The 4 pounds a week was a lure which must draw

him, and what was it to them, who were playing for thousands?

They put in the advertisement, one rogue has the temporary

office, the other rogue incites the man to apply for it, and

together they manage to secure his absence every morning in the

week. From the time that I heard of the assistant having come for

half wages, it was obvious to me that he had some strong motive

for securing the situation."

"But how could you guess what the motive was?"

"Had there been women in the house, I should have suspected a

mere vulgar intrigue. That, however, was out of the question. The

man's business was a small one, and there was nothing in his

house which could account for such elaborate preparations, and

such an expenditure as they were at. It must, then, be something

out of the house. What could it be? I thought of the assistant's

fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the

cellar. The cellar! There was the end of this tangled clue. Then

I made inquiries as to this mysterious assistant and found that I

had to deal with one of the coolest and most daring criminals in

London. He was doing something in the cellar--something which

took many hours a day for months on end. What could it be, once

more? I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel

to some other building.

"So far I had got when we went to visit the scene of action. I

surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. I was

ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind.

It was not in front. Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the

assistant answered it. We have had some skirmishes, but we had

never set eyes upon each other before. I hardly looked at his

face. His knees were what I wished to see. You must yourself have

remarked how worn, wrinkled, and stained they were. They spoke of

those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they

were burrowing for. I walked round the corner, saw the City and

Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I

had solved my problem. When you drove home after the concert I

called upon Scotland Yard and upon the chairman of the bank

directors, with the result that you have seen."

"And how could you tell that they would make their attempt

to-night?" I asked.

"Well, when they closed their League offices that was a sign that

they cared no longer about Mr. Jabez Wilson's presence--in other

words, that they had completed their tunnel. But it was essential

that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the

bullion might be removed. Saturday would suit them better than

any other day, as it would give them two days for their escape.

For all these reasons I expected them to come to-night."

"You reasoned it out beautifully," I exclaimed in unfeigned

admiration. "It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings

true."

"It saved me from ennui," he answered, yawning. "Alas! I already

feel it closing in upon me. My life is spent in one long effort

to escape from the commonplaces of existence. These little

problems help me to do so."

"And you are a benefactor of the race," said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, perhaps, after all, it is of

some little use," he remarked. "'L'homme c'est rien--l'oeuvre

c'est tout,' as Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand."

ADVENTURE III. A CASE OF IDENTITY

"My dear fellow," said Sherlock Holmes as we sat on either side

of the fire in his lodgings at Baker Street, "life is infinitely

stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We

would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere

commonplaces of existence. If we could fly out of that window

hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the

roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the

strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the

wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and

leading to the most outré results, it would make all fiction with

its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and

unprofitable."

"And yet I am not convinced of it," I answered. "The cases which

come to light in the papers are, as a rule, bald enough, and

vulgar enough. We have in our police reports realism pushed to

its extreme limits, and yet the result is, it must be confessed,

neither fascinating nor artistic."

"A certain selection and discretion must be used in producing a

realistic effect," remarked Holmes. "This is wanting in the

police report, where more stress is laid, perhaps, upon the

platitudes of the magistrate than upon the details, which to an

observer contain the vital essence of the whole matter. Depend

upon it, there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace."

I smiled and shook my head. "I can quite understand your thinking

so," I said. "Of course, in your position of unofficial adviser

and helper to everybody who is absolutely puzzled, throughout

three continents, you are brought in contact with all that is

strange and bizarre. But here"--I picked up the morning paper

from the ground--"let us put it to a practical test. Here is the

first heading upon which I come. 'A husband's cruelty to his

wife.' There is half a column of print, but I know without

reading it that it is all perfectly familiar to me. There is, of

course, the other woman, the drink, the push, the blow, the

bruise, the sympathetic sister or landlady. The crudest of

writers could invent nothing more crude."

"Indeed, your example is an unfortunate one for your argument,"

said Holmes, taking the paper and glancing his eye down it. "This

is the Dundas separation case, and, as it happens, I was engaged

in clearing up some small points in connection with it. The

husband was a teetotaler, there was no other woman, and the

conduct complained of was that he had drifted into the habit of

winding up every meal by taking out his false teeth and hurling

them at his wife, which, you will allow, is not an action likely

to occur to the imagination of the average story-teller. Take a

pinch of snuff, Doctor, and acknowledge that I have scored over

you in your example."

He held out his snuffbox of old gold, with a great amethyst in

the centre of the lid. Its splendour was in such contrast to his

homely ways and simple life that I could not help commenting upon

it.

"Ah," said he, "I forgot that I had not seen you for some weeks.

It is a little souvenir from the King of Bohemia in return for my

assistance in the case of the Irene Adler papers."

"And the ring?" I asked, glancing at a remarkable brilliant which

sparkled upon his finger.

"It was from the reigning family of Holland, though the matter in

which I served them was of such delicacy that I cannot confide it

even to you, who have been good enough to chronicle one or two of

my little problems."

"And have you any on hand just now?" I asked with interest.

"Some ten or twelve, but none which present any feature of

interest. They are important, you understand, without being

interesting. Indeed, I have found that it is usually in

unimportant matters that there is a field for the observation,

and for the quick analysis of cause and effect which gives the

charm to an investigation. The larger crimes are apt to be the

simpler, for the bigger the crime the more obvious, as a rule, is

the motive. In these cases, save for one rather intricate matter

which has been referred to me from Marseilles, there is nothing

which presents any features of interest. It is possible, however,

that I may have something better before very many minutes are

over, for this is one of my clients, or I am much mistaken."

He had risen from his chair and was standing between the parted

blinds gazing down into the dull neutral-tinted London street.

Looking over his shoulder, I saw that on the pavement opposite

there stood a large woman with a heavy fur boa round her neck,

and a large curling red feather in a broad-brimmed hat which was

tilted in a coquettish Duchess of Devonshire fashion over her

ear. From under this great panoply she peeped up in a nervous,

hesitating fashion at our windows, while her body oscillated

backward and forward, and her fingers fidgeted with her glove

buttons. Suddenly, with a plunge, as of the swimmer who leaves

the bank, she hurried across the road, and we heard the sharp

clang of the bell.

"I have seen those symptoms before," said Holmes, throwing his

cigarette into the fire. "Oscillation upon the pavement always

means an affaire de coeur. She would like advice, but is not sure

that the matter is not too delicate for communication. And yet

even here we may discriminate. When a woman has been seriously

wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom

is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love

matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or

grieved. But here she comes in person to resolve our doubts."

As he spoke there was a tap at the door, and the boy in buttons

entered to announce Miss Mary Sutherland, while the lady herself

loomed behind his small black figure like a full-sailed

merchant-man behind a tiny pilot boat. Sherlock Holmes welcomed

her with the easy courtesy for which he was remarkable, and,

having closed the door and bowed her into an armchair, he looked

her over in the minute and yet abstracted fashion which was

peculiar to him.

"Do you not find," he said, "that with your short sight it is a

little trying to do so much typewriting?"

"I did at first," she answered, "but now I know where the letters

are without looking." Then, suddenly realising the full purport

of his words, she gave a violent start and looked up, with fear

and astonishment upon her broad, good-humoured face. "You've

heard about me, Mr. Holmes," she cried, "else how could you know

all that?"

"Never mind," said Holmes, laughing; "it is my business to know

things. Perhaps I have trained myself to see what others

overlook. If not, why should you come to consult me?"

"I came to you, sir, because I heard of you from Mrs. Etherege,

whose husband you found so easy when the police and everyone had

given him up for dead. Oh, Mr. Holmes, I wish you would do as

much for me. I'm not rich, but still I have a hundred a year in

my own right, besides the little that I make by the machine, and

I would give it all to know what has become of Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"Why did you come away to consult me in such a hurry?" asked

Sherlock Holmes, with his finger-tips together and his eyes to

the ceiling.

Again a startled look came over the somewhat vacuous face of Miss

Mary Sutherland. "Yes, I did bang out of the house," she said,

"for it made me angry to see the easy way in which Mr.

Windibank--that is, my father--took it all. He would not go to

the police, and he would not go to you, and so at last, as he

would do nothing and kept on saying that there was no harm done,

it made me mad, and I just on with my things and came right away

to you."

"Your father," said Holmes, "your stepfather, surely, since the

name is different."

"Yes, my stepfather. I call him father, though it sounds funny,

too, for he is only five years and two months older than myself."

"And your mother is alive?"

"Oh, yes, mother is alive and well. I wasn't best pleased, Mr.

Holmes, when she married again so soon after father's death, and

a man who was nearly fifteen years younger than herself. Father

was a plumber in the Tottenham Court Road, and he left a tidy

business behind him, which mother carried on with Mr. Hardy, the

foreman; but when Mr. Windibank came he made her sell the

business, for he was very superior, being a traveller in wines.

They got 4700 pounds for the goodwill and interest, which wasn't

near as much as father could have got if he had been alive."

I had expected to see Sherlock Holmes impatient under this

rambling and inconsequential narrative, but, on the contrary, he

had listened with the greatest concentration of attention.

"Your own little income," he asked, "does it come out of the

business?"

"Oh, no, sir. It is quite separate and was left me by my uncle

Ned in Auckland. It is in New Zealand stock, paying 4 1/2 per

cent. Two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount, but I can

only touch the interest."

"You interest me extremely," said Holmes. "And since you draw so

large a sum as a hundred a year, with what you earn into the

bargain, you no doubt travel a little and indulge yourself in

every way. I believe that a single lady can get on very nicely

upon an income of about 60 pounds."

"I could do with much less than that, Mr. Holmes, but you

understand that as long as I live at home I don't wish to be a

burden to them, and so they have the use of the money just while

I am staying with them. Of course, that is only just for the

time. Mr. Windibank draws my interest every quarter and pays it

over to mother, and I find that I can do pretty well with what I

earn at typewriting. It brings me twopence a sheet, and I can

often do from fifteen to twenty sheets in a day."

"You have made your position very clear to me," said Holmes.

"This is my friend, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as

freely as before myself. Kindly tell us now all about your

connection with Mr. Hosmer Angel."

A flush stole over Miss Sutherland's face, and she picked

nervously at the fringe of her jacket. "I met him first at the

gasfitters' ball," she said. "They used to send father tickets

when he was alive, and then afterwards they remembered us, and

sent them to mother. Mr. Windibank did not wish us to go. He

never did wish us to go anywhere. He would get quite mad if I

wanted so much as to join a Sunday-school treat. But this time I

was set on going, and I would go; for what right had he to

prevent? He said the folk were not fit for us to know, when all

father's friends were to be there. And he said that I had nothing

fit to wear, when I had my purple plush that I had never so much

as taken out of the drawer. At last, when nothing else would do,

he went off to France upon the business of the firm, but we went,

mother and I, with Mr. Hardy, who used to be our foreman, and it

was there I met Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"I suppose," said Holmes, "that when Mr. Windibank came back from

France he was very annoyed at your having gone to the ball."

"Oh, well, he was very good about it. He laughed, I remember, and

shrugged his shoulders, and said there was no use denying

anything to a woman, for she would have her way."

"I see. Then at the gasfitters' ball you met, as I understand, a

gentleman called Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"Yes, sir. I met him that night, and he called next day to ask if

we had got home all safe, and after that we met him--that is to

say, Mr. Holmes, I met him twice for walks, but after that father

came back again, and Mr. Hosmer Angel could not come to the house

any more."

"No?"

"Well, you know father didn't like anything of the sort. He

wouldn't have any visitors if he could help it, and he used to

say that a woman should be happy in her own family circle. But

then, as I used to say to mother, a woman wants her own circle to

begin with, and I had not got mine yet."

"But how about Mr. Hosmer Angel? Did he make no attempt to see

you?"

"Well, father was going off to France again in a week, and Hosmer

wrote and said that it would be safer and better not to see each

other until he had gone. We could write in the meantime, and he

used to write every day. I took the letters in in the morning, so

there was no need for father to know."

"Were you engaged to the gentleman at this time?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Holmes. We were engaged after the first walk that

we took. Hosmer--Mr. Angel--was a cashier in an office in

Leadenhall Street--and--"

"What office?"

"That's the worst of it, Mr. Holmes, I don't know."

"Where did he live, then?"

"He slept on the premises."

"And you don't know his address?"

"No--except that it was Leadenhall Street."

"Where did you address your letters, then?"

"To the Leadenhall Street Post Office, to be left till called

for. He said that if they were sent to the office he would be

chaffed by all the other clerks about having letters from a lady,

so I offered to typewrite them, like he did his, but he wouldn't

have that, for he said that when I wrote them they seemed to come

from me, but when they were typewritten he always felt that the

machine had come between us. That will just show you how fond he

was of me, Mr. Holmes, and the little things that he would think

of."

"It was most suggestive," said Holmes. "It has long been an axiom

of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important.

Can you remember any other little things about Mr. Hosmer Angel?"

"He was a very shy man, Mr. Holmes. He would rather walk with me

in the evening than in the daylight, for he said that he hated to

be conspicuous. Very retiring and gentlemanly he was. Even his

voice was gentle. He'd had the quinsy and swollen glands when he

was young, he told me, and it had left him with a weak throat,

and a hesitating, whispering fashion of speech. He was always

well dressed, very neat and plain, but his eyes were weak, just

as mine are, and he wore tinted glasses against the glare."

"Well, and what happened when Mr. Windibank, your stepfather,

returned to France?"

"Mr. Hosmer Angel came to the house again and proposed that we

should marry before father came back. He was in dreadful earnest

and made me swear, with my hands on the Testament, that whatever

happened I would always be true to him. Mother said he was quite

right to make me swear, and that it was a sign of his passion.

Mother was all in his favour from the first and was even fonder

of him than I was. Then, when they talked of marrying within the

week, I began to ask about father; but they both said never to

mind about father, but just to tell him afterwards, and mother

said she would make it all right with him. I didn't quite like

that, Mr. Holmes. It seemed funny that I should ask his leave, as

he was only a few years older than me; but I didn't want to do

anything on the sly, so I wrote to father at Bordeaux, where the

company has its French offices, but the letter came back to me on

the very morning of the wedding."

"It missed him, then?"

"Yes, sir; for he had started to England just before it arrived."

"Ha! that was unfortunate. Your wedding was arranged, then, for

the Friday. Was it to be in church?"

"Yes, sir, but very quietly. It was to be at St. Saviour's, near

King's Cross, and we were to have breakfast afterwards at the St.

Pancras Hotel. Hosmer came for us in a hansom, but as there were

two of us he put us both into it and stepped himself into a

four-wheeler, which happened to be the only other cab in the

street. We got to the church first, and when the four-wheeler

drove up we waited for him to step out, but he never did, and

when the cabman got down from the box and looked there was no one

there! The cabman said that he could not imagine what had become

of him, for he had seen him get in with his own eyes. That was

last Friday, Mr. Holmes, and I have never seen or heard anything

since then to throw any light upon what became of him."

"It seems to me that you have been very shamefully treated," said

Holmes.

"Oh, no, sir! He was too good and kind to leave me so. Why, all

the morning he was saying to me that, whatever happened, I was to

be true; and that even if something quite unforeseen occurred to

separate us, I was always to remember that I was pledged to him,

and that he would claim his pledge sooner or later. It seemed

strange talk for a wedding-morning, but what has happened since

gives a meaning to it."

"Most certainly it does. Your own opinion is, then, that some

unforeseen catastrophe has occurred to him?"

"Yes, sir. I believe that he foresaw some danger, or else he

would not have talked so. And then I think that what he foresaw

happened."

"But you have no notion as to what it could have been?"

"None."

"One more question. How did your mother take the matter?"

"She was angry, and said that I was never to speak of the matter

again."

"And your father? Did you tell him?"

"Yes; and he seemed to think, with me, that something had

happened, and that I should hear of Hosmer again. As he said,

what interest could anyone have in bringing me to the doors of

the church, and then leaving me? Now, if he had borrowed my

money, or if he had married me and got my money settled on him,

there might be some reason, but Hosmer was very independent about

money and never would look at a shilling of mine. And yet, what

could have happened? And why could he not write? Oh, it drives me

half-mad to think of it, and I can't sleep a wink at night." She

pulled a little handkerchief out of her muff and began to sob

heavily into it.

"I shall glance into the case for you," said Holmes, rising, "and

I have no doubt that we shall reach some definite result. Let the

weight of the matter rest upon me now, and do not let your mind

dwell upon it further. Above all, try to let Mr. Hosmer Angel

vanish from your memory, as he has done from your life."

"Then you don't think I'll see him again?"

"I fear not."

"Then what has happened to him?"

"You will leave that question in my hands. I should like an

accurate description of him and any letters of his which you can

spare."

"I advertised for him in last Saturday's Chronicle," said she.

"Here is the slip and here are four letters from him."

"Thank you. And your address?"

"No. 31 Lyon Place, Camberwell."

"Mr. Angel's address you never had, I understand. Where is your

father's place of business?"

"He travels for Westhouse & Marbank, the great claret importers

of Fenchurch Street."

"Thank you. You have made your statement very clearly. You will

leave the papers here, and remember the advice which I have given

you. Let the whole incident be a sealed book, and do not allow it

to affect your life."

"You are very kind, Mr. Holmes, but I cannot do that. I shall be

true to Hosmer. He shall find me ready when he comes back."

For all the preposterous hat and the vacuous face, there was

something noble in the simple faith of our visitor which

compelled our respect. She laid her little bundle of papers upon

the table and went her way, with a promise to come again whenever

she might be summoned.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for a few minutes with his fingertips

still pressed together, his legs stretched out in front of him,

and his gaze directed upward to the ceiling. Then he took down

from the rack the old and oily clay pipe, which was to him as a

counsellor, and, having lit it, he leaned back in his chair, with

the thick blue cloud-wreaths spinning up from him, and a look of

infinite languor in his face.

"Quite an interesting study, that maiden," he observed. "I found

her more interesting than her little problem, which, by the way,

is rather a trite one. You will find parallel cases, if you

consult my index, in Andover in '77, and there was something of

the sort at The Hague last year. Old as is the idea, however,

there were one or two details which were new to me. But the

maiden herself was most instructive."

"You appeared to read a good deal upon her which was quite

invisible to me," I remarked.

"Not invisible but unnoticed, Watson. You did not know where to

look, and so you missed all that was important. I can never bring

you to realise the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of

thumb-nails, or the great issues that may hang from a boot-lace.

Now, what did you gather from that woman's appearance? Describe

it."

"Well, she had a slate-coloured, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a

feather of a brickish red. Her jacket was black, with black beads

sewn upon it, and a fringe of little black jet ornaments. Her

dress was brown, rather darker than coffee colour, with a little

purple plush at the neck and sleeves. Her gloves were greyish and

were worn through at the right forefinger. Her boots I didn't

observe. She had small round, hanging gold earrings, and a

general air of being fairly well-to-do in a vulgar, comfortable,

easy-going way."

Sherlock Holmes clapped his hands softly together and chuckled.

"'Pon my word, Watson, you are coming along wonderfully. You have

really done very well indeed. It is true that you have missed

everything of importance, but you have hit upon the method, and

you have a quick eye for colour. Never trust to general

impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. My

first glance is always at a woman's sleeve. In a man it is

perhaps better first to take the knee of the trouser. As you

observe, this woman had plush upon her sleeves, which is a most

useful material for showing traces. The double line a little

above the wrist, where the typewritist presses against the table,

was beautifully defined. The sewing-machine, of the hand type,

leaves a similar mark, but only on the left arm, and on the side

of it farthest from the thumb, instead of being right across the

broadest part, as this was. I then glanced at her face, and,

observing the dint of a pince-nez at either side of her nose, I

ventured a remark upon short sight and typewriting, which seemed

to surprise her."

"It surprised me."

"But, surely, it was obvious. I was then much surprised and

interested on glancing down to observe that, though the boots

which she was wearing were not unlike each other, they were

really odd ones; the one having a slightly decorated toe-cap, and

the other a plain one. One was buttoned only in the two lower

buttons out of five, and the other at the first, third, and

fifth. Now, when you see that a young lady, otherwise neatly

dressed, has come away from home with odd boots, half-buttoned,

it is no great deduction to say that she came away in a hurry."

"And what else?" I asked, keenly interested, as I always was, by

my friend's incisive reasoning.

"I noted, in passing, that she had written a note before leaving

home but after being fully dressed. You observed that her right

glove was torn at the forefinger, but you did not apparently see

that both glove and finger were stained with violet ink. She had

written in a hurry and dipped her pen too deep. It must have been

this morning, or the mark would not remain clear upon the finger.

All this is amusing, though rather elementary, but I must go back

to business, Watson. Would you mind reading me the advertised

description of Mr. Hosmer Angel?"

I held the little printed slip to the light.

"Missing," it said, "on the morning of the fourteenth, a gentleman

named Hosmer Angel. About five ft. seven in. in height;

strongly built, sallow complexion, black hair, a little bald in

the centre, bushy, black side-whiskers and moustache; tinted

glasses, slight infirmity of speech. Was dressed, when last seen,

in black frock-coat faced with silk, black waistcoat, gold Albert

chain, and grey Harris tweed trousers, with brown gaiters over

elastic-sided boots. Known to have been employed in an office in

Leadenhall Street. Anybody bringing--"

"That will do," said Holmes. "As to the letters," he continued,

glancing over them, "they are very commonplace. Absolutely no

clue in them to Mr. Angel, save that he quotes Balzac once. There

is one remarkable point, however, which will no doubt strike

you."

"They are typewritten," I remarked.

"Not only that, but the signature is typewritten. Look at the

neat little 'Hosmer Angel' at the bottom. There is a date, you

see, but no superscription except Leadenhall Street, which is

rather vague. The point about the signature is very suggestive--in

fact, we may call it conclusive."

"Of what?"

"My dear fellow, is it possible you do not see how strongly it

bears upon the case?"

"I cannot say that I do unless it were that he wished to be able

to deny his signature if an action for breach of promise were

instituted."

"No, that was not the point. However, I shall write two letters,

which should settle the matter. One is to a firm in the City, the

other is to the young lady's stepfather, Mr. Windibank, asking

him whether he could meet us here at six o'clock tomorrow

evening. It is just as well that we should do business with the

male relatives. And now, Doctor, we can do nothing until the

answers to those letters come, so we may put our little problem

upon the shelf for the interim."

I had had so many reasons to believe in my friend's subtle powers

of reasoning and extraordinary energy in action that I felt that

he must have some solid grounds for the assured and easy

demeanour with which he treated the singular mystery which he had

been called upon to fathom. Once only had I known him to fail, in

the case of the King of Bohemia and of the Irene Adler

photograph; but when I looked back to the weird business of the

Sign of Four, and the extraordinary circumstances connected with

the Study in Scarlet, I felt that it would be a strange tangle

indeed which he could not unravel.

I left him then, still puffing at his black clay pipe, with the

conviction that when I came again on the next evening I would

find that he held in his hands all the clues which would lead up

to the identity of the disappearing bridegroom of Miss Mary

Sutherland.

A professional case of great gravity was engaging my own

attention at the time, and the whole of next day I was busy at

the bedside of the sufferer. It was not until close upon six

o'clock that I found myself free and was able to spring into a

hansom and drive to Baker Street, half afraid that I might be too

late to assist at the dénouement of the little mystery. I found

Sherlock Holmes alone, however, half asleep, with his long, thin

form curled up in the recesses of his armchair. A formidable

array of bottles and test-tubes, with the pungent cleanly smell

of hydrochloric acid, told me that he had spent his day in the

chemical work which was so dear to him.

"Well, have you solved it?" I asked as I entered.

"Yes. It was the bisulphate of baryta."

"No, no, the mystery!" I cried.

"Oh, that! I thought of the salt that I have been working upon.

There was never any mystery in the matter, though, as I said

yesterday, some of the details are of interest. The only drawback

is that there is no law, I fear, that can touch the scoundrel."

"Who was he, then, and what was his object in deserting Miss

Sutherland?"

The question was hardly out of my mouth, and Holmes had not yet

opened his lips to reply, when we heard a heavy footfall in the

passage and a tap at the door.

"This is the girl's stepfather, Mr. James Windibank," said

Holmes. "He has written to me to say that he would be here at

six. Come in!"

The man who entered was a sturdy, middle-sized fellow, some

thirty years of age, clean-shaven, and sallow-skinned, with a

bland, insinuating manner, and a pair of wonderfully sharp and

penetrating grey eyes. He shot a questioning glance at each of

us, placed his shiny top-hat upon the sideboard, and with a

slight bow sidled down into the nearest chair.

"Good-evening, Mr. James Windibank," said Holmes. "I think that

this typewritten letter is from you, in which you made an

appointment with me for six o'clock?"

"Yes, sir. I am afraid that I am a little late, but I am not

quite my own master, you know. I am sorry that Miss Sutherland

has troubled you about this little matter, for I think it is far

better not to wash linen of the sort in public. It was quite

against my wishes that she came, but she is a very excitable,

impulsive girl, as you may have noticed, and she is not easily

controlled when she has made up her mind on a point. Of course, I

did not mind you so much, as you are not connected with the

official police, but it is not pleasant to have a family

misfortune like this noised abroad. Besides, it is a useless

expense, for how could you possibly find this Hosmer Angel?"

"On the contrary," said Holmes quietly; "I have every reason to

believe that I will succeed in discovering Mr. Hosmer Angel."

Mr. Windibank gave a violent start and dropped his gloves. "I am

delighted to hear it," he said.

"It is a curious thing," remarked Holmes, "that a typewriter has

really quite as much individuality as a man's handwriting. Unless

they are quite new, no two of them write exactly alike. Some

letters get more worn than others, and some wear only on one

side. Now, you remark in this note of yours, Mr. Windibank, that

in every case there is some little slurring over of the 'e,' and

a slight defect in the tail of the 'r.' There are fourteen other

characteristics, but those are the more obvious."

"We do all our correspondence with this machine at the office,

and no doubt it is a little worn," our visitor answered, glancing

keenly at Holmes with his bright little eyes.

"And now I will show you what is really a very interesting study,

Mr. Windibank," Holmes continued. "I think of writing another

little monograph some of these days on the typewriter and its

relation to crime. It is a subject to which I have devoted some

little attention. I have here four letters which purport to come

from the missing man. They are all typewritten. In each case, not

only are the 'e's' slurred and the 'r's' tailless, but you will

observe, if you care to use my magnifying lens, that the fourteen

other characteristics to which I have alluded are there as well."

Mr. Windibank sprang out of his chair and picked up his hat. "I

cannot waste time over this sort of fantastic talk, Mr. Holmes,"

he said. "If you can catch the man, catch him, and let me know

when you have done it."

"Certainly," said Holmes, stepping over and turning the key in

the door. "I let you know, then, that I have caught him!"

"What! where?" shouted Mr. Windibank, turning white to his lips

and glancing about him like a rat in a trap.

"Oh, it won't do--really it won't," said Holmes suavely. "There

is no possible getting out of it, Mr. Windibank. It is quite too

transparent, and it was a very bad compliment when you said that

it was impossible for me to solve so simple a question. That's

right! Sit down and let us talk it over."

Our visitor collapsed into a chair, with a ghastly face and a

glitter of moisture on his brow. "It--it's not actionable," he

stammered.

"I am very much afraid that it is not. But between ourselves,

Windibank, it was as cruel and selfish and heartless a trick in a

petty way as ever came before me. Now, let me just run over the

course of events, and you will contradict me if I go wrong."

The man sat huddled up in his chair, with his head sunk upon his

breast, like one who is utterly crushed. Holmes stuck his feet up

on the corner of the mantelpiece and, leaning back with his hands

in his pockets, began talking, rather to himself, as it seemed,

than to us.

"The man married a woman very much older than himself for her

money," said he, "and he enjoyed the use of the money of the

daughter as long as she lived with them. It was a considerable

sum, for people in their position, and the loss of it would have

made a serious difference. It was worth an effort to preserve it.

The daughter was of a good, amiable disposition, but affectionate

and warm-hearted in her ways, so that it was evident that with

her fair personal advantages, and her little income, she would

not be allowed to remain single long. Now her marriage would

mean, of course, the loss of a hundred a year, so what does her

stepfather do to prevent it? He takes the obvious course of

keeping her at home and forbidding her to seek the company of

people of her own age. But soon he found that that would not

answer forever. She became restive, insisted upon her rights, and

finally announced her positive intention of going to a certain

ball. What does her clever stepfather do then? He conceives an

idea more creditable to his head than to his heart. With the

connivance and assistance of his wife he disguised himself,

covered those keen eyes with tinted glasses, masked the face with

a moustache and a pair of bushy whiskers, sunk that clear voice

into an insinuating whisper, and doubly secure on account of the

girl's short sight, he appears as Mr. Hosmer Angel, and keeps off

other lovers by making love himself."

"It was only a joke at first," groaned our visitor. "We never

thought that she would have been so carried away."

"Very likely not. However that may be, the young lady was very

decidedly carried away, and, having quite made up her mind that

her stepfather was in France, the suspicion of treachery never

for an instant entered her mind. She was flattered by the

gentleman's attentions, and the effect was increased by the

loudly expressed admiration of her mother. Then Mr. Angel began

to call, for it was obvious that the matter should be pushed as

far as it would go if a real effect were to be produced. There

were meetings, and an engagement, which would finally secure the

girl's affections from turning towards anyone else. But the

deception could not be kept up forever. These pretended journeys

to France were rather cumbrous. The thing to do was clearly to

bring the business to an end in such a dramatic manner that it

would leave a permanent impression upon the young lady's mind and

prevent her from looking upon any other suitor for some time to

come. Hence those vows of fidelity exacted upon a Testament, and

hence also the allusions to a possibility of something happening

on the very morning of the wedding. James Windibank wished Miss

Sutherland to be so bound to Hosmer Angel, and so uncertain as to

his fate, that for ten years to come, at any rate, she would not

listen to another man. As far as the church door he brought her,

and then, as he could go no farther, he conveniently vanished

away by the old trick of stepping in at one door of a

four-wheeler and out at the other. I think that was the chain of

events, Mr. Windibank!"

Our visitor had recovered something of his assurance while Holmes

had been talking, and he rose from his chair now with a cold

sneer upon his pale face.

"It may be so, or it may not, Mr. Holmes," said he, "but if you

are so very sharp you ought to be sharp enough to know that it is

you who are breaking the law now, and not me. I have done nothing

actionable from the first, but as long as you keep that door

locked you lay yourself open to an action for assault and illegal

constraint."

"The law cannot, as you say, touch you," said Holmes, unlocking

and throwing open the door, "yet there never was a man who

deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a

friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. By Jove!"

he continued, flushing up at the sight of the bitter sneer upon

the man's face, "it is not part of my duties to my client, but

here's a hunting crop handy, and I think I shall just treat

myself to--" He took two swift steps to the whip, but before he

could grasp it there was a wild clatter of steps upon the stairs,

the heavy hall door banged, and from the window we could see Mr.

James Windibank running at the top of his speed down the road.

"There's a cold-blooded scoundrel!" said Holmes, laughing, as he

threw himself down into his chair once more. "That fellow will

rise from crime to crime until he does something very bad, and

ends on a gallows. The case has, in some respects, been not

entirely devoid of interest."

"I cannot now entirely see all the steps of your reasoning," I

remarked.

"Well, of course it was obvious from the first that this Mr.

Hosmer Angel must have some strong object for his curious

conduct, and it was equally clear that the only man who really

profited by the incident, as far as we could see, was the

stepfather. Then the fact that the two men were never together,

but that the one always appeared when the other was away, was

suggestive. So were the tinted spectacles and the curious voice,

which both hinted at a disguise, as did the bushy whiskers. My

suspicions were all confirmed by his peculiar action in

typewriting his signature, which, of course, inferred that his

handwriting was so familiar to her that she would recognise even

the smallest sample of it. You see all these isolated facts,

together with many minor ones, all pointed in the same

direction."

"And how did you verify them?"

"Having once spotted my man, it was easy to get corroboration. I

knew the firm for which this man worked. Having taken the printed

description. I eliminated everything from it which could be the

result of a disguise--the whiskers, the glasses, the voice, and I

sent it to the firm, with a request that they would inform me

whether it answered to the description of any of their

travellers. I had already noticed the peculiarities of the

typewriter, and I wrote to the man himself at his business

address asking him if he would come here. As I expected, his

reply was typewritten and revealed the same trivial but

characteristic defects. The same post brought me a letter from

Westhouse & Marbank, of Fenchurch Street, to say that the

description tallied in every respect with that of their employé,

James Windibank. Voilà tout!"

"And Miss Sutherland?"

"If I tell her she will not believe me. You may remember the old

Persian saying, 'There is danger for him who taketh the tiger

cub, and danger also for whoso snatches a delusion from a woman.'

There is as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much

knowledge of the world."

ADVENTURE IV. THE BOSCOMBE VALLEY MYSTERY

We were seated at breakfast one morning, my wife and I, when the

maid brought in a telegram. It was from Sherlock Holmes and ran

in this way:

"Have you a couple of days to spare? Have just been wired for from

the west of England in connection with Boscombe Valley tragedy.

Shall be glad if you will come with me. Air and scenery perfect.

Leave Paddington by the 11:15."

"What do you say, dear?" said my wife, looking across at me.

"Will you go?"

"I really don't know what to say. I have a fairly long list at

present."

"Oh, Anstruther would do your work for you. You have been looking

a little pale lately. I think that the change would do you good,

and you are always so interested in Mr. Sherlock Holmes' cases."

"I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained

through one of them," I answered. "But if I am to go, I must pack

at once, for I have only half an hour."

My experience of camp life in Afghanistan had at least had the

effect of making me a prompt and ready traveller. My wants were

few and simple, so that in less than the time stated I was in a

cab with my valise, rattling away to Paddington Station. Sherlock

Holmes was pacing up and down the platform, his tall, gaunt

figure made even gaunter and taller by his long grey

travelling-cloak and close-fitting cloth cap.

"It is really very good of you to come, Watson," said he. "It

makes a considerable difference to me, having someone with me on

whom I can thoroughly rely. Local aid is always either worthless

or else biassed. If you will keep the two corner seats I shall

get the tickets."

We had the carriage to ourselves save for an immense litter of

papers which Holmes had brought with him. Among these he rummaged

and read, with intervals of note-taking and of meditation, until

we were past Reading. Then he suddenly rolled them all into a

gigantic ball and tossed them up onto the rack.

"Have you heard anything of the case?" he asked.

"Not a word. I have not seen a paper for some days."

"The London press has not had very full accounts. I have just

been looking through all the recent papers in order to master the

particulars. It seems, from what I gather, to be one of those

simple cases which are so extremely difficult."

"That sounds a little paradoxical."

"But it is profoundly true. Singularity is almost invariably a

clue. The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more

difficult it is to bring it home. In this case, however, they

have established a very serious case against the son of the

murdered man."

"It is a murder, then?"

"Well, it is conjectured to be so. I shall take nothing for

granted until I have the opportunity of looking personally into

it. I will explain the state of things to you, as far as I have

been able to understand it, in a very few words.

"Boscombe Valley is a country district not very far from Ross, in

Herefordshire. The largest landed proprietor in that part is a

Mr. John Turner, who made his money in Australia and returned

some years ago to the old country. One of the farms which he

held, that of Hatherley, was let to Mr. Charles McCarthy, who was

also an ex-Australian. The men had known each other in the

colonies, so that it was not unnatural that when they came to

settle down they should do so as near each other as possible.

Turner was apparently the richer man, so McCarthy became his

tenant but still remained, it seems, upon terms of perfect

equality, as they were frequently together. McCarthy had one son,

a lad of eighteen, and Turner had an only daughter of the same

age, but neither of them had wives living. They appear to have

avoided the society of the neighbouring English families and to

have led retired lives, though both the McCarthys were fond of

sport and were frequently seen at the race-meetings of the

neighbourhood. McCarthy kept two servants--a man and a girl.

Turner had a considerable household, some half-dozen at the

least. That is as much as I have been able to gather about the

families. Now for the facts.

"On June 3rd, that is, on Monday last, McCarthy left his house at

Hatherley about three in the afternoon and walked down to the

Boscombe Pool, which is a small lake formed by the spreading out

of the stream which runs down the Boscombe Valley. He had been

out with his serving-man in the morning at Ross, and he had told

the man that he must hurry, as he had an appointment of

importance to keep at three. From that appointment he never came

back alive.

"From Hatherley Farm-house to the Boscombe Pool is a quarter of a

mile, and two people saw him as he passed over this ground. One

was an old woman, whose name is not mentioned, and the other was

William Crowder, a game-keeper in the employ of Mr. Turner. Both

these witnesses depose that Mr. McCarthy was walking alone. The

game-keeper adds that within a few minutes of his seeing Mr.

McCarthy pass he had seen his son, Mr. James McCarthy, going the

same way with a gun under his arm. To the best of his belief, the

father was actually in sight at the time, and the son was

following him. He thought no more of the matter until he heard in

the evening of the tragedy that had occurred.

"The two McCarthys were seen after the time when William Crowder,

the game-keeper, lost sight of them. The Boscombe Pool is thickly

wooded round, with just a fringe of grass and of reeds round the

edge. A girl of fourteen, Patience Moran, who is the daughter of

the lodge-keeper of the Boscombe Valley estate, was in one of the

woods picking flowers. She states that while she was there she

saw, at the border of the wood and close by the lake, Mr.

McCarthy and his son, and that they appeared to be having a

violent quarrel. She heard Mr. McCarthy the elder using very

strong language to his son, and she saw the latter raise up his

hand as if to strike his father. She was so frightened by their

violence that she ran away and told her mother when she reached

home that she had left the two McCarthys quarrelling near

Boscombe Pool, and that she was afraid that they were going to

fight. She had hardly said the words when young Mr. McCarthy came

running up to the lodge to say that he had found his father dead

in the wood, and to ask for the help of the lodge-keeper. He was

much excited, without either his gun or his hat, and his right

hand and sleeve were observed to be stained with fresh blood. On

following him they found the dead body stretched out upon the

grass beside the pool. The head had been beaten in by repeated

blows of some heavy and blunt weapon. The injuries were such as

might very well have been inflicted by the butt-end of his son's

gun, which was found lying on the grass within a few paces of the

body. Under these circumstances the young man was instantly

arrested, and a verdict of 'wilful murder' having been returned

at the inquest on Tuesday, he was on Wednesday brought before the

magistrates at Ross, who have referred the case to the next

Assizes. Those are the main facts of the case as they came out

before the coroner and the police-court."

"I could hardly imagine a more damning case," I remarked. "If

ever circumstantial evidence pointed to a criminal it does so

here."

"Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing," answered Holmes

thoughtfully. "It may seem to point very straight to one thing,

but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it

pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something

entirely different. It must be confessed, however, that the case

looks exceedingly grave against the young man, and it is very

possible that he is indeed the culprit. There are several people

in the neighbourhood, however, and among them Miss Turner, the

daughter of the neighbouring landowner, who believe in his

innocence, and who have retained Lestrade, whom you may recollect

in connection with the Study in Scarlet, to work out the case in

his interest. Lestrade, being rather puzzled, has referred the

case to me, and hence it is that two middle-aged gentlemen are

flying westward at fifty miles an hour instead of quietly

digesting their breakfasts at home."

"I am afraid," said I, "that the facts are so obvious that you

will find little credit to be gained out of this case."

"There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact," he

answered, laughing. "Besides, we may chance to hit upon some

other obvious facts which may have been by no means obvious to

Mr. Lestrade. You know me too well to think that I am boasting

when I say that I shall either confirm or destroy his theory by

means which he is quite incapable of employing, or even of

understanding. To take the first example to hand, I very clearly

perceive that in your bedroom the window is upon the right-hand

side, and yet I question whether Mr. Lestrade would have noted

even so self-evident a thing as that."

"How on earth--"

"My dear fellow, I know you well. I know the military neatness

which characterises you. You shave every morning, and in this

season you shave by the sunlight; but since your shaving is less

and less complete as we get farther back on the left side, until

it becomes positively slovenly as we get round the angle of the

jaw, it is surely very clear that that side is less illuminated

than the other. I could not imagine a man of your habits looking

at himself in an equal light and being satisfied with such a

result. I only quote this as a trivial example of observation and

inference. Therein lies my métier, and it is just possible that

it may be of some service in the investigation which lies before

us. There are one or two minor points which were brought out in

the inquest, and which are worth considering."

"What are they?"

"It appears that his arrest did not take place at once, but after

the return to Hatherley Farm. On the inspector of constabulary

informing him that he was a prisoner, he remarked that he was not

surprised to hear it, and that it was no more than his deserts.

This observation of his had the natural effect of removing any

traces of doubt which might have remained in the minds of the

coroner's jury."

"It was a confession," I ejaculated.

"No, for it was followed by a protestation of innocence."

"Coming on the top of such a damning series of events, it was at

least a most suspicious remark."

"On the contrary," said Holmes, "it is the brightest rift which I

can at present see in the clouds. However innocent he might be,

he could not be such an absolute imbecile as not to see that the

circumstances were very black against him. Had he appeared

surprised at his own arrest, or feigned indignation at it, I

should have looked upon it as highly suspicious, because such

surprise or anger would not be natural under the circumstances,

and yet might appear to be the best policy to a scheming man. His

frank acceptance of the situation marks him as either an innocent

man, or else as a man of considerable self-restraint and

firmness. As to his remark about his deserts, it was also not

unnatural if you consider that he stood beside the dead body of

his father, and that there is no doubt that he had that very day

so far forgotten his filial duty as to bandy words with him, and

even, according to the little girl whose evidence is so

important, to raise his hand as if to strike him. The

self-reproach and contrition which are displayed in his remark

appear to me to be the signs of a healthy mind rather than of a

guilty one."

I shook my head. "Many men have been hanged on far slighter

evidence," I remarked.

"So they have. And many men have been wrongfully hanged."

"What is the young man's own account of the matter?"

"It is, I am afraid, not very encouraging to his supporters,

though there are one or two points in it which are suggestive.

You will find it here, and may read it for yourself."

He picked out from his bundle a copy of the local Herefordshire

paper, and having turned down the sheet he pointed out the

paragraph in which the unfortunate young man had given his own

statement of what had occurred. I settled myself down in the

corner of the carriage and read it very carefully. It ran in this

way:

"Mr. James McCarthy, the only son of the deceased, was then called

and gave evidence as follows: 'I had been away from home for

three days at Bristol, and had only just returned upon the

morning of last Monday, the 3rd. My father was absent from home at

the time of my arrival, and I was informed by the maid that he

had driven over to Ross with John Cobb, the groom. Shortly after

my return I heard the wheels of his trap in the yard, and,

looking out of my window, I saw him get out and walk rapidly out

of the yard, though I was not aware in which direction he was

going. I then took my gun and strolled out in the direction of

the Boscombe Pool, with the intention of visiting the rabbit

warren which is upon the other side. On my way I saw William

Crowder, the game-keeper, as he had stated in his evidence; but

he is mistaken in thinking that I was following my father. I had

no idea that he was in front of me. When about a hundred yards

from the pool I heard a cry of "Cooee!" which was a usual signal

between my father and myself. I then hurried forward, and found

him standing by the pool. He appeared to be much surprised at

seeing me and asked me rather roughly what I was doing there. A

conversation ensued which led to high words and almost to blows,

for my father was a man of a very violent temper. Seeing that his

passion was becoming ungovernable, I left him and returned

towards Hatherley Farm. I had not gone more than 150 yards,

however, when I heard a hideous outcry behind me, which caused me

to run back again. I found my father expiring upon the ground,

with his head terribly injured. I dropped my gun and held him in

my arms, but he almost instantly expired. I knelt beside him for

some minutes, and then made my way to Mr. Turner's lodge-keeper,

his house being the nearest, to ask for assistance. I saw no one

near my father when I returned, and I have no idea how he came by

his injuries. He was not a popular man, being somewhat cold and

forbidding in his manners, but he had, as far as I know, no

active enemies. I know nothing further of the matter.'

"The Coroner: Did your father make any statement to you before

he died?

"Witness: He mumbled a few words, but I could only catch some

allusion to a rat.

"The Coroner: What did you understand by that?

"Witness: It conveyed no meaning to me. I thought that he was

delirious.

"The Coroner: What was the point upon which you and your father

had this final quarrel?

"Witness: I should prefer not to answer.

"The Coroner: I am afraid that I must press it.

"Witness: It is really impossible for me to tell you. I can

assure you that it has nothing to do with the sad tragedy which

followed.

"The Coroner: That is for the court to decide. I need not point

out to you that your refusal to answer will prejudice your case

considerably in any future proceedings which may arise.

"Witness: I must still refuse.

"The Coroner: I understand that the cry of 'Cooee' was a common

signal between you and your father?

"Witness: It was.

"The Coroner: How was it, then, that he uttered it before he saw

you, and before he even knew that you had returned from Bristol?

"Witness (with considerable confusion): I do not know.

"A Juryman: Did you see nothing which aroused your suspicions

when you returned on hearing the cry and found your father

fatally injured?

"Witness: Nothing definite.

"The Coroner: What do you mean?

"Witness: I was so disturbed and excited as I rushed out into

the open, that I could think of nothing except of my father. Yet

I have a vague impression that as I ran forward something lay

upon the ground to the left of me. It seemed to me to be

something grey in colour, a coat of some sort, or a plaid perhaps.

When I rose from my father I looked round for it, but it was

gone.

"'Do you mean that it disappeared before you went for help?'

"'Yes, it was gone.'

"'You cannot say what it was?'

"'No, I had a feeling something was there.'

"'How far from the body?'

"'A dozen yards or so.'

"'And how far from the edge of the wood?'

"'About the same.'

"'Then if it was removed it was while you were within a dozen

yards of it?'

"'Yes, but with my back towards it.'

"This concluded the examination of the witness."

"I see," said I as I glanced down the column, "that the coroner

in his concluding remarks was rather severe upon young McCarthy.

He calls attention, and with reason, to the discrepancy about his

father having signalled to him before seeing him, also to his

refusal to give details of his conversation with his father, and

his singular account of his father's dying words. They are all,

as he remarks, very much against the son."

Holmes laughed softly to himself and stretched himself out upon

the cushioned seat. "Both you and the coroner have been at some

pains," said he, "to single out the very strongest points in the

young man's favour. Don't you see that you alternately give him

credit for having too much imagination and too little? Too

little, if he could not invent a cause of quarrel which would

give him the sympathy of the jury; too much, if he evolved from

his own inner consciousness anything so outré as a dying

reference to a rat, and the incident of the vanishing cloth. No,

sir, I shall approach this case from the point of view that what

this young man says is true, and we shall see whither that

hypothesis will lead us. And now here is my pocket Petrarch, and

not another word shall I say of this case until we are on the

scene of action. We lunch at Swindon, and I see that we shall be

there in twenty minutes."

It was nearly four o'clock when we at last, after passing through

the beautiful Stroud Valley, and over the broad gleaming Severn,

found ourselves at the pretty little country-town of Ross. A

lean, ferret-like man, furtive and sly-looking, was waiting for

us upon the platform. In spite of the light brown dustcoat and

leather-leggings which he wore in deference to his rustic

surroundings, I had no difficulty in recognising Lestrade, of

Scotland Yard. With him we drove to the Hereford Arms where a

room had already been engaged for us.

"I have ordered a carriage," said Lestrade as we sat over a cup

of tea. "I knew your energetic nature, and that you would not be

happy until you had been on the scene of the crime."

"It was very nice and complimentary of you," Holmes answered. "It

is entirely a question of barometric pressure."

Lestrade looked startled. "I do not quite follow," he said.

"How is the glass? Twenty-nine, I see. No wind, and not a cloud

in the sky. I have a caseful of cigarettes here which need

smoking, and the sofa is very much superior to the usual country

hotel abomination. I do not think that it is probable that I

shall use the carriage to-night."

Lestrade laughed indulgently. "You have, no doubt, already formed

your conclusions from the newspapers," he said. "The case is as

plain as a pikestaff, and the more one goes into it the plainer

it becomes. Still, of course, one can't refuse a lady, and such a

very positive one, too. She has heard of you, and would have your

opinion, though I repeatedly told her that there was nothing

which you could do which I had not already done. Why, bless my

soul! here is her carriage at the door."

He had hardly spoken before there rushed into the room one of the

most lovely young women that I have ever seen in my life. Her

violet eyes shining, her lips parted, a pink flush upon her

cheeks, all thought of her natural reserve lost in her

overpowering excitement and concern.

"Oh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" she cried, glancing from one to the

other of us, and finally, with a woman's quick intuition,

fastening upon my companion, "I am so glad that you have come. I

have driven down to tell you so. I know that James didn't do it.

I know it, and I want you to start upon your work knowing it,

too. Never let yourself doubt upon that point. We have known each

other since we were little children, and I know his faults as no

one else does; but he is too tender-hearted to hurt a fly. Such a

charge is absurd to anyone who really knows him."

"I hope we may clear him, Miss Turner," said Sherlock Holmes.

"You may rely upon my doing all that I can."

"But you have read the evidence. You have formed some conclusion?

Do you not see some loophole, some flaw? Do you not yourself

think that he is innocent?"

"I think that it is very probable."

"There, now!" she cried, throwing back her head and looking

defiantly at Lestrade. "You hear! He gives me hopes."

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. "I am afraid that my colleague

has been a little quick in forming his conclusions," he said.

"But he is right. Oh! I know that he is right. James never did

it. And about his quarrel with his father, I am sure that the

reason why he would not speak about it to the coroner was because

I was concerned in it."

"In what way?" asked Holmes.

"It is no time for me to hide anything. James and his father had

many disagreements about me. Mr. McCarthy was very anxious that

there should be a marriage between us. James and I have always

loved each other as brother and sister; but of course he is young

and has seen very little of life yet, and--and--well, he

naturally did not wish to do anything like that yet. So there

were quarrels, and this, I am sure, was one of them."

"And your father?" asked Holmes. "Was he in favour of such a

union?"

"No, he was averse to it also. No one but Mr. McCarthy was in

favour of it." A quick blush passed over her fresh young face as

Holmes shot one of his keen, questioning glances at her.

"Thank you for this information," said he. "May I see your father

if I call to-morrow?"

"I am afraid the doctor won't allow it."

"The doctor?"

"Yes, have you not heard? Poor father has never been strong for

years back, but this has broken him down completely. He has taken

to his bed, and Dr. Willows says that he is a wreck and that his

nervous system is shattered. Mr. McCarthy was the only man alive

who had known dad in the old days in Victoria."

"Ha! In Victoria! That is important."

"Yes, at the mines."

"Quite so; at the gold-mines, where, as I understand, Mr. Turner

made his money."

"Yes, certainly."

"Thank you, Miss Turner. You have been of material assistance to

me."

"You will tell me if you have any news to-morrow. No doubt you

will go to the prison to see James. Oh, if you do, Mr. Holmes, do

tell him that I know him to be innocent."

"I will, Miss Turner."

"I must go home now, for dad is very ill, and he misses me so if

I leave him. Good-bye, and God help you in your undertaking." She

hurried from the room as impulsively as she had entered, and we

heard the wheels of her carriage rattle off down the street.

"I am ashamed of you, Holmes," said Lestrade with dignity after a

few minutes' silence. "Why should you raise up hopes which you

are bound to disappoint? I am not over-tender of heart, but I

call it cruel."

"I think that I see my way to clearing James McCarthy," said

Holmes. "Have you an order to see him in prison?"

"Yes, but only for you and me."

"Then I shall reconsider my resolution about going out. We have

still time to take a train to Hereford and see him to-night?"

"Ample."

"Then let us do so. Watson, I fear that you will find it very

slow, but I shall only be away a couple of hours."

I walked down to the station with them, and then wandered through

the streets of the little town, finally returning to the hotel,

where I lay upon the sofa and tried to interest myself in a

yellow-backed novel. The puny plot of the story was so thin,

however, when compared to the deep mystery through which we were

groping, and I found my attention wander so continually from the

action to the fact, that I at last flung it across the room and

gave myself up entirely to a consideration of the events of the

day. Supposing that this unhappy young man's story were

absolutely true, then what hellish thing, what absolutely

unforeseen and extraordinary calamity could have occurred between

the time when he parted from his father, and the moment when,

drawn back by his screams, he rushed into the glade? It was

something terrible and deadly. What could it be? Might not the

nature of the injuries reveal something to my medical instincts?

I rang the bell and called for the weekly county paper, which

contained a verbatim account of the inquest. In the surgeon's

deposition it was stated that the posterior third of the left

parietal bone and the left half of the occipital bone had been

shattered by a heavy blow from a blunt weapon. I marked the spot

upon my own head. Clearly such a blow must have been struck from

behind. That was to some extent in favour of the accused, as when

seen quarrelling he was face to face with his father. Still, it

did not go for very much, for the older man might have turned his

back before the blow fell. Still, it might be worth while to call

Holmes' attention to it. Then there was the peculiar dying

reference to a rat. What could that mean? It could not be

delirium. A man dying from a sudden blow does not commonly become

delirious. No, it was more likely to be an attempt to explain how

he met his fate. But what could it indicate? I cudgelled my

brains to find some possible explanation. And then the incident

of the grey cloth seen by young McCarthy. If that were true the

murderer must have dropped some part of his dress, presumably his

overcoat, in his flight, and must have had the hardihood to

return and to carry it away at the instant when the son was

kneeling with his back turned not a dozen paces off. What a

tissue of mysteries and improbabilities the whole thing was! I

did not wonder at Lestrade's opinion, and yet I had so much faith

in Sherlock Holmes' insight that I could not lose hope as long

as every fresh fact seemed to strengthen his conviction of young

McCarthy's innocence.

It was late before Sherlock Holmes returned. He came back alone,

for Lestrade was staying in lodgings in the town.

"The glass still keeps very high," he remarked as he sat down.

"It is of importance that it should not rain before we are able

to go over the ground. On the other hand, a man should be at his

very best and keenest for such nice work as that, and I did not

wish to do it when fagged by a long journey. I have seen young

McCarthy."

"And what did you learn from him?"

"Nothing."

"Could he throw no light?"

"None at all. I was inclined to think at one time that he knew

who had done it and was screening him or her, but I am convinced

now that he is as puzzled as everyone else. He is not a very

quick-witted youth, though comely to look at and, I should think,

sound at heart."

"I cannot admire his taste," I remarked, "if it is indeed a fact

that he was averse to a marriage with so charming a young lady as

this Miss Turner."

"Ah, thereby hangs a rather painful tale. This fellow is madly,

insanely, in love with her, but some two years ago, when he was

only a lad, and before he really knew her, for she had been away

five years at a boarding-school, what does the idiot do but get

into the clutches of a barmaid in Bristol and marry her at a

registry office? No one knows a word of the matter, but you can

imagine how maddening it must be to him to be upbraided for not

doing what he would give his very eyes to do, but what he knows

to be absolutely impossible. It was sheer frenzy of this sort

which made him throw his hands up into the air when his father,

at their last interview, was goading him on to propose to Miss

Turner. On the other hand, he had no means of supporting himself,

and his father, who was by all accounts a very hard man, would

have thrown him over utterly had he known the truth. It was with

his barmaid wife that he had spent the last three days in

Bristol, and his father did not know where he was. Mark that

point. It is of importance. Good has come out of evil, however,

for the barmaid, finding from the papers that he is in serious

trouble and likely to be hanged, has thrown him over utterly and

has written to him to say that she has a husband already in the

Bermuda Dockyard, so that there is really no tie between them. I

think that that bit of news has consoled young McCarthy for all

that he has suffered."

"But if he is innocent, who has done it?"

"Ah! who? I would call your attention very particularly to two

points. One is that the murdered man had an appointment with

someone at the pool, and that the someone could not have been his

son, for his son was away, and he did not know when he would

return. The second is that the murdered man was heard to cry

'Cooee!' before he knew that his son had returned. Those are the

crucial points upon which the case depends. And now let us talk

about George Meredith, if you please, and we shall leave all

minor matters until to-morrow."

There was no rain, as Holmes had foretold, and the morning broke

bright and cloudless. At nine o'clock Lestrade called for us with

the carriage, and we set off for Hatherley Farm and the Boscombe

Pool.

"There is serious news this morning," Lestrade observed. "It is

said that Mr. Turner, of the Hall, is so ill that his life is

despaired of."

"An elderly man, I presume?" said Holmes.

"About sixty; but his constitution has been shattered by his life

abroad, and he has been in failing health for some time. This

business has had a very bad effect upon him. He was an old friend

of McCarthy's, and, I may add, a great benefactor to him, for I

have learned that he gave him Hatherley Farm rent free."

"Indeed! That is interesting," said Holmes.

"Oh, yes! In a hundred other ways he has helped him. Everybody

about here speaks of his kindness to him."

"Really! Does it not strike you as a little singular that this

McCarthy, who appears to have had little of his own, and to have

been under such obligations to Turner, should still talk of

marrying his son to Turner's daughter, who is, presumably,

heiress to the estate, and that in such a very cocksure manner,

as if it were merely a case of a proposal and all else would

follow? It is the more strange, since we know that Turner himself

was averse to the idea. The daughter told us as much. Do you not

deduce something from that?"

"We have got to the deductions and the inferences," said

Lestrade, winking at me. "I find it hard enough to tackle facts,

Holmes, without flying away after theories and fancies."

"You are right," said Holmes demurely; "you do find it very hard

to tackle the facts."

"Anyhow, I have grasped one fact which you seem to find it

difficult to get hold of," replied Lestrade with some warmth.

"And that is--"

"That McCarthy senior met his death from McCarthy junior and that

all theories to the contrary are the merest moonshine."

"Well, moonshine is a brighter thing than fog," said Holmes,

laughing. "But I am very much mistaken if this is not Hatherley

Farm upon the left."

"Yes, that is it." It was a widespread, comfortable-looking

building, two-storied, slate-roofed, with great yellow blotches

of lichen upon the grey walls. The drawn blinds and the smokeless

chimneys, however, gave it a stricken look, as though the weight

of this horror still lay heavy upon it. We called at the door,

when the maid, at Holmes' request, showed us the boots which her

master wore at the time of his death, and also a pair of the

son's, though not the pair which he had then had. Having measured

these very carefully from seven or eight different points, Holmes

desired to be led to the court-yard, from which we all followed

the winding track which led to Boscombe Pool.

Sherlock Holmes was transformed when he was hot upon such a scent

as this. Men who had only known the quiet thinker and logician of

Baker Street would have failed to recognise him. His face flushed

and darkened. His brows were drawn into two hard black lines,

while his eyes shone out from beneath them with a steely glitter.

His face was bent downward, his shoulders bowed, his lips

compressed, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his long,

sinewy neck. His nostrils seemed to dilate with a purely animal

lust for the chase, and his mind was so absolutely concentrated

upon the matter before him that a question or remark fell

unheeded upon his ears, or, at the most, only provoked a quick,

impatient snarl in reply. Swiftly and silently he made his way

along the track which ran through the meadows, and so by way of

the woods to the Boscombe Pool. It was damp, marshy ground, as is

all that district, and there were marks of many feet, both upon

the path and amid the short grass which bounded it on either

side. Sometimes Holmes would hurry on, sometimes stop dead, and

once he made quite a little detour into the meadow. Lestrade and

I walked behind him, the detective indifferent and contemptuous,

while I watched my friend with the interest which sprang from the

conviction that every one of his actions was directed towards a

definite end.

The Boscombe Pool, which is a little reed-girt sheet of water

some fifty yards across, is situated at the boundary between the

Hatherley Farm and the private park of the wealthy Mr. Turner.

Above the woods which lined it upon the farther side we could see

the red, jutting pinnacles which marked the site of the rich

landowner's dwelling. On the Hatherley side of the pool the woods

grew very thick, and there was a narrow belt of sodden grass

twenty paces across between the edge of the trees and the reeds

which lined the lake. Lestrade showed us the exact spot at which

the body had been found, and, indeed, so moist was the ground,

that I could plainly see the traces which had been left by the

fall of the stricken man. To Holmes, as I could see by his eager

face and peering eyes, very many other things were to be read

upon the trampled grass. He ran round, like a dog who is picking

up a scent, and then turned upon my companion.

"What did you go into the pool for?" he asked.

"I fished about with a rake. I thought there might be some weapon

or other trace. But how on earth--"

"Oh, tut, tut! I have no time! That left foot of yours with its

inward twist is all over the place. A mole could trace it, and

there it vanishes among the reeds. Oh, how simple it would all

have been had I been here before they came like a herd of buffalo

and wallowed all over it. Here is where the party with the

lodge-keeper came, and they have covered all tracks for six or

eight feet round the body. But here are three separate tracks of

the same feet." He drew out a lens and lay down upon his

waterproof to have a better view, talking all the time rather to

himself than to us. "These are young McCarthy's feet. Twice he

was walking, and once he ran swiftly, so that the soles are

deeply marked and the heels hardly visible. That bears out his

story. He ran when he saw his father on the ground. Then here are

the father's feet as he paced up and down. What is this, then? It

is the butt-end of the gun as the son stood listening. And this?

Ha, ha! What have we here? Tiptoes! tiptoes! Square, too, quite

unusual boots! They come, they go, they come again--of course

that was for the cloak. Now where did they come from?" He ran up

and down, sometimes losing, sometimes finding the track until we

were well within the edge of the wood and under the shadow of a

great beech, the largest tree in the neighbourhood. Holmes traced

his way to the farther side of this and lay down once more upon

his face with a little cry of satisfaction. For a long time he

remained there, turning over the leaves and dried sticks,

gathering up what seemed to me to be dust into an envelope and

examining with his lens not only the ground but even the bark of

the tree as far as he could reach. A jagged stone was lying among

the moss, and this also he carefully examined and retained. Then

he followed a pathway through the wood until he came to the

highroad, where all traces were lost.

"It has been a case of considerable interest," he remarked,

returning to his natural manner. "I fancy that this grey house on

the right must be the lodge. I think that I will go in and have a

word with Moran, and perhaps write a little note. Having done

that, we may drive back to our luncheon. You may walk to the cab,

and I shall be with you presently."

It was about ten minutes before we regained our cab and drove

back into Ross, Holmes still carrying with him the stone which he

had picked up in the wood.

"This may interest you, Lestrade," he remarked, holding it out.

"The murder was done with it."

"I see no marks."

"There are none."

"How do you know, then?"

"The grass was growing under it. It had only lain there a few

days. There was no sign of a place whence it had been taken. It

corresponds with the injuries. There is no sign of any other

weapon."

"And the murderer?"

"Is a tall man, left-handed, limps with the right leg, wears

thick-soled shooting-boots and a grey cloak, smokes Indian

cigars, uses a cigar-holder, and carries a blunt pen-knife in his

pocket. There are several other indications, but these may be

enough to aid us in our search."

Lestrade laughed. "I am afraid that I am still a sceptic," he

said. "Theories are all very well, but we have to deal with a

hard-headed British jury."

"Nous verrons," answered Holmes calmly. "You work your own

method, and I shall work mine. I shall be busy this afternoon,

and shall probably return to London by the evening train."

"And leave your case unfinished?"

"No, finished."

"But the mystery?"

"It is solved."

"Who was the criminal, then?"

"The gentleman I describe."

"But who is he?"

"Surely it would not be difficult to find out. This is not such a

populous neighbourhood."

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. "I am a practical man," he said,

"and I really cannot undertake to go about the country looking

for a left-handed gentleman with a game leg. I should become the

laughing-stock of Scotland Yard."

"All right," said Holmes quietly. "I have given you the chance.

Here are your lodgings. Good-bye. I shall drop you a line before

I leave."

Having left Lestrade at his rooms, we drove to our hotel, where

we found lunch upon the table. Holmes was silent and buried in

thought with a pained expression upon his face, as one who finds

himself in a perplexing position.

"Look here, Watson," he said when the cloth was cleared "just sit

down in this chair and let me preach to you for a little. I don't

know quite what to do, and I should value your advice. Light a

cigar and let me expound."

"Pray do so."

"Well, now, in considering this case there are two points about

young McCarthy's narrative which struck us both instantly,

although they impressed me in his favour and you against him. One

was the fact that his father should, according to his account,

cry 'Cooee!' before seeing him. The other was his singular dying

reference to a rat. He mumbled several words, you understand, but

that was all that caught the son's ear. Now from this double

point our research must commence, and we will begin it by

presuming that what the lad says is absolutely true."

"What of this 'Cooee!' then?"

"Well, obviously it could not have been meant for the son. The

son, as far as he knew, was in Bristol. It was mere chance that

he was within earshot. The 'Cooee!' was meant to attract the

attention of whoever it was that he had the appointment with. But

'Cooee' is a distinctly Australian cry, and one which is used

between Australians. There is a strong presumption that the

person whom McCarthy expected to meet him at Boscombe Pool was

someone who had been in Australia."

"What of the rat, then?"

Sherlock Holmes took a folded paper from his pocket and flattened

it out on the table. "This is a map of the Colony of Victoria,"

he said. "I wired to Bristol for it last night." He put his hand

over part of the map. "What do you read?"

"ARAT," I read.

"And now?" He raised his hand.

"BALLARAT."

"Quite so. That was the word the man uttered, and of which his

son only caught the last two syllables. He was trying to utter

the name of his murderer. So and so, of Ballarat."

"It is wonderful!" I exclaimed.

"It is obvious. And now, you see, I had narrowed the field down

considerably. The possession of a grey garment was a third point

which, granting the son's statement to be correct, was a

certainty. We have come now out of mere vagueness to the definite

conception of an Australian from Ballarat with a grey cloak."

"Certainly."

"And one who was at home in the district, for the pool can only

be approached by the farm or by the estate, where strangers could

hardly wander."

"Quite so."

"Then comes our expedition of to-day. By an examination of the

ground I gained the trifling details which I gave to that

imbecile Lestrade, as to the personality of the criminal."

"But how did you gain them?"

"You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of

trifles."

"His height I know that you might roughly judge from the length

of his stride. His boots, too, might be told from their traces."

"Yes, they were peculiar boots."

"But his lameness?"

"The impression of his right foot was always less distinct than

his left. He put less weight upon it. Why? Because he limped--he

was lame."

"But his left-handedness."

"You were yourself struck by the nature of the injury as recorded

by the surgeon at the inquest. The blow was struck from

immediately behind, and yet was upon the left side. Now, how can

that be unless it were by a left-handed man? He had stood behind

that tree during the interview between the father and son. He had

even smoked there. I found the ash of a cigar, which my special

knowledge of tobacco ashes enables me to pronounce as an Indian

cigar. I have, as you know, devoted some attention to this, and

written a little monograph on the ashes of 140 different

varieties of pipe, cigar, and cigarette tobacco. Having found the

ash, I then looked round and discovered the stump among the moss

where he had tossed it. It was an Indian cigar, of the variety

which are rolled in Rotterdam."

"And the cigar-holder?"

"I could see that the end had not been in his mouth. Therefore he

used a holder. The tip had been cut off, not bitten off, but the

cut was not a clean one, so I deduced a blunt pen-knife."

"Holmes," I said, "you have drawn a net round this man from which

he cannot escape, and you have saved an innocent human life as

truly as if you had cut the cord which was hanging him. I see the

direction in which all this points. The culprit is--"

"Mr. John Turner," cried the hotel waiter, opening the door of

our sitting-room, and ushering in a visitor.

The man who entered was a strange and impressive figure. His

slow, limping step and bowed shoulders gave the appearance of

decrepitude, and yet his hard, deep-lined, craggy features, and

his enormous limbs showed that he was possessed of unusual

strength of body and of character. His tangled beard, grizzled

hair, and outstanding, drooping eyebrows combined to give an air

of dignity and power to his appearance, but his face was of an

ashen white, while his lips and the corners of his nostrils were

tinged with a shade of blue. It was clear to me at a glance that

he was in the grip of some deadly and chronic disease.

"Pray sit down on the sofa," said Holmes gently. "You had my

note?"

"Yes, the lodge-keeper brought it up. You said that you wished to

see me here to avoid scandal."

"I thought people would talk if I went to the Hall."

"And why did you wish to see me?" He looked across at my

companion with despair in his weary eyes, as though his question

was already answered.

"Yes," said Holmes, answering the look rather than the words. "It

is so. I know all about McCarthy."

The old man sank his face in his hands. "God help me!" he cried.

"But I would not have let the young man come to harm. I give you

my word that I would have spoken out if it went against him at

the Assizes."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Holmes gravely.

"I would have spoken now had it not been for my dear girl. It

would break her heart--it will break her heart when she hears

that I am arrested."

"It may not come to that," said Holmes.

"What?"

"I am no official agent. I understand that it was your daughter

who required my presence here, and I am acting in her interests.

Young McCarthy must be got off, however."

"I am a dying man," said old Turner. "I have had diabetes for

years. My doctor says it is a question whether I shall live a

month. Yet I would rather die under my own roof than in a gaol."

Holmes rose and sat down at the table with his pen in his hand

and a bundle of paper before him. "Just tell us the truth," he

said. "I shall jot down the facts. You will sign it, and Watson

here can witness it. Then I could produce your confession at the

last extremity to save young McCarthy. I promise you that I shall

not use it unless it is absolutely needed."

"It's as well," said the old man; "it's a question whether I

shall live to the Assizes, so it matters little to me, but I

should wish to spare Alice the shock. And now I will make the

thing clear to you; it has been a long time in the acting, but

will not take me long to tell.

"You didn't know this dead man, McCarthy. He was a devil

incarnate. I tell you that. God keep you out of the clutches of

such a man as he. His grip has been upon me these twenty years,

and he has blasted my life. I'll tell you first how I came to be

in his power.

"It was in the early '60's at the diggings. I was a young chap

then, hot-blooded and reckless, ready to turn my hand at

anything; I got among bad companions, took to drink, had no luck

with my claim, took to the bush, and in a word became what you

would call over here a highway robber. There were six of us, and

we had a wild, free life of it, sticking up a station from time

to time, or stopping the wagons on the road to the diggings.

Black Jack of Ballarat was the name I went under, and our party

is still remembered in the colony as the Ballarat Gang.

"One day a gold convoy came down from Ballarat to Melbourne, and

we lay in wait for it and attacked it. There were six troopers

and six of us, so it was a close thing, but we emptied four of

their saddles at the first volley. Three of our boys were killed,

however, before we got the swag. I put my pistol to the head of

the wagon-driver, who was this very man McCarthy. I wish to the

Lord that I had shot him then, but I spared him, though I saw his

wicked little eyes fixed on my face, as though to remember every

feature. We got away with the gold, became wealthy men, and made

our way over to England without being suspected. There I parted

from my old pals and determined to settle down to a quiet and

respectable life. I bought this estate, which chanced to be in

the market, and I set myself to do a little good with my money,

to make up for the way in which I had earned it. I married, too,

and though my wife died young she left me my dear little Alice.

Even when she was just a baby her wee hand seemed to lead me down

the right path as nothing else had ever done. In a word, I turned

over a new leaf and did my best to make up for the past. All was

going well when McCarthy laid his grip upon me.

"I had gone up to town about an investment, and I met him in

Regent Street with hardly a coat to his back or a boot to his

foot.

"'Here we are, Jack,' says he, touching me on the arm; 'we'll be

as good as a family to you. There's two of us, me and my son, and

you can have the keeping of us. If you don't--it's a fine,

law-abiding country is England, and there's always a policeman

within hail.'

"Well, down they came to the west country, there was no shaking

them off, and there they have lived rent free on my best land

ever since. There was no rest for me, no peace, no forgetfulness;

turn where I would, there was his cunning, grinning face at my

elbow. It grew worse as Alice grew up, for he soon saw I was more

afraid of her knowing my past than of the police. Whatever he

wanted he must have, and whatever it was I gave him without

question, land, money, houses, until at last he asked a thing

which I could not give. He asked for Alice.

"His son, you see, had grown up, and so had my girl, and as I was

known to be in weak health, it seemed a fine stroke to him that

his lad should step into the whole property. But there I was

firm. I would not have his cursed stock mixed with mine; not that

I had any dislike to the lad, but his blood was in him, and that

was enough. I stood firm. McCarthy threatened. I braved him to do

his worst. We were to meet at the pool midway between our houses

to talk it over.

"When I went down there I found him talking with his son, so I

smoked a cigar and waited behind a tree until he should be alone.

But as I listened to his talk all that was black and bitter in

me seemed to come uppermost. He was urging his son to marry my

daughter with as little regard for what she might think as if she

were a slut from off the streets. It drove me mad to think that I

and all that I held most dear should be in the power of such a

man as this. Could I not snap the bond? I was already a dying and

a desperate man. Though clear of mind and fairly strong of limb,

I knew that my own fate was sealed. But my memory and my girl!

Both could be saved if I could but silence that foul tongue. I

did it, Mr. Holmes. I would do it again. Deeply as I have sinned,

I have led a life of martyrdom to atone for it. But that my girl

should be entangled in the same meshes which held me was more

than I could suffer. I struck him down with no more compunction

than if he had been some foul and venomous beast. His cry brought

back his son; but I had gained the cover of the wood, though I

was forced to go back to fetch the cloak which I had dropped in

my flight. That is the true story, gentlemen, of all that

occurred."

"Well, it is not for me to judge you," said Holmes as the old man

signed the statement which had been drawn out. "I pray that we

may never be exposed to such a temptation."

"I pray not, sir. And what do you intend to do?"

"In view of your health, nothing. You are yourself aware that you

will soon have to answer for your deed at a higher court than the

Assizes. I will keep your confession, and if McCarthy is

condemned I shall be forced to use it. If not, it shall never be

seen by mortal eye; and your secret, whether you be alive or

dead, shall be safe with us."

"Farewell, then," said the old man solemnly. "Your own deathbeds,

when they come, will be the easier for the thought of the peace

which you have given to mine." Tottering and shaking in all his

giant frame, he stumbled slowly from the room.

"God help us!" said Holmes after a long silence. "Why does fate

play such tricks with poor, helpless worms? I never hear of such

a case as this that I do not think of Baxter's words, and say,

'There, but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes.'"

James McCarthy was acquitted at the Assizes on the strength of a

number of objections which had been drawn out by Holmes and

submitted to the defending counsel. Old Turner lived for seven

months after our interview, but he is now dead; and there is

every prospect that the son and daughter may come to live happily

together in ignorance of the black cloud which rests upon their

past.

ADVENTURE V. THE FIVE ORANGE PIPS

When I glance over my notes and records of the Sherlock Holmes

cases between the years '82 and '90, I am faced by so many which

present strange and interesting features that it is no easy

matter to know which to choose and which to leave. Some, however,

have already gained publicity through the papers, and others have

not offered a field for those peculiar qualities which my friend

possessed in so high a degree, and which it is the object of

these papers to illustrate. Some, too, have baffled his

analytical skill, and would be, as narratives, beginnings without

an ending, while others have been but partially cleared up, and

have their explanations founded rather upon conjecture and

surmise than on that absolute logical proof which was so dear to

him. There is, however, one of these last which was so remarkable

in its details and so startling in its results that I am tempted

to give some account of it in spite of the fact that there are

points in connection with it which never have been, and probably

never will be, entirely cleared up.

The year '87 furnished us with a long series of cases of greater

or less interest, of which I retain the records. Among my

headings under this one twelve months I find an account of the

adventure of the Paradol Chamber, of the Amateur Mendicant

Society, who held a luxurious club in the lower vault of a

furniture warehouse, of the facts connected with the loss of the

British barque "Sophy Anderson", of the singular adventures of the

Grice Patersons in the island of Uffa, and finally of the

Camberwell poisoning case. In the latter, as may be remembered,

Sherlock Holmes was able, by winding up the dead man's watch, to

prove that it had been wound up two hours before, and that

therefore the deceased had gone to bed within that time--a

deduction which was of the greatest importance in clearing up the

case. All these I may sketch out at some future date, but none of

them present such singular features as the strange train of

circumstances which I have now taken up my pen to describe.

It was in the latter days of September, and the equinoctial gales

had set in with exceptional violence. All day the wind had

screamed and the rain had beaten against the windows, so that

even here in the heart of great, hand-made London we were forced

to raise our minds for the instant from the routine of life and

to recognise the presence of those great elemental forces which

shriek at mankind through the bars of his civilisation, like

untamed beasts in a cage. As evening drew in, the storm grew

higher and louder, and the wind cried and sobbed like a child in

the chimney. Sherlock Holmes sat moodily at one side of the

fireplace cross-indexing his records of crime, while I at the

other was deep in one of Clark Russell's fine sea-stories until

the howl of the gale from without seemed to blend with the text,

and the splash of the rain to lengthen out into the long swash of

the sea waves. My wife was on a visit to her mother's, and for a

few days I was a dweller once more in my old quarters at Baker

Street.

"Why," said I, glancing up at my companion, "that was surely the

bell. Who could come to-night? Some friend of yours, perhaps?"

"Except yourself I have none," he answered. "I do not encourage

visitors."

"A client, then?"

"If so, it is a serious case. Nothing less would bring a man out

on such a day and at such an hour. But I take it that it is more

likely to be some crony of the landlady's."

Sherlock Holmes was wrong in his conjecture, however, for there

came a step in the passage and a tapping at the door. He

stretched out his long arm to turn the lamp away from himself and

towards the vacant chair upon which a newcomer must sit.

"Come in!" said he.

The man who entered was young, some two-and-twenty at the

outside, well-groomed and trimly clad, with something of

refinement and delicacy in his bearing. The streaming umbrella

which he held in his hand, and his long shining waterproof told

of the fierce weather through which he had come. He looked about

him anxiously in the glare of the lamp, and I could see that his

face was pale and his eyes heavy, like those of a man who is

weighed down with some great anxiety.

"I owe you an apology," he said, raising his golden pince-nez to

his eyes. "I trust that I am not intruding. I fear that I have

brought some traces of the storm and rain into your snug

chamber."

"Give me your coat and umbrella," said Holmes. "They may rest

here on the hook and will be dry presently. You have come up from

the south-west, I see."

"Yes, from Horsham."

"That clay and chalk mixture which I see upon your toe caps is

quite distinctive."

"I have come for advice."

"That is easily got."

"And help."

"That is not always so easy."

"I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes. I heard from Major Prendergast

how you saved him in the Tankerville Club scandal."

"Ah, of course. He was wrongfully accused of cheating at cards."

"He said that you could solve anything."

"He said too much."

"That you are never beaten."

"I have been beaten four times--three times by men, and once by a

woman."

"But what is that compared with the number of your successes?"

"It is true that I have been generally successful."

"Then you may be so with me."

"I beg that you will draw your chair up to the fire and favour me

with some details as to your case."

"It is no ordinary one."

"None of those which come to me are. I am the last court of

appeal."

"And yet I question, sir, whether, in all your experience, you

have ever listened to a more mysterious and inexplicable chain of

events than those which have happened in my own family."

"You fill me with interest," said Holmes. "Pray give us the

essential facts from the commencement, and I can afterwards

question you as to those details which seem to me to be most

important."

The young man pulled his chair up and pushed his wet feet out

towards the blaze.

"My name," said he, "is John Openshaw, but my own affairs have,

as far as I can understand, little to do with this awful

business. It is a hereditary matter; so in order to give you an

idea of the facts, I must go back to the commencement of the

affair.

"You must know that my grandfather had two sons--my uncle Elias

and my father Joseph. My father had a small factory at Coventry,

which he enlarged at the time of the invention of bicycling. He

was a patentee of the Openshaw unbreakable tire, and his business

met with such success that he was able to sell it and to retire

upon a handsome competence.

"My uncle Elias emigrated to America when he was a young man and

became a planter in Florida, where he was reported to have done

very well. At the time of the war he fought in Jackson's army,

and afterwards under Hood, where he rose to be a colonel. When

Lee laid down his arms my uncle returned to his plantation, where

he remained for three or four years. About 1869 or 1870 he came

back to Europe and took a small estate in Sussex, near Horsham.

He had made a very considerable fortune in the States, and his

reason for leaving them was his aversion to the negroes, and his

dislike of the Republican policy in extending the franchise to

them. He was a singular man, fierce and quick-tempered, very

foul-mouthed when he was angry, and of a most retiring

disposition. During all the years that he lived at Horsham, I

doubt if ever he set foot in the town. He had a garden and two or

three fields round his house, and there he would take his

exercise, though very often for weeks on end he would never leave

his room. He drank a great deal of brandy and smoked very

heavily, but he would see no society and did not want any

friends, not even his own brother.

"He didn't mind me; in fact, he took a fancy to me, for at the

time when he saw me first I was a youngster of twelve or so. This

would be in the year 1878, after he had been eight or nine years

in England. He begged my father to let me live with him and he

was very kind to me in his way. When he was sober he used to be

fond of playing backgammon and draughts with me, and he would

make me his representative both with the servants and with the

tradespeople, so that by the time that I was sixteen I was quite

master of the house. I kept all the keys and could go where I

liked and do what I liked, so long as I did not disturb him in

his privacy. There was one singular exception, however, for he

had a single room, a lumber-room up among the attics, which was

invariably locked, and which he would never permit either me or

anyone else to enter. With a boy's curiosity I have peeped

through the keyhole, but I was never able to see more than such a

collection of old trunks and bundles as would be expected in such

a room.

"One day--it was in March, 1883--a letter with a foreign stamp

lay upon the table in front of the colonel's plate. It was not a

common thing for him to receive letters, for his bills were all

paid in ready money, and he had no friends of any sort. 'From

India!' said he as he took it up, 'Pondicherry postmark! What can

this be?' Opening it hurriedly, out there jumped five little

dried orange pips, which pattered down upon his plate. I began to

laugh at this, but the laugh was struck from my lips at the sight

of his face. His lip had fallen, his eyes were protruding, his

skin the colour of putty, and he glared at the envelope which he

still held in his trembling hand, 'K. K. K.!' he shrieked, and

then, 'My God, my God, my sins have overtaken me!'

"'What is it, uncle?' I cried.

"'Death,' said he, and rising from the table he retired to his

room, leaving me palpitating with horror. I took up the envelope

and saw scrawled in red ink upon the inner flap, just above the

gum, the letter K three times repeated. There was nothing else

save the five dried pips. What could be the reason of his

overpowering terror? I left the breakfast-table, and as I

ascended the stair I met him coming down with an old rusty key,

which must have belonged to the attic, in one hand, and a small

brass box, like a cashbox, in the other.

"'They may do what they like, but I'll checkmate them still,'

said he with an oath. 'Tell Mary that I shall want a fire in my

room to-day, and send down to Fordham, the Horsham lawyer.'

"I did as he ordered, and when the lawyer arrived I was asked to

step up to the room. The fire was burning brightly, and in the

grate there was a mass of black, fluffy ashes, as of burned

paper, while the brass box stood open and empty beside it. As I

glanced at the box I noticed, with a start, that upon the lid was

printed the treble K which I had read in the morning upon the

envelope.

"'I wish you, John,' said my uncle, 'to witness my will. I leave

my estate, with all its advantages and all its disadvantages, to

my brother, your father, whence it will, no doubt, descend to

you. If you can enjoy it in peace, well and good! If you find you

cannot, take my advice, my boy, and leave it to your deadliest

enemy. I am sorry to give you such a two-edged thing, but I can't

say what turn things are going to take. Kindly sign the paper

where Mr. Fordham shows you.'

"I signed the paper as directed, and the lawyer took it away with

him. The singular incident made, as you may think, the deepest

impression upon me, and I pondered over it and turned it every

way in my mind without being able to make anything of it. Yet I

could not shake off the vague feeling of dread which it left

behind, though the sensation grew less keen as the weeks passed

and nothing happened to disturb the usual routine of our lives. I

could see a change in my uncle, however. He drank more than ever,

and he was less inclined for any sort of society. Most of his

time he would spend in his room, with the door locked upon the

inside, but sometimes he would emerge in a sort of drunken frenzy

and would burst out of the house and tear about the garden with a

revolver in his hand, screaming out that he was afraid of no man,

and that he was not to be cooped up, like a sheep in a pen, by

man or devil. When these hot fits were over, however, he would

rush tumultuously in at the door and lock and bar it behind him,

like a man who can brazen it out no longer against the terror

which lies at the roots of his soul. At such times I have seen

his face, even on a cold day, glisten with moisture, as though it

were new raised from a basin.

"Well, to come to an end of the matter, Mr. Holmes, and not to

abuse your patience, there came a night when he made one of those

drunken sallies from which he never came back. We found him, when

we went to search for him, face downward in a little

green-scummed pool, which lay at the foot of the garden. There

was no sign of any violence, and the water was but two feet deep,

so that the jury, having regard to his known eccentricity,

brought in a verdict of 'suicide.' But I, who knew how he winced

from the very thought of death, had much ado to persuade myself

that he had gone out of his way to meet it. The matter passed,

however, and my father entered into possession of the estate, and

of some 14,000 pounds, which lay to his credit at the bank."

"One moment," Holmes interposed, "your statement is, I foresee,

one of the most remarkable to which I have ever listened. Let me

have the date of the reception by your uncle of the letter, and

the date of his supposed suicide."

"The letter arrived on March 10, 1883. His death was seven weeks

later, upon the night of May 2nd."

"Thank you. Pray proceed."

"When my father took over the Horsham property, he, at my

request, made a careful examination of the attic, which had been

always locked up. We found the brass box there, although its

contents had been destroyed. On the inside of the cover was a

paper label, with the initials of K. K. K. repeated upon it, and

'Letters, memoranda, receipts, and a register' written beneath.

These, we presume, indicated the nature of the papers which had

been destroyed by Colonel Openshaw. For the rest, there was

nothing of much importance in the attic save a great many

scattered papers and note-books bearing upon my uncle's life in

America. Some of them were of the war time and showed that he had

done his duty well and had borne the repute of a brave soldier.

Others were of a date during the reconstruction of the Southern

states, and were mostly concerned with politics, for he had

evidently taken a strong part in opposing the carpet-bag

politicians who had been sent down from the North.

"Well, it was the beginning of '84 when my father came to live at

Horsham, and all went as well as possible with us until the

January of '85. On the fourth day after the new year I heard my

father give a sharp cry of surprise as we sat together at the

breakfast-table. There he was, sitting with a newly opened

envelope in one hand and five dried orange pips in the

outstretched palm of the other one. He had always laughed at what

he called my cock-and-bull story about the colonel, but he looked

very scared and puzzled now that the same thing had come upon

himself.

"'Why, what on earth does this mean, John?' he stammered.

"My heart had turned to lead. 'It is K. K. K.,' said I.

"He looked inside the envelope. 'So it is,' he cried. 'Here are

the very letters. But what is this written above them?'

"'Put the papers on the sundial,' I read, peeping over his

shoulder.

"'What papers? What sundial?' he asked.

"'The sundial in the garden. There is no other,' said I; 'but the

papers must be those that are destroyed.'

"'Pooh!' said he, gripping hard at his courage. 'We are in a

civilised land here, and we can't have tomfoolery of this kind.

Where does the thing come from?'

"'From Dundee,' I answered, glancing at the postmark.

"'Some preposterous practical joke,' said he. 'What have I to do

with sundials and papers? I shall take no notice of such

nonsense.'

"'I should certainly speak to the police,' I said.

"'And be laughed at for my pains. Nothing of the sort.'

"'Then let me do so?'

"'No, I forbid you. I won't have a fuss made about such

nonsense.'

"It was in vain to argue with him, for he was a very obstinate

man. I went about, however, with a heart which was full of

forebodings.

"On the third day after the coming of the letter my father went

from home to visit an old friend of his, Major Freebody, who is

in command of one of the forts upon Portsdown Hill. I was glad

that he should go, for it seemed to me that he was farther from

danger when he was away from home. In that, however, I was in

error. Upon the second day of his absence I received a telegram

from the major, imploring me to come at once. My father had

fallen over one of the deep chalk-pits which abound in the

neighbourhood, and was lying senseless, with a shattered skull. I

hurried to him, but he passed away without having ever recovered

his consciousness. He had, as it appears, been returning from

Fareham in the twilight, and as the country was unknown to him,

and the chalk-pit unfenced, the jury had no hesitation in

bringing in a verdict of 'death from accidental causes.'

Carefully as I examined every fact connected with his death, I

was unable to find anything which could suggest the idea of

murder. There were no signs of violence, no footmarks, no

robbery, no record of strangers having been seen upon the roads.

And yet I need not tell you that my mind was far from at ease,

and that I was well-nigh certain that some foul plot had been

woven round him.

"In this sinister way I came into my inheritance. You will ask me

why I did not dispose of it? I answer, because I was well

convinced that our troubles were in some way dependent upon an

incident in my uncle's life, and that the danger would be as

pressing in one house as in another.

"It was in January, '85, that my poor father met his end, and two

years and eight months have elapsed since then. During that time

I have lived happily at Horsham, and I had begun to hope that

this curse had passed away from the family, and that it had ended

with the last generation. I had begun to take comfort too soon,

however; yesterday morning the blow fell in the very shape in

which it had come upon my father."

The young man took from his waistcoat a crumpled envelope, and

turning to the table he shook out upon it five little dried

orange pips.

"This is the envelope," he continued. "The postmark is

London--eastern division. Within are the very words which were

upon my father's last message: 'K. K. K.'; and then 'Put the

papers on the sundial.'"

"What have you done?" asked Holmes.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"To tell the truth"--he sank his face into his thin, white

hands--"I have felt helpless. I have felt like one of those poor

rabbits when the snake is writhing towards it. I seem to be in

the grasp of some resistless, inexorable evil, which no foresight

and no precautions can guard against."

"Tut! tut!" cried Sherlock Holmes. "You must act, man, or you are

lost. Nothing but energy can save you. This is no time for

despair."

"I have seen the police."

"Ah!"

"But they listened to my story with a smile. I am convinced that

the inspector has formed the opinion that the letters are all

practical jokes, and that the deaths of my relations were really

accidents, as the jury stated, and were not to be connected with

the warnings."

Holmes shook his clenched hands in the air. "Incredible

imbecility!" he cried.

"They have, however, allowed me a policeman, who may remain in

the house with me."

"Has he come with you to-night?"

"No. His orders were to stay in the house."

Again Holmes raved in the air.

"Why did you come to me," he cried, "and, above all, why did you

not come at once?"

"I did not know. It was only to-day that I spoke to Major

Prendergast about my troubles and was advised by him to come to

you."

"It is really two days since you had the letter. We should have

acted before this. You have no further evidence, I suppose, than

that which you have placed before us--no suggestive detail which

might help us?"

"There is one thing," said John Openshaw. He rummaged in his coat

pocket, and, drawing out a piece of discoloured, blue-tinted

paper, he laid it out upon the table. "I have some remembrance,"

said he, "that on the day when my uncle burned the papers I

observed that the small, unburned margins which lay amid the

ashes were of this particular colour. I found this single sheet

upon the floor of his room, and I am inclined to think that it

may be one of the papers which has, perhaps, fluttered out from

among the others, and in that way has escaped destruction. Beyond

the mention of pips, I do not see that it helps us much. I think

myself that it is a page from some private diary. The writing is

undoubtedly my uncle's."

Holmes moved the lamp, and we both bent over the sheet of paper,

which showed by its ragged edge that it had indeed been torn from

a book. It was headed, "March, 1869," and beneath were the

following enigmatical notices:

"4th. Hudson came. Same old platform.

"7th. Set the pips on McCauley, Paramore, and

John Swain, of St. Augustine.

"9th. McCauley cleared.

"10th. John Swain cleared.

"12th. Visited Paramore. All well."

"Thank you!" said Holmes, folding up the paper and returning it

to our visitor. "And now you must on no account lose another

instant. We cannot spare time even to discuss what you have told

me. You must get home instantly and act."

"What shall I do?"

"There is but one thing to do. It must be done at once. You must

put this piece of paper which you have shown us into the brass

box which you have described. You must also put in a note to say

that all the other papers were burned by your uncle, and that

this is the only one which remains. You must assert that in such

words as will carry conviction with them. Having done this, you

must at once put the box out upon the sundial, as directed. Do

you understand?"

"Entirely."

"Do not think of revenge, or anything of the sort, at present. I

think that we may gain that by means of the law; but we have our

web to weave, while theirs is already woven. The first

consideration is to remove the pressing danger which threatens

you. The second is to clear up the mystery and to punish the

guilty parties."

"I thank you," said the young man, rising and pulling on his

overcoat. "You have given me fresh life and hope. I shall

certainly do as you advise."

"Do not lose an instant. And, above all, take care of yourself in

the meanwhile, for I do not think that there can be a doubt that

you are threatened by a very real and imminent danger. How do you

go back?"

"By train from Waterloo."

"It is not yet nine. The streets will be crowded, so I trust that

you may be in safety. And yet you cannot guard yourself too

closely."

"I am armed."

"That is well. To-morrow I shall set to work upon your case."

"I shall see you at Horsham, then?"

"No, your secret lies in London. It is there that I shall seek

it."

"Then I shall call upon you in a day, or in two days, with news

as to the box and the papers. I shall take your advice in every

particular." He shook hands with us and took his leave. Outside

the wind still screamed and the rain splashed and pattered

against the windows. This strange, wild story seemed to have come

to us from amid the mad elements--blown in upon us like a sheet

of sea-weed in a gale--and now to have been reabsorbed by them

once more.

Sherlock Holmes sat for some time in silence, with his head sunk

forward and his eyes bent upon the red glow of the fire. Then he

lit his pipe, and leaning back in his chair he watched the blue

smoke-rings as they chased each other up to the ceiling.

"I think, Watson," he remarked at last, "that of all our cases we

have had none more fantastic than this."

"Save, perhaps, the Sign of Four."

"Well, yes. Save, perhaps, that. And yet this John Openshaw seems

to me to be walking amid even greater perils than did the

Sholtos."

"But have you," I asked, "formed any definite conception as to

what these perils are?"

"There can be no question as to their nature," he answered.

"Then what are they? Who is this K. K. K., and why does he pursue

this unhappy family?"

Sherlock Holmes closed his eyes and placed his elbows upon the

arms of his chair, with his finger-tips together. "The ideal

reasoner," he remarked, "would, when he had once been shown a

single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the

chain of events which led up to it but also all the results which

would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole

animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who

has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents

should be able to accurately state all the other ones, both

before and after. We have not yet grasped the results which the

reason alone can attain to. Problems may be solved in the study

which have baffled all those who have sought a solution by the

aid of their senses. To carry the art, however, to its highest

pitch, it is necessary that the reasoner should be able to

utilise all the facts which have come to his knowledge; and this

in itself implies, as you will readily see, a possession of all

knowledge, which, even in these days of free education and

encyclopaedias, is a somewhat rare accomplishment. It is not so

impossible, however, that a man should possess all knowledge

which is likely to be useful to him in his work, and this I have

endeavoured in my case to do. If I remember rightly, you on one

occasion, in the early days of our friendship, defined my limits

in a very precise fashion."

"Yes," I answered, laughing. "It was a singular document.

Philosophy, astronomy, and politics were marked at zero, I

remember. Botany variable, geology profound as regards the

mud-stains from any region within fifty miles of town, chemistry

eccentric, anatomy unsystematic, sensational literature and crime

records unique, violin-player, boxer, swordsman, lawyer, and

self-poisoner by cocaine and tobacco. Those, I think, were the

main points of my analysis."

Holmes grinned at the last item. "Well," he said, "I say now, as

I said then, that a man should keep his little brain-attic

stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use, and the

rest he can put away in the lumber-room of his library, where he

can get it if he wants it. Now, for such a case as the one which

has been submitted to us to-night, we need certainly to muster

all our resources. Kindly hand me down the letter K of the

'American Encyclopaedia' which stands upon the shelf beside you.

Thank you. Now let us consider the situation and see what may be

deduced from it. In the first place, we may start with a strong

presumption that Colonel Openshaw had some very strong reason for

leaving America. Men at his time of life do not change all their

habits and exchange willingly the charming climate of Florida for

the lonely life of an English provincial town. His extreme love

of solitude in England suggests the idea that he was in fear of

someone or something, so we may assume as a working hypothesis

that it was fear of someone or something which drove him from

America. As to what it was he feared, we can only deduce that by

considering the formidable letters which were received by himself

and his successors. Did you remark the postmarks of those

letters?"

"The first was from Pondicherry, the second from Dundee, and the

third from London."

"From East London. What do you deduce from that?"

"They are all seaports. That the writer was on board of a ship."

"Excellent. We have already a clue. There can be no doubt that

the probability--the strong probability--is that the writer was

on board of a ship. And now let us consider another point. In the

case of Pondicherry, seven weeks elapsed between the threat and

its fulfilment, in Dundee it was only some three or four days.

Does that suggest anything?"

"A greater distance to travel."

"But the letter had also a greater distance to come."

"Then I do not see the point."

"There is at least a presumption that the vessel in which the man

or men are is a sailing-ship. It looks as if they always send

their singular warning or token before them when starting upon

their mission. You see how quickly the deed followed the sign

when it came from Dundee. If they had come from Pondicherry in a

steamer they would have arrived almost as soon as their letter.

But, as a matter of fact, seven weeks elapsed. I think that those

seven weeks represented the difference between the mail-boat which

brought the letter and the sailing vessel which brought the

writer."

"It is possible."

"More than that. It is probable. And now you see the deadly

urgency of this new case, and why I urged young Openshaw to

caution. The blow has always fallen at the end of the time which

it would take the senders to travel the distance. But this one

comes from London, and therefore we cannot count upon delay."

"Good God!" I cried. "What can it mean, this relentless

persecution?"

"The papers which Openshaw carried are obviously of vital

importance to the person or persons in the sailing-ship. I think

that it is quite clear that there must be more than one of them.

A single man could not have carried out two deaths in such a way

as to deceive a coroner's jury. There must have been several in

it, and they must have been men of resource and determination.

Their papers they mean to have, be the holder of them who it may.

In this way you see K. K. K. ceases to be the initials of an

individual and becomes the badge of a society."

"But of what society?"

"Have you never--" said Sherlock Holmes, bending forward and

sinking his voice--"have you never heard of the Ku Klux Klan?"

"I never have."

Holmes turned over the leaves of the book upon his knee. "Here it

is," said he presently:

"'Ku Klux Klan. A name derived from the fanciful resemblance to

the sound produced by cocking a rifle. This terrible secret

society was formed by some ex-Confederate soldiers in the

Southern states after the Civil War, and it rapidly formed local

branches in different parts of the country, notably in Tennessee,

Louisiana, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Its power was

used for political purposes, principally for the terrorising of

the negro voters and the murdering and driving from the country

of those who were opposed to its views. Its outrages were usually

preceded by a warning sent to the marked man in some fantastic

but generally recognised shape--a sprig of oak-leaves in some

parts, melon seeds or orange pips in others. On receiving this

the victim might either openly abjure his former ways, or might

fly from the country. If he braved the matter out, death would

unfailingly come upon him, and usually in some strange and

unforeseen manner. So perfect was the organisation of the

society, and so systematic its methods, that there is hardly a

case upon record where any man succeeded in braving it with

impunity, or in which any of its outrages were traced home to the

perpetrators. For some years the organisation flourished in spite

of the efforts of the United States government and of the better

classes of the community in the South. Eventually, in the year

1869, the movement rather suddenly collapsed, although there have

been sporadic outbreaks of the same sort since that date.'

"You will observe," said Holmes, laying down the volume, "that

the sudden breaking up of the society was coincident with the

disappearance of Openshaw from America with their papers. It may

well have been cause and effect. It is no wonder that he and his

family have some of the more implacable spirits upon their track.

You can understand that this register and diary may implicate

some of the first men in the South, and that there may be many

who will not sleep easy at night until it is recovered."

"Then the page we have seen--"

"Is such as we might expect. It ran, if I remember right, 'sent

the pips to A, B, and C'--that is, sent the society's warning to

them. Then there are successive entries that A and B cleared, or

left the country, and finally that C was visited, with, I fear, a

sinister result for C. Well, I think, Doctor, that we may let

some light into this dark place, and I believe that the only

chance young Openshaw has in the meantime is to do what I have

told him. There is nothing more to be said or to be done

to-night, so hand me over my violin and let us try to forget for

half an hour the miserable weather and the still more miserable

ways of our fellow-men."

It had cleared in the morning, and the sun was shining with a

subdued brightness through the dim veil which hangs over the

great city. Sherlock Holmes was already at breakfast when I came

down.

"You will excuse me for not waiting for you," said he; "I have, I

foresee, a very busy day before me in looking into this case of

young Openshaw's."

"What steps will you take?" I asked.

"It will very much depend upon the results of my first inquiries.

I may have to go down to Horsham, after all."

"You will not go there first?"

"No, I shall commence with the City. Just ring the bell and the

maid will bring up your coffee."

As I waited, I lifted the unopened newspaper from the table and

glanced my eye over it. It rested upon a heading which sent a

chill to my heart.

"Holmes," I cried, "you are too late."

"Ah!" said he, laying down his cup, "I feared as much. How was it

done?" He spoke calmly, but I could see that he was deeply moved.

"My eye caught the name of Openshaw, and the heading 'Tragedy

Near Waterloo Bridge.' Here is the account:

"Between nine and ten last night Police-Constable Cook, of the H

Division, on duty near Waterloo Bridge, heard a cry for help and

a splash in the water. The night, however, was extremely dark and

stormy, so that, in spite of the help of several passers-by, it

was quite impossible to effect a rescue. The alarm, however, was

given, and, by the aid of the water-police, the body was

eventually recovered. It proved to be that of a young gentleman

whose name, as it appears from an envelope which was found in his

pocket, was John Openshaw, and whose residence is near Horsham.

It is conjectured that he may have been hurrying down to catch

the last train from Waterloo Station, and that in his haste and

the extreme darkness he missed his path and walked over the edge

of one of the small landing-places for river steamboats. The body

exhibited no traces of violence, and there can be no doubt that

the deceased had been the victim of an unfortunate accident,

which should have the effect of calling the attention of the

authorities to the condition of the riverside landing-stages."

We sat in silence for some minutes, Holmes more depressed and

shaken than I had ever seen him.

"That hurts my pride, Watson," he said at last. "It is a petty

feeling, no doubt, but it hurts my pride. It becomes a personal

matter with me now, and, if God sends me health, I shall set my

hand upon this gang. That he should come to me for help, and that

I should send him away to his death--!" He sprang from his chair

and paced about the room in uncontrollable agitation, with a

flush upon his sallow cheeks and a nervous clasping and

unclasping of his long thin hands.

"They must be cunning devils," he exclaimed at last. "How could

they have decoyed him down there? The Embankment is not on the

direct line to the station. The bridge, no doubt, was too

crowded, even on such a night, for their purpose. Well, Watson,

we shall see who will win in the long run. I am going out now!"

"To the police?"

"No; I shall be my own police. When I have spun the web they may

take the flies, but not before."

All day I was engaged in my professional work, and it was late in

the evening before I returned to Baker Street. Sherlock Holmes

had not come back yet. It was nearly ten o'clock before he

entered, looking pale and worn. He walked up to the sideboard,

and tearing a piece from the loaf he devoured it voraciously,

washing it down with a long draught of water.

"You are hungry," I remarked.

"Starving. It had escaped my memory. I have had nothing since

breakfast."

"Nothing?"

"Not a bite. I had no time to think of it."

"And how have you succeeded?"

"Well."

"You have a clue?"

"I have them in the hollow of my hand. Young Openshaw shall not

long remain unavenged. Why, Watson, let us put their own devilish

trade-mark upon them. It is well thought of!"

"What do you mean?"

He took an orange from the cupboard, and tearing it to pieces he

squeezed out the pips upon the table. Of these he took five and

thrust them into an envelope. On the inside of the flap he wrote

"S. H. for J. O." Then he sealed it and addressed it to "Captain

James Calhoun, Barque 'Lone Star,' Savannah, Georgia."

"That will await him when he enters port," said he, chuckling.

"It may give him a sleepless night. He will find it as sure a

precursor of his fate as Openshaw did before him."

"And who is this Captain Calhoun?"

"The leader of the gang. I shall have the others, but he first."

"How did you trace it, then?"

He took a large sheet of paper from his pocket, all covered with

dates and names.

"I have spent the whole day," said he, "over Lloyd's registers

and files of the old papers, following the future career of every

vessel which touched at Pondicherry in January and February in

'83. There were thirty-six ships of fair tonnage which were

reported there during those months. Of these, one, the 'Lone Star,'

instantly attracted my attention, since, although it was reported

as having cleared from London, the name is that which is given to

one of the states of the Union."

"Texas, I think."

"I was not and am not sure which; but I knew that the ship must

have an American origin."

"What then?"

"I searched the Dundee records, and when I found that the barque

'Lone Star' was there in January, '85, my suspicion became a

certainty. I then inquired as to the vessels which lay at present

in the port of London."

"Yes?"

"The 'Lone Star' had arrived here last week. I went down to the

Albert Dock and found that she had been taken down the river by

the early tide this morning, homeward bound to Savannah. I wired

to Gravesend and learned that she had passed some time ago, and

as the wind is easterly I have no doubt that she is now past the

Goodwins and not very far from the Isle of Wight."

"What will you do, then?"

"Oh, I have my hand upon him. He and the two mates, are as I

learn, the only native-born Americans in the ship. The others are

Finns and Germans. I know, also, that they were all three away

from the ship last night. I had it from the stevedore who has

been loading their cargo. By the time that their sailing-ship

reaches Savannah the mail-boat will have carried this letter, and

the cable will have informed the police of Savannah that these

three gentlemen are badly wanted here upon a charge of murder."

There is ever a flaw, however, in the best laid of human plans,

and the murderers of John Openshaw were never to receive the

orange pips which would show them that another, as cunning and as

resolute as themselves, was upon their track. Very long and very

severe were the equinoctial gales that year. We waited long for

news of the "Lone Star" of Savannah, but none ever reached us. We

did at last hear that somewhere far out in the Atlantic a

shattered stern-post of a boat was seen swinging in the trough

of a wave, with the letters "L. S." carved upon it, and that is

all which we shall ever know of the fate of the "Lone Star."

ADVENTURE VI. THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED LIP

Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D.D., Principal

of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to

opium. The habit grew upon him, as I understand, from some

foolish freak when he was at college; for having read De

Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, he had

drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the

same effects. He found, as so many more have done, that the

practice is easier to attain than to get rid of, and for many

years he continued to be a slave to the drug, an object of

mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives. I can see

him now, with yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point

pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble

man.

One night--it was in June, '89--there came a ring to my bell,

about the hour when a man gives his first yawn and glances at the

clock. I sat up in my chair, and my wife laid her needle-work

down in her lap and made a little face of disappointment.

"A patient!" said she. "You'll have to go out."

I groaned, for I was newly come back from a weary day.

We heard the door open, a few hurried words, and then quick steps

upon the linoleum. Our own door flew open, and a lady, clad in

some dark-coloured stuff, with a black veil, entered the room.

"You will excuse my calling so late," she began, and then,

suddenly losing her self-control, she ran forward, threw her arms

about my wife's neck, and sobbed upon her shoulder. "Oh, I'm in

such trouble!" she cried; "I do so want a little help."

"Why," said my wife, pulling up her veil, "it is Kate Whitney.

How you startled me, Kate! I had not an idea who you were when

you came in."

"I didn't know what to do, so I came straight to you." That was

always the way. Folk who were in grief came to my wife like birds

to a light-house.

"It was very sweet of you to come. Now, you must have some wine

and water, and sit here comfortably and tell us all about it. Or

should you rather that I sent James off to bed?"

"Oh, no, no! I want the doctor's advice and help, too. It's about

Isa. He has not been home for two days. I am so frightened about

him!"

It was not the first time that she had spoken to us of her

husband's trouble, to me as a doctor, to my wife as an old friend

and school companion. We soothed and comforted her by such words

as we could find. Did she know where her husband was? Was it

possible that we could bring him back to her?

It seems that it was. She had the surest information that of late

he had, when the fit was on him, made use of an opium den in the

farthest east of the City. Hitherto his orgies had always been

confined to one day, and he had come back, twitching and

shattered, in the evening. But now the spell had been upon him

eight-and-forty hours, and he lay there, doubtless among the

dregs of the docks, breathing in the poison or sleeping off the

effects. There he was to be found, she was sure of it, at the Bar

of Gold, in Upper Swandam Lane. But what was she to do? How could

she, a young and timid woman, make her way into such a place and

pluck her husband out from among the ruffians who surrounded him?

There was the case, and of course there was but one way out of

it. Might I not escort her to this place? And then, as a second

thought, why should she come at all? I was Isa Whitney's medical

adviser, and as such I had influence over him. I could manage it

better if I were alone. I promised her on my word that I would

send him home in a cab within two hours if he were indeed at the

address which she had given me. And so in ten minutes I had left

my armchair and cheery sitting-room behind me, and was speeding

eastward in a hansom on a strange errand, as it seemed to me at

the time, though the future only could show how strange it was to

be.

But there was no great difficulty in the first stage of my

adventure. Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the

high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east

of London Bridge. Between a slop-shop and a gin-shop, approached

by a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the

mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search.

Ordering my cab to wait, I passed down the steps, worn hollow in

the centre by the ceaseless tread of drunken feet; and by the

light of a flickering oil-lamp above the door I found the latch

and made my way into a long, low room, thick and heavy with the

brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like the

forecastle of an emigrant ship.

Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying

in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads

thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a

dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black

shadows there glimmered little red circles of light, now bright,

now faint, as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of

the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to

themselves, and others talked together in a strange, low,

monotonous voice, their conversation coming in gushes, and then

suddenly tailing off into silence, each mumbling out his own

thoughts and paying little heed to the words of his neighbour. At

the farther end was a small brazier of burning charcoal, beside

which on a three-legged wooden stool there sat a tall, thin old

man, with his jaw resting upon his two fists, and his elbows upon

his knees, staring into the fire.

As I entered, a sallow Malay attendant had hurried up with a pipe

for me and a supply of the drug, beckoning me to an empty berth.

"Thank you. I have not come to stay," said I. "There is a friend

of mine here, Mr. Isa Whitney, and I wish to speak with him."

There was a movement and an exclamation from my right, and

peering through the gloom, I saw Whitney, pale, haggard, and

unkempt, staring out at me.

"My God! It's Watson," said he. He was in a pitiable state of

reaction, with every nerve in a twitter. "I say, Watson, what

o'clock is it?"

"Nearly eleven."

"Of what day?"

"Of Friday, June 19th."

"Good heavens! I thought it was Wednesday. It is Wednesday. What

d'you want to frighten a chap for?" He sank his face onto his

arms and began to sob in a high treble key.

"I tell you that it is Friday, man. Your wife has been waiting

this two days for you. You should be ashamed of yourself!"

"So I am. But you've got mixed, Watson, for I have only been here

a few hours, three pipes, four pipes--I forget how many. But I'll

go home with you. I wouldn't frighten Kate--poor little Kate.

Give me your hand! Have you a cab?"

"Yes, I have one waiting."

"Then I shall go in it. But I must owe something. Find what I

owe, Watson. I am all off colour. I can do nothing for myself."

I walked down the narrow passage between the double row of

sleepers, holding my breath to keep out the vile, stupefying

fumes of the drug, and looking about for the manager. As I passed

the tall man who sat by the brazier I felt a sudden pluck at my

skirt, and a low voice whispered, "Walk past me, and then look

back at me." The words fell quite distinctly upon my ear. I

glanced down. They could only have come from the old man at my

side, and yet he sat now as absorbed as ever, very thin, very

wrinkled, bent with age, an opium pipe dangling down from between

his knees, as though it had dropped in sheer lassitude from his

fingers. I took two steps forward and looked back. It took all my

self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of

astonishment. He had turned his back so that none could see him

but I. His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull

eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and

grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes. He

made a slight motion to me to approach him, and instantly, as he

turned his face half round to the company once more, subsided

into a doddering, loose-lipped senility.

"Holmes!" I whispered, "what on earth are you doing in this den?"

"As low as you can," he answered; "I have excellent ears. If you

would have the great kindness to get rid of that sottish friend

of yours I should be exceedingly glad to have a little talk with

you."

"I have a cab outside."

"Then pray send him home in it. You may safely trust him, for he

appears to be too limp to get into any mischief. I should

recommend you also to send a note by the cabman to your wife to

say that you have thrown in your lot with me. If you will wait

outside, I shall be with you in five minutes."

It was difficult to refuse any of Sherlock Holmes' requests, for

they were always so exceedingly definite, and put forward with

such a quiet air of mastery. I felt, however, that when Whitney

was once confined in the cab my mission was practically

accomplished; and for the rest, I could not wish anything better

than to be associated with my friend in one of those singular

adventures which were the normal condition of his existence. In a

few minutes I had written my note, paid Whitney's bill, led him

out to the cab, and seen him driven through the darkness. In a

very short time a decrepit figure had emerged from the opium den,

and I was walking down the street with Sherlock Holmes. For two

streets he shuffled along with a bent back and an uncertain foot.

Then, glancing quickly round, he straightened himself out and

burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"I suppose, Watson," said he, "that you imagine that I have added

opium-smoking to cocaine injections, and all the other little

weaknesses on which you have favoured me with your medical

views."

"I was certainly surprised to find you there."

"But not more so than I to find you."

"I came to find a friend."

"And I to find an enemy."

"An enemy?"

"Yes; one of my natural enemies, or, shall I say, my natural

prey. Briefly, Watson, I am in the midst of a very remarkable

inquiry, and I have hoped to find a clue in the incoherent

ramblings of these sots, as I have done before now. Had I been

recognised in that den my life would not have been worth an

hour's purchase; for I have used it before now for my own

purposes, and the rascally Lascar who runs it has sworn to have

vengeance upon me. There is a trap-door at the back of that

building, near the corner of Paul's Wharf, which could tell some

strange tales of what has passed through it upon the moonless

nights."

"What! You do not mean bodies?"

"Ay, bodies, Watson. We should be rich men if we had 1000 pounds

for every poor devil who has been done to death in that den. It

is the vilest murder-trap on the whole riverside, and I fear that

Neville St. Clair has entered it never to leave it more. But our

trap should be here." He put his two forefingers between his

teeth and whistled shrilly--a signal which was answered by a

similar whistle from the distance, followed shortly by the rattle

of wheels and the clink of horses' hoofs.

"Now, Watson," said Holmes, as a tall dog-cart dashed up through

the gloom, throwing out two golden tunnels of yellow light from

its side lanterns. "You'll come with me, won't you?"

"If I can be of use."

"Oh, a trusty comrade is always of use; and a chronicler still

more so. My room at The Cedars is a double-bedded one."

"The Cedars?"

"Yes; that is Mr. St. Clair's house. I am staying there while I

conduct the inquiry."

"Where is it, then?"

"Near Lee, in Kent. We have a seven-mile drive before us."

"But I am all in the dark."

"Of course you are. You'll know all about it presently. Jump up

here. All right, John; we shall not need you. Here's half a

crown. Look out for me to-morrow, about eleven. Give her her

head. So long, then!"

He flicked the horse with his whip, and we dashed away through

the endless succession of sombre and deserted streets, which

widened gradually, until we were flying across a broad

balustraded bridge, with the murky river flowing sluggishly

beneath us. Beyond lay another dull wilderness of bricks and

mortar, its silence broken only by the heavy, regular footfall of

the policeman, or the songs and shouts of some belated party of

revellers. A dull wrack was drifting slowly across the sky, and a

star or two twinkled dimly here and there through the rifts of

the clouds. Holmes drove in silence, with his head sunk upon his

breast, and the air of a man who is lost in thought, while I sat

beside him, curious to learn what this new quest might be which

seemed to tax his powers so sorely, and yet afraid to break in

upon the current of his thoughts. We had driven several miles,

and were beginning to get to the fringe of the belt of suburban

villas, when he shook himself, shrugged his shoulders, and lit up

his pipe with the air of a man who has satisfied himself that he

is acting for the best.

"You have a grand gift of silence, Watson," said he. "It makes

you quite invaluable as a companion. 'Pon my word, it is a great

thing for me to have someone to talk to, for my own thoughts are

not over-pleasant. I was wondering what I should say to this dear

little woman to-night when she meets me at the door."

"You forget that I know nothing about it."

"I shall just have time to tell you the facts of the case before

we get to Lee. It seems absurdly simple, and yet, somehow I can

get nothing to go upon. There's plenty of thread, no doubt, but I

can't get the end of it into my hand. Now, I'll state the case

clearly and concisely to you, Watson, and maybe you can see a

spark where all is dark to me."

"Proceed, then."

"Some years ago--to be definite, in May, 1884--there came to Lee

a gentleman, Neville St. Clair by name, who appeared to have

plenty of money. He took a large villa, laid out the grounds very

nicely, and lived generally in good style. By degrees he made

friends in the neighbourhood, and in 1887 he married the daughter

of a local brewer, by whom he now has two children. He had no

occupation, but was interested in several companies and went into

town as a rule in the morning, returning by the 5:14 from Cannon

Street every night. Mr. St. Clair is now thirty-seven years of

age, is a man of temperate habits, a good husband, a very

affectionate father, and a man who is popular with all who know

him. I may add that his whole debts at the present moment, as far

as we have been able to ascertain, amount to 88 pounds 10s., while

he has 220 pounds standing to his credit in the Capital and

Counties Bank. There is no reason, therefore, to think that money

troubles have been weighing upon his mind.

"Last Monday Mr. Neville St. Clair went into town rather earlier

than usual, remarking before he started that he had two important

commissions to perform, and that he would bring his little boy

home a box of bricks. Now, by the merest chance, his wife

received a telegram upon this same Monday, very shortly after his

departure, to the effect that a small parcel of considerable

value which she had been expecting was waiting for her at the

offices of the Aberdeen Shipping Company. Now, if you are well up

in your London, you will know that the office of the company is

in Fresno Street, which branches out of Upper Swandam Lane, where

you found me to-night. Mrs. St. Clair had her lunch, started for

the City, did some shopping, proceeded to the company's office,

got her packet, and found herself at exactly 4:35 walking through

Swandam Lane on her way back to the station. Have you followed me

so far?"

"It is very clear."

"If you remember, Monday was an exceedingly hot day, and Mrs. St.

Clair walked slowly, glancing about in the hope of seeing a cab,

as she did not like the neighbourhood in which she found herself.

While she was walking in this way down Swandam Lane, she suddenly

heard an ejaculation or cry, and was struck cold to see her

husband looking down at her and, as it seemed to her, beckoning

to her from a second-floor window. The window was open, and she

distinctly saw his face, which she describes as being terribly

agitated. He waved his hands frantically to her, and then

vanished from the window so suddenly that it seemed to her that

he had been plucked back by some irresistible force from behind.

One singular point which struck her quick feminine eye was that

although he wore some dark coat, such as he had started to town

in, he had on neither collar nor necktie.

"Convinced that something was amiss with him, she rushed down the

steps--for the house was none other than the opium den in which

you found me to-night--and running through the front room she

attempted to ascend the stairs which led to the first floor. At

the foot of the stairs, however, she met this Lascar scoundrel of

whom I have spoken, who thrust her back and, aided by a Dane, who

acts as assistant there, pushed her out into the street. Filled

with the most maddening doubts and fears, she rushed down the

lane and, by rare good-fortune, met in Fresno Street a number of

constables with an inspector, all on their way to their beat. The

inspector and two men accompanied her back, and in spite of the

continued resistance of the proprietor, they made their way to

the room in which Mr. St. Clair had last been seen. There was no

sign of him there. In fact, in the whole of that floor there was

no one to be found save a crippled wretch of hideous aspect, who,

it seems, made his home there. Both he and the Lascar stoutly

swore that no one else had been in the front room during the

afternoon. So determined was their denial that the inspector was

staggered, and had almost come to believe that Mrs. St. Clair had

been deluded when, with a cry, she sprang at a small deal box

which lay upon the table and tore the lid from it. Out there fell

a cascade of children's bricks. It was the toy which he had

promised to bring home.

"This discovery, and the evident confusion which the cripple

showed, made the inspector realise that the matter was serious.

The rooms were carefully examined, and results all pointed to an

abominable crime. The front room was plainly furnished as a

sitting-room and led into a small bedroom, which looked out upon

the back of one of the wharves. Between the wharf and the bedroom

window is a narrow strip, which is dry at low tide but is covered

at high tide with at least four and a half feet of water. The

bedroom window was a broad one and opened from below. On

examination traces of blood were to be seen upon the windowsill,

and several scattered drops were visible upon the wooden floor of

the bedroom. Thrust away behind a curtain in the front room were

all the clothes of Mr. Neville St. Clair, with the exception of

his coat. His boots, his socks, his hat, and his watch--all were

there. There were no signs of violence upon any of these

garments, and there were no other traces of Mr. Neville St.

Clair. Out of the window he must apparently have gone for no

other exit could be discovered, and the ominous bloodstains upon

the sill gave little promise that he could save himself by

swimming, for the tide was at its very highest at the moment of

the tragedy.

"And now as to the villains who seemed to be immediately

implicated in the matter. The Lascar was known to be a man of the

vilest antecedents, but as, by Mrs. St. Clair's story, he was

known to have been at the foot of the stair within a very few

seconds of her husband's appearance at the window, he could

hardly have been more than an accessory to the crime. His defence

was one of absolute ignorance, and he protested that he had no

knowledge as to the doings of Hugh Boone, his lodger, and that he

could not account in any way for the presence of the missing

gentleman's clothes.

"So much for the Lascar manager. Now for the sinister cripple who

lives upon the second floor of the opium den, and who was

certainly the last human being whose eyes rested upon Neville St.

Clair. His name is Hugh Boone, and his hideous face is one which

is familiar to every man who goes much to the City. He is a

professional beggar, though in order to avoid the police

regulations he pretends to a small trade in wax vestas. Some

little distance down Threadneedle Street, upon the left-hand

side, there is, as you may have remarked, a small angle in the

wall. Here it is that this creature takes his daily seat,

cross-legged with his tiny stock of matches on his lap, and as he

is a piteous spectacle a small rain of charity descends into the

greasy leather cap which lies upon the pavement beside him. I

have watched the fellow more than once before ever I thought of

making his professional acquaintance, and I have been surprised

at the harvest which he has reaped in a short time. His

appearance, you see, is so remarkable that no one can pass him

without observing him. A shock of orange hair, a pale face

disfigured by a horrible scar, which, by its contraction, has

turned up the outer edge of his upper lip, a bulldog chin, and a

pair of very penetrating dark eyes, which present a singular

contrast to the colour of his hair, all mark him out from amid

the common crowd of mendicants and so, too, does his wit, for he

is ever ready with a reply to any piece of chaff which may be

thrown at him by the passers-by. This is the man whom we now

learn to have been the lodger at the opium den, and to have been

the last man to see the gentleman of whom we are in quest."

"But a cripple!" said I. "What could he have done single-handed

against a man in the prime of life?"

"He is a cripple in the sense that he walks with a limp; but in

other respects he appears to be a powerful and well-nurtured man.

Surely your medical experience would tell you, Watson, that

weakness in one limb is often compensated for by exceptional

strength in the others."

"Pray continue your narrative."

"Mrs. St. Clair had fainted at the sight of the blood upon the

window, and she was escorted home in a cab by the police, as her

presence could be of no help to them in their investigations.

Inspector Barton, who had charge of the case, made a very careful

examination of the premises, but without finding anything which

threw any light upon the matter. One mistake had been made in not

arresting Boone instantly, as he was allowed some few minutes

during which he might have communicated with his friend the

Lascar, but this fault was soon remedied, and he was seized and

searched, without anything being found which could incriminate

him. There were, it is true, some blood-stains upon his right

shirt-sleeve, but he pointed to his ring-finger, which had been

cut near the nail, and explained that the bleeding came from

there, adding that he had been to the window not long before, and

that the stains which had been observed there came doubtless from

the same source. He denied strenuously having ever seen Mr.

Neville St. Clair and swore that the presence of the clothes in

his room was as much a mystery to him as to the police. As to

Mrs. St. Clair's assertion that she had actually seen her husband

at the window, he declared that she must have been either mad or

dreaming. He was removed, loudly protesting, to the

police-station, while the inspector remained upon the premises in

the hope that the ebbing tide might afford some fresh clue.

"And it did, though they hardly found upon the mud-bank what they

had feared to find. It was Neville St. Clair's coat, and not

Neville St. Clair, which lay uncovered as the tide receded. And

what do you think they found in the pockets?"

"I cannot imagine."

"No, I don't think you would guess. Every pocket stuffed with

pennies and half-pennies--421 pennies and 270 half-pennies. It

was no wonder that it had not been swept away by the tide. But a

human body is a different matter. There is a fierce eddy between

the wharf and the house. It seemed likely enough that the

weighted coat had remained when the stripped body had been sucked

away into the river."

"But I understand that all the other clothes were found in the

room. Would the body be dressed in a coat alone?"

"No, sir, but the facts might be met speciously enough. Suppose

that this man Boone had thrust Neville St. Clair through the

window, there is no human eye which could have seen the deed.

What would he do then? It would of course instantly strike him

that he must get rid of the tell-tale garments. He would seize

the coat, then, and be in the act of throwing it out, when it

would occur to him that it would swim and not sink. He has little

time, for he has heard the scuffle downstairs when the wife tried

to force her way up, and perhaps he has already heard from his

Lascar confederate that the police are hurrying up the street.

There is not an instant to be lost. He rushes to some secret

hoard, where he has accumulated the fruits of his beggary, and he

stuffs all the coins upon which he can lay his hands into the

pockets to make sure of the coat's sinking. He throws it out, and

would have done the same with the other garments had not he heard

the rush of steps below, and only just had time to close the

window when the police appeared."

"It certainly sounds feasible."

"Well, we will take it as a working hypothesis for want of a

better. Boone, as I have told you, was arrested and taken to the

station, but it could not be shown that there had ever before

been anything against him. He had for years been known as a

professional beggar, but his life appeared to have been a very

quiet and innocent one. There the matter stands at present, and

the questions which have to be solved--what Neville St. Clair was

doing in the opium den, what happened to him when there, where is

he now, and what Hugh Boone had to do with his disappearance--are

all as far from a solution as ever. I confess that I cannot

recall any case within my experience which looked at the first

glance so simple and yet which presented such difficulties."

While Sherlock Holmes had been detailing this singular series of

events, we had been whirling through the outskirts of the great

town until the last straggling houses had been left behind, and

we rattled along with a country hedge upon either side of us.

Just as he finished, however, we drove through two scattered

villages, where a few lights still glimmered in the windows.

"We are on the outskirts of Lee," said my companion. "We have

touched on three English counties in our short drive, starting in

Middlesex, passing over an angle of Surrey, and ending in Kent.

See that light among the trees? That is The Cedars, and beside

that lamp sits a woman whose anxious ears have already, I have

little doubt, caught the clink of our horse's feet."

"But why are you not conducting the case from Baker Street?" I

asked.

"Because there are many inquiries which must be made out here.

Mrs. St. Clair has most kindly put two rooms at my disposal, and

you may rest assured that she will have nothing but a welcome for

my friend and colleague. I hate to meet her, Watson, when I have

no news of her husband. Here we are. Whoa, there, whoa!"

We had pulled up in front of a large villa which stood within its

own grounds. A stable-boy had run out to the horse's head, and

springing down, I followed Holmes up the small, winding

gravel-drive which led to the house. As we approached, the door

flew open, and a little blonde woman stood in the opening, clad

in some sort of light mousseline de soie, with a touch of fluffy

pink chiffon at her neck and wrists. She stood with her figure

outlined against the flood of light, one hand upon the door, one

half-raised in her eagerness, her body slightly bent, her head

and face protruded, with eager eyes and parted lips, a standing

question.

"Well?" she cried, "well?" And then, seeing that there were two

of us, she gave a cry of hope which sank into a groan as she saw

that my companion shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"No good news?"

"None."

"No bad?"

"No."

"Thank God for that. But come in. You must be weary, for you have

had a long day."

"This is my friend, Dr. Watson. He has been of most vital use to

me in several of my cases, and a lucky chance has made it

possible for me to bring him out and associate him with this

investigation."

"I am delighted to see you," said she, pressing my hand warmly.

"You will, I am sure, forgive anything that may be wanting in our

arrangements, when you consider the blow which has come so

suddenly upon us."

"My dear madam," said I, "I am an old campaigner, and if I were

not I can very well see that no apology is needed. If I can be of

any assistance, either to you or to my friend here, I shall be

indeed happy."

"Now, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said the lady as we entered a

well-lit dining-room, upon the table of which a cold supper had

been laid out, "I should very much like to ask you one or two

plain questions, to which I beg that you will give a plain

answer."

"Certainly, madam."

"Do not trouble about my feelings. I am not hysterical, nor given

to fainting. I simply wish to hear your real, real opinion."

"Upon what point?"

"In your heart of hearts, do you think that Neville is alive?"

Sherlock Holmes seemed to be embarrassed by the question.

"Frankly, now!" she repeated, standing upon the rug and looking

keenly down at him as he leaned back in a basket-chair.

"Frankly, then, madam, I do not."

"You think that he is dead?"

"I do."

"Murdered?"

"I don't say that. Perhaps."

"And on what day did he meet his death?"

"On Monday."

"Then perhaps, Mr. Holmes, you will be good enough to explain how

it is that I have received a letter from him to-day."

Sherlock Holmes sprang out of his chair as if he had been

galvanised.

"What!" he roared.

"Yes, to-day." She stood smiling, holding up a little slip of

paper in the air.

"May I see it?"

"Certainly."

He snatched it from her in his eagerness, and smoothing it out

upon the table he drew over the lamp and examined it intently. I

had left my chair and was gazing at it over his shoulder. The

envelope was a very coarse one and was stamped with the Gravesend

postmark and with the date of that very day, or rather of the day

before, for it was considerably after midnight.

"Coarse writing," murmured Holmes. "Surely this is not your

husband's writing, madam."

"No, but the enclosure is."

"I perceive also that whoever addressed the envelope had to go

and inquire as to the address."

"How can you tell that?"

"The name, you see, is in perfectly black ink, which has dried

itself. The rest is of the greyish colour, which shows that

blotting-paper has been used. If it had been written straight

off, and then blotted, none would be of a deep black shade. This

man has written the name, and there has then been a pause before

he wrote the address, which can only mean that he was not

familiar with it. It is, of course, a trifle, but there is

nothing so important as trifles. Let us now see the letter. Ha!

there has been an enclosure here!"

"Yes, there was a ring. His signet-ring."

"And you are sure that this is your husband's hand?"

"One of his hands."

"One?"

"His hand when he wrote hurriedly. It is very unlike his usual

writing, and yet I know it well."

"'Dearest do not be frightened. All will come well. There is a

huge error which it may take some little time to rectify.

Wait in patience.--NEVILLE.' Written in pencil upon the fly-leaf

of a book, octavo size, no water-mark. Hum! Posted to-day in

Gravesend by a man with a dirty thumb. Ha! And the flap has been

gummed, if I am not very much in error, by a person who had been

chewing tobacco. And you have no doubt that it is your husband's

hand, madam?"

"None. Neville wrote those words."

"And they were posted to-day at Gravesend. Well, Mrs. St. Clair,

the clouds lighten, though I should not venture to say that the

danger is over."

"But he must be alive, Mr. Holmes."

"Unless this is a clever forgery to put us on the wrong scent.

The ring, after all, proves nothing. It may have been taken from

him."

"No, no; it is, it is his very own writing!"

"Very well. It may, however, have been written on Monday and only

posted to-day."

"That is possible."

"If so, much may have happened between."

"Oh, you must not discourage me, Mr. Holmes. I know that all is

well with him. There is so keen a sympathy between us that I

should know if evil came upon him. On the very day that I saw him

last he cut himself in the bedroom, and yet I in the dining-room

rushed upstairs instantly with the utmost certainty that

something had happened. Do you think that I would respond to such

a trifle and yet be ignorant of his death?"

"I have seen too much not to know that the impression of a woman

may be more valuable than the conclusion of an analytical

reasoner. And in this letter you certainly have a very strong

piece of evidence to corroborate your view. But if your husband

is alive and able to write letters, why should he remain away

from you?"

"I cannot imagine. It is unthinkable."

"And on Monday he made no remarks before leaving you?"

"No."

"And you were surprised to see him in Swandam Lane?"

"Very much so."

"Was the window open?"

"Yes."

"Then he might have called to you?"

"He might."

"He only, as I understand, gave an inarticulate cry?"

"Yes."

"A call for help, you thought?"

"Yes. He waved his hands."

"But it might have been a cry of surprise. Astonishment at the

unexpected sight of you might cause him to throw up his hands?"

"It is possible."

"And you thought he was pulled back?"

"He disappeared so suddenly."

"He might have leaped back. You did not see anyone else in the

room?"

"No, but this horrible man confessed to having been there, and

the Lascar was at the foot of the stairs."

"Quite so. Your husband, as far as you could see, had his

ordinary clothes on?"

"But without his collar or tie. I distinctly saw his bare

throat."

"Had he ever spoken of Swandam Lane?"

"Never."

"Had he ever showed any signs of having taken opium?"

"Never."

"Thank you, Mrs. St. Clair. Those are the principal points about

which I wished to be absolutely clear. We shall now have a little

supper and then retire, for we may have a very busy day

to-morrow."

A large and comfortable double-bedded room had been placed at our

disposal, and I was quickly between the sheets, for I was weary

after my night of adventure. Sherlock Holmes was a man, however,

who, when he had an unsolved problem upon his mind, would go for

days, and even for a week, without rest, turning it over,

rearranging his facts, looking at it from every point of view

until he had either fathomed it or convinced himself that his

data were insufficient. It was soon evident to me that he was now

preparing for an all-night sitting. He took off his coat and

waistcoat, put on a large blue dressing-gown, and then wandered

about the room collecting pillows from his bed and cushions from

the sofa and armchairs. With these he constructed a sort of

Eastern divan, upon which he perched himself cross-legged, with

an ounce of shag tobacco and a box of matches laid out in front

of him. In the dim light of the lamp I saw him sitting there, an

old briar pipe between his lips, his eyes fixed vacantly upon the

corner of the ceiling, the blue smoke curling up from him,

silent, motionless, with the light shining upon his strong-set

aquiline features. So he sat as I dropped off to sleep, and so he

sat when a sudden ejaculation caused me to wake up, and I found

the summer sun shining into the apartment. The pipe was still

between his lips, the smoke still curled upward, and the room was

full of a dense tobacco haze, but nothing remained of the heap of

shag which I had seen upon the previous night.

"Awake, Watson?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Game for a morning drive?"

"Certainly."

"Then dress. No one is stirring yet, but I know where the

stable-boy sleeps, and we shall soon have the trap out." He

chuckled to himself as he spoke, his eyes twinkled, and he seemed

a different man to the sombre thinker of the previous night.

As I dressed I glanced at my watch. It was no wonder that no one

was stirring. It was twenty-five minutes past four. I had hardly

finished when Holmes returned with the news that the boy was

putting in the horse.

"I want to test a little theory of mine," said he, pulling on his

boots. "I think, Watson, that you are now standing in the

presence of one of the most absolute fools in Europe. I deserve

to be kicked from here to Charing Cross. But I think I have the

key of the affair now."

"And where is it?" I asked, smiling.

"In the bathroom," he answered. "Oh, yes, I am not joking," he

continued, seeing my look of incredulity. "I have just been

there, and I have taken it out, and I have got it in this

Gladstone bag. Come on, my boy, and we shall see whether it will

not fit the lock."

We made our way downstairs as quietly as possible, and out into

the bright morning sunshine. In the road stood our horse and

trap, with the half-clad stable-boy waiting at the head. We both

sprang in, and away we dashed down the London Road. A few country

carts were stirring, bearing in vegetables to the metropolis, but

the lines of villas on either side were as silent and lifeless as

some city in a dream.

"It has been in some points a singular case," said Holmes,

flicking the horse on into a gallop. "I confess that I have been

as blind as a mole, but it is better to learn wisdom late than

never to learn it at all."

In town the earliest risers were just beginning to look sleepily

from their windows as we drove through the streets of the Surrey

side. Passing down the Waterloo Bridge Road we crossed over the

river, and dashing up Wellington Street wheeled sharply to the

right and found ourselves in Bow Street. Sherlock Holmes was well

known to the force, and the two constables at the door saluted

him. One of them held the horse's head while the other led us in.

"Who is on duty?" asked Holmes.

"Inspector Bradstreet, sir."

"Ah, Bradstreet, how are you?" A tall, stout official had come

down the stone-flagged passage, in a peaked cap and frogged

jacket. "I wish to have a quiet word with you, Bradstreet."

"Certainly, Mr. Holmes. Step into my room here." It was a small,

office-like room, with a huge ledger upon the table, and a

telephone projecting from the wall. The inspector sat down at his

desk.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Holmes?"

"I called about that beggarman, Boone--the one who was charged

with being concerned in the disappearance of Mr. Neville St.

Clair, of Lee."

"Yes. He was brought up and remanded for further inquiries."

"So I heard. You have him here?"

"In the cells."

"Is he quiet?"

"Oh, he gives no trouble. But he is a dirty scoundrel."

"Dirty?"

"Yes, it is all we can do to make him wash his hands, and his

face is as black as a tinker's. Well, when once his case has been

settled, he will have a regular prison bath; and I think, if you

saw him, you would agree with me that he needed it."

"I should like to see him very much."

"Would you? That is easily done. Come this way. You can leave

your bag."

"No, I think that I'll take it."

"Very good. Come this way, if you please." He led us down a

passage, opened a barred door, passed down a winding stair, and

brought us to a whitewashed corridor with a line of doors on each

side.

"The third on the right is his," said the inspector. "Here it

is!" He quietly shot back a panel in the upper part of the door

and glanced through.

"He is asleep," said he. "You can see him very well."

We both put our eyes to the grating. The prisoner lay with his

face towards us, in a very deep sleep, breathing slowly and

heavily. He was a middle-sized man, coarsely clad as became his

calling, with a coloured shirt protruding through the rent in his

tattered coat. He was, as the inspector had said, extremely

dirty, but the grime which covered his face could not conceal its

repulsive ugliness. A broad wheal from an old scar ran right

across it from eye to chin, and by its contraction had turned up

one side of the upper lip, so that three teeth were exposed in a

perpetual snarl. A shock of very bright red hair grew low over

his eyes and forehead.

"He's a beauty, isn't he?" said the inspector.

"He certainly needs a wash," remarked Holmes. "I had an idea that

he might, and I took the liberty of bringing the tools with me."

He opened the Gladstone bag as he spoke, and took out, to my

astonishment, a very large bath-sponge.

"He! he! You are a funny one," chuckled the inspector.

"Now, if you will have the great goodness to open that door very

quietly, we will soon make him cut a much more respectable

figure."

"Well, I don't know why not," said the inspector. "He doesn't

look a credit to the Bow Street cells, does he?" He slipped his

key into the lock, and we all very quietly entered the cell. The

sleeper half turned, and then settled down once more into a deep

slumber. Holmes stooped to the water-jug, moistened his sponge,

and then rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the

prisoner's face.

"Let me introduce you," he shouted, "to Mr. Neville St. Clair, of

Lee, in the county of Kent."

Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man's face peeled

off under the sponge like the bark from a tree. Gone was the

coarse brown tint! Gone, too, was the horrid scar which had

seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the

repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch brought away the tangled

red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale,

sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned,

rubbing his eyes and staring about him with sleepy bewilderment.

Then suddenly realising the exposure, he broke into a scream and

threw himself down with his face to the pillow.

"Great heavens!" cried the inspector, "it is, indeed, the missing

man. I know him from the photograph."

The prisoner turned with the reckless air of a man who abandons

himself to his destiny. "Be it so," said he. "And pray what am I

charged with?"

"With making away with Mr. Neville St.-- Oh, come, you can't be

charged with that unless they make a case of attempted suicide of

it," said the inspector with a grin. "Well, I have been

twenty-seven years in the force, but this really takes the cake."

"If I am Mr. Neville St. Clair, then it is obvious that no crime

has been committed, and that, therefore, I am illegally

detained."

"No crime, but a very great error has been committed," said

Holmes. "You would have done better to have trusted your wife."

"It was not the wife; it was the children," groaned the prisoner.

"God help me, I would not have them ashamed of their father. My

God! What an exposure! What can I do?"

Sherlock Holmes sat down beside him on the couch and patted him

kindly on the shoulder.

"If you leave it to a court of law to clear the matter up," said

he, "of course you can hardly avoid publicity. On the other hand,

if you convince the police authorities that there is no possible

case against you, I do not know that there is any reason that the

details should find their way into the papers. Inspector

Bradstreet would, I am sure, make notes upon anything which you

might tell us and submit it to the proper authorities. The case

would then never go into court at all."

"God bless you!" cried the prisoner passionately. "I would have

endured imprisonment, ay, even execution, rather than have left

my miserable secret as a family blot to my children.

"You are the first who have ever heard my story. My father was a

schoolmaster in Chesterfield, where I received an excellent

education. I travelled in my youth, took to the stage, and

finally became a reporter on an evening paper in London. One day

my editor wished to have a series of articles upon begging in the

metropolis, and I volunteered to supply them. There was the point

from which all my adventures started. It was only by trying

begging as an amateur that I could get the facts upon which to

base my articles. When an actor I had, of course, learned all the

secrets of making up, and had been famous in the green-room for

my skill. I took advantage now of my attainments. I painted my

face, and to make myself as pitiable as possible I made a good

scar and fixed one side of my lip in a twist by the aid of a

small slip of flesh-coloured plaster. Then with a red head of

hair, and an appropriate dress, I took my station in the business

part of the city, ostensibly as a match-seller but really as a

beggar. For seven hours I plied my trade, and when I returned

home in the evening I found to my surprise that I had received no

less than 26s. 4d.

"I wrote my articles and thought little more of the matter until,

some time later, I backed a bill for a friend and had a writ

served upon me for 25 pounds. I was at my wit's end where to get

the money, but a sudden idea came to me. I begged a fortnight's

grace from the creditor, asked for a holiday from my employers,

and spent the time in begging in the City under my disguise. In

ten days I had the money and had paid the debt.

"Well, you can imagine how hard it was to settle down to arduous

work at 2 pounds a week when I knew that I could earn as much in

a day by smearing my face with a little paint, laying my cap on

the ground, and sitting still. It was a long fight between my

pride and the money, but the dollars won at last, and I threw up

reporting and sat day after day in the corner which I had first

chosen, inspiring pity by my ghastly face and filling my pockets

with coppers. Only one man knew my secret. He was the keeper of a

low den in which I used to lodge in Swandam Lane, where I could

every morning emerge as a squalid beggar and in the evenings

transform myself into a well-dressed man about town. This fellow,

a Lascar, was well paid by me for his rooms, so that I knew that

my secret was safe in his possession.

"Well, very soon I found that I was saving considerable sums of

money. I do not mean that any beggar in the streets of London

could earn 700 pounds a year--which is less than my average

takings--but I had exceptional advantages in my power of making

up, and also in a facility of repartee, which improved by

practice and made me quite a recognised character in the City.

All day a stream of pennies, varied by silver, poured in upon me,

and it was a very bad day in which I failed to take 2 pounds.

"As I grew richer I grew more ambitious, took a house in the

country, and eventually married, without anyone having a

suspicion as to my real occupation. My dear wife knew that I had

business in the City. She little knew what.

"Last Monday I had finished for the day and was dressing in my

room above the opium den when I looked out of my window and saw,

to my horror and astonishment, that my wife was standing in the

street, with her eyes fixed full upon me. I gave a cry of

surprise, threw up my arms to cover my face, and, rushing to my

confidant, the Lascar, entreated him to prevent anyone from

coming up to me. I heard her voice downstairs, but I knew that

she could not ascend. Swiftly I threw off my clothes, pulled on

those of a beggar, and put on my pigments and wig. Even a wife's

eyes could not pierce so complete a disguise. But then it

occurred to me that there might be a search in the room, and that

the clothes might betray me. I threw open the window, reopening

by my violence a small cut which I had inflicted upon myself in

the bedroom that morning. Then I seized my coat, which was

weighted by the coppers which I had just transferred to it from

the leather bag in which I carried my takings. I hurled it out of

the window, and it disappeared into the Thames. The other clothes

would have followed, but at that moment there was a rush of

constables up the stair, and a few minutes after I found, rather,

I confess, to my relief, that instead of being identified as Mr.

Neville St. Clair, I was arrested as his murderer.

"I do not know that there is anything else for me to explain. I

was determined to preserve my disguise as long as possible, and

hence my preference for a dirty face. Knowing that my wife would

be terribly anxious, I slipped off my ring and confided it to the

Lascar at a moment when no constable was watching me, together

with a hurried scrawl, telling her that she had no cause to

fear."

"That note only reached her yesterday," said Holmes.

"Good God! What a week she must have spent!"

"The police have watched this Lascar," said Inspector Bradstreet,

"and I can quite understand that he might find it difficult to

post a letter unobserved. Probably he handed it to some sailor

customer of his, who forgot all about it for some days."

"That was it," said Holmes, nodding approvingly; "I have no doubt

of it. But have you never been prosecuted for begging?"

"Many times; but what was a fine to me?"

"It must stop here, however," said Bradstreet. "If the police are

to hush this thing up, there must be no more of Hugh Boone."

"I have sworn it by the most solemn oaths which a man can take."

"In that case I think that it is probable that no further steps

may be taken. But if you are found again, then all must come out.

I am sure, Mr. Holmes, that we are very much indebted to you for

having cleared the matter up. I wish I knew how you reach your

results."

"I reached this one," said my friend, "by sitting upon five

pillows and consuming an ounce of shag. I think, Watson, that if

we drive to Baker Street we shall just be in time for breakfast."

VII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE

I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon the second

morning after Christmas, with the intention of wishing him the

compliments of the season. He was lounging upon the sofa in a

purple dressing-gown, a pipe-rack within his reach upon the

right, and a pile of crumpled morning papers, evidently newly

studied, near at hand. Beside the couch was a wooden chair, and

on the angle of the back hung a very seedy and disreputable

hard-felt hat, much the worse for wear, and cracked in several

places. A lens and a forceps lying upon the seat of the chair

suggested that the hat had been suspended in this manner for the

purpose of examination.

"You are engaged," said I; "perhaps I interrupt you."

"Not at all. I am glad to have a friend with whom I can discuss

my results. The matter is a perfectly trivial one"--he jerked his

thumb in the direction of the old hat--"but there are points in

connection with it which are not entirely devoid of interest and

even of instruction."

I seated myself in his armchair and warmed my hands before his

crackling fire, for a sharp frost had set in, and the windows

were thick with the ice crystals. "I suppose," I remarked, "that,

homely as it looks, this thing has some deadly story linked on to

it--that it is the clue which will guide you in the solution of

some mystery and the punishment of some crime."

"No, no. No crime," said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. "Only one of

those whimsical little incidents which will happen when you have

four million human beings all jostling each other within the

space of a few square miles. Amid the action and reaction of so

dense a swarm of humanity, every possible combination of events

may be expected to take place, and many a little problem will be

presented which may be striking and bizarre without being

criminal. We have already had experience of such."

"So much so," I remarked, "that of the last six cases which I

have added to my notes, three have been entirely free of any

legal crime."

"Precisely. You allude to my attempt to recover the Irene Adler

papers, to the singular case of Miss Mary Sutherland, and to the

adventure of the man with the twisted lip. Well, I have no doubt

that this small matter will fall into the same innocent category.

You know Peterson, the commissionaire?"

"Yes."

"It is to him that this trophy belongs."

"It is his hat."

"No, no, he found it. Its owner is unknown. I beg that you will

look upon it not as a battered billycock but as an intellectual

problem. And, first, as to how it came here. It arrived upon

Christmas morning, in company with a good fat goose, which is, I

have no doubt, roasting at this moment in front of Peterson's

fire. The facts are these: about four o'clock on Christmas

morning, Peterson, who, as you know, is a very honest fellow, was

returning from some small jollification and was making his way

homeward down Tottenham Court Road. In front of him he saw, in

the gaslight, a tallish man, walking with a slight stagger, and

carrying a white goose slung over his shoulder. As he reached the

corner of Goodge Street, a row broke out between this stranger

and a little knot of roughs. One of the latter knocked off the

man's hat, on which he raised his stick to defend himself and,

swinging it over his head, smashed the shop window behind him.

Peterson had rushed forward to protect the stranger from his

assailants; but the man, shocked at having broken the window, and

seeing an official-looking person in uniform rushing towards him,

dropped his goose, took to his heels, and vanished amid the

labyrinth of small streets which lie at the back of Tottenham

Court Road. The roughs had also fled at the appearance of

Peterson, so that he was left in possession of the field of

battle, and also of the spoils of victory in the shape of this

battered hat and a most unimpeachable Christmas goose."

"Which surely he restored to their owner?"

"My dear fellow, there lies the problem. It is true that 'For

Mrs. Henry Baker' was printed upon a small card which was tied to

the bird's left leg, and it is also true that the initials 'H.

B.' are legible upon the lining of this hat, but as there are

some thousands of Bakers, and some hundreds of Henry Bakers in

this city of ours, it is not easy to restore lost property to any

one of them."

"What, then, did Peterson do?"

"He brought round both hat and goose to me on Christmas morning,

knowing that even the smallest problems are of interest to me.

The goose we retained until this morning, when there were signs

that, in spite of the slight frost, it would be well that it

should be eaten without unnecessary delay. Its finder has carried

it off, therefore, to fulfil the ultimate destiny of a goose,

while I continue to retain the hat of the unknown gentleman who

lost his Christmas dinner."

"Did he not advertise?"

"No."

"Then, what clue could you have as to his identity?"

"Only as much as we can deduce."

"From his hat?"

"Precisely."

"But you are joking. What can you gather from this old battered

felt?"

"Here is my lens. You know my methods. What can you gather

yourself as to the individuality of the man who has worn this

article?"

I took the tattered object in my hands and turned it over rather

ruefully. It was a very ordinary black hat of the usual round

shape, hard and much the worse for wear. The lining had been of

red silk, but was a good deal discoloured. There was no maker's

name; but, as Holmes had remarked, the initials "H. B." were

scrawled upon one side. It was pierced in the brim for a

hat-securer, but the elastic was missing. For the rest, it was

cracked, exceedingly dusty, and spotted in several places,

although there seemed to have been some attempt to hide the

discoloured patches by smearing them with ink.

"I can see nothing," said I, handing it back to my friend.

"On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail,

however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in

drawing your inferences."

"Then, pray tell me what it is that you can infer from this hat?"

He picked it up and gazed at it in the peculiar introspective

fashion which was characteristic of him. "It is perhaps less

suggestive than it might have been," he remarked, "and yet there

are a few inferences which are very distinct, and a few others

which represent at least a strong balance of probability. That

the man was highly intellectual is of course obvious upon the

face of it, and also that he was fairly well-to-do within the

last three years, although he has now fallen upon evil days. He

had foresight, but has less now than formerly, pointing to a

moral retrogression, which, when taken with the decline of his

fortunes, seems to indicate some evil influence, probably drink,

at work upon him. This may account also for the obvious fact that

his wife has ceased to love him."

"My dear Holmes!"

"He has, however, retained some degree of self-respect," he

continued, disregarding my remonstrance. "He is a man who leads a

sedentary life, goes out little, is out of training entirely, is

middle-aged, has grizzled hair which he has had cut within the

last few days, and which he anoints with lime-cream. These are

the more patent facts which are to be deduced from his hat. Also,

by the way, that it is extremely improbable that he has gas laid

on in his house."

"You are certainly joking, Holmes."

"Not in the least. Is it possible that even now, when I give you

these results, you are unable to see how they are attained?"

"I have no doubt that I am very stupid, but I must confess that I

am unable to follow you. For example, how did you deduce that

this man was intellectual?"

For answer Holmes clapped the hat upon his head. It came right

over the forehead and settled upon the bridge of his nose. "It is

a question of cubic capacity," said he; "a man with so large a

brain must have something in it."

"The decline of his fortunes, then?"

"This hat is three years old. These flat brims curled at the edge

came in then. It is a hat of the very best quality. Look at the

band of ribbed silk and the excellent lining. If this man could

afford to buy so expensive a hat three years ago, and has had no

hat since, then he has assuredly gone down in the world."

"Well, that is clear enough, certainly. But how about the

foresight and the moral retrogression?"

Sherlock Holmes laughed. "Here is the foresight," said he putting

his finger upon the little disc and loop of the hat-securer.

"They are never sold upon hats. If this man ordered one, it is a

sign of a certain amount of foresight, since he went out of his

way to take this precaution against the wind. But since we see

that he has broken the elastic and has not troubled to replace

it, it is obvious that he has less foresight now than formerly,

which is a distinct proof of a weakening nature. On the other

hand, he has endeavoured to conceal some of these stains upon the

felt by daubing them with ink, which is a sign that he has not

entirely lost his self-respect."

"Your reasoning is certainly plausible."

"The further points, that he is middle-aged, that his hair is

grizzled, that it has been recently cut, and that he uses

lime-cream, are all to be gathered from a close examination of the

lower part of the lining. The lens discloses a large number of

hair-ends, clean cut by the scissors of the barber. They all

appear to be adhesive, and there is a distinct odour of

lime-cream. This dust, you will observe, is not the gritty, grey

dust of the street but the fluffy brown dust of the house,

showing that it has been hung up indoors most of the time, while

the marks of moisture upon the inside are proof positive that the

wearer perspired very freely, and could therefore, hardly be in

the best of training."

"But his wife--you said that she had ceased to love him."

"This hat has not been brushed for weeks. When I see you, my dear

Watson, with a week's accumulation of dust upon your hat, and

when your wife allows you to go out in such a state, I shall fear

that you also have been unfortunate enough to lose your wife's

affection."

"But he might be a bachelor."

"Nay, he was bringing home the goose as a peace-offering to his

wife. Remember the card upon the bird's leg."

"You have an answer to everything. But how on earth do you deduce

that the gas is not laid on in his house?"

"One tallow stain, or even two, might come by chance; but when I

see no less than five, I think that there can be little doubt

that the individual must be brought into frequent contact with

burning tallow--walks upstairs at night probably with his hat in

one hand and a guttering candle in the other. Anyhow, he never

got tallow-stains from a gas-jet. Are you satisfied?"

"Well, it is very ingenious," said I, laughing; "but since, as

you said just now, there has been no crime committed, and no harm

done save the loss of a goose, all this seems to be rather a

waste of energy."

Sherlock Holmes had opened his mouth to reply, when the door flew

open, and Peterson, the commissionaire, rushed into the apartment

with flushed cheeks and the face of a man who is dazed with

astonishment.

"The goose, Mr. Holmes! The goose, sir!" he gasped.

"Eh? What of it, then? Has it returned to life and flapped off

through the kitchen window?" Holmes twisted himself round upon

the sofa to get a fairer view of the man's excited face.

"See here, sir! See what my wife found in its crop!" He held out

his hand and displayed upon the centre of the palm a brilliantly

scintillating blue stone, rather smaller than a bean in size, but

of such purity and radiance that it twinkled like an electric

point in the dark hollow of his hand.

Sherlock Holmes sat up with a whistle. "By Jove, Peterson!" said

he, "this is treasure trove indeed. I suppose you know what you

have got?"

"A diamond, sir? A precious stone. It cuts into glass as though

it were putty."

"It's more than a precious stone. It is the precious stone."

"Not the Countess of Morcar's blue carbuncle!" I ejaculated.

"Precisely so. I ought to know its size and shape, seeing that I

have read the advertisement about it in The Times every day

lately. It is absolutely unique, and its value can only be

conjectured, but the reward offered of 1000 pounds is certainly

not within a twentieth part of the market price."

"A thousand pounds! Great Lord of mercy!" The commissionaire

plumped down into a chair and stared from one to the other of us.

"That is the reward, and I have reason to know that there are

sentimental considerations in the background which would induce

the Countess to part with half her fortune if she could but

recover the gem."

"It was lost, if I remember aright, at the Hotel Cosmopolitan," I

remarked.

"Precisely so, on December 22nd, just five days ago. John Horner,

a plumber, was accused of having abstracted it from the lady's

jewel-case. The evidence against him was so strong that the case

has been referred to the Assizes. I have some account of the

matter here, I believe." He rummaged amid his newspapers,

glancing over the dates, until at last he smoothed one out,

doubled it over, and read the following paragraph:

"Hotel Cosmopolitan Jewel Robbery. John Horner, 26, plumber, was

brought up upon the charge of having upon the 22nd inst.,

abstracted from the jewel-case of the Countess of Morcar the

valuable gem known as the blue carbuncle. James Ryder,

upper-attendant at the hotel, gave his evidence to the effect

that he had shown Horner up to the dressing-room of the Countess

of Morcar upon the day of the robbery in order that he might

solder the second bar of the grate, which was loose. He had

remained with Horner some little time, but had finally been

called away. On returning, he found that Horner had disappeared,

that the bureau had been forced open, and that the small morocco

casket in which, as it afterwards transpired, the Countess was

accustomed to keep her jewel, was lying empty upon the

dressing-table. Ryder instantly gave the alarm, and Horner was

arrested the same evening; but the stone could not be found

either upon his person or in his rooms. Catherine Cusack, maid to

the Countess, deposed to having heard Ryder's cry of dismay on

discovering the robbery, and to having rushed into the room,

where she found matters as described by the last witness.

Inspector Bradstreet, B division, gave evidence as to the arrest

of Horner, who struggled frantically, and protested his innocence

in the strongest terms. Evidence of a previous conviction for

robbery having been given against the prisoner, the magistrate

refused to deal summarily with the offence, but referred it to

the Assizes. Horner, who had shown signs of intense emotion

during the proceedings, fainted away at the conclusion and was

carried out of court."

"Hum! So much for the police-court," said Holmes thoughtfully,

tossing aside the paper. "The question for us now to solve is the

sequence of events leading from a rifled jewel-case at one end to

the crop of a goose in Tottenham Court Road at the other. You

see, Watson, our little deductions have suddenly assumed a much

more important and less innocent aspect. Here is the stone; the

stone came from the goose, and the goose came from Mr. Henry

Baker, the gentleman with the bad hat and all the other

characteristics with which I have bored you. So now we must set

ourselves very seriously to finding this gentleman and

ascertaining what part he has played in this little mystery. To

do this, we must try the simplest means first, and these lie

undoubtedly in an advertisement in all the evening papers. If

this fail, I shall have recourse to other methods."

"What will you say?"

"Give me a pencil and that slip of paper. Now, then: 'Found at

the corner of Goodge Street, a goose and a black felt hat. Mr.

Henry Baker can have the same by applying at 6:30 this evening at

221B, Baker Street.' That is clear and concise."

"Very. But will he see it?"

"Well, he is sure to keep an eye on the papers, since, to a poor

man, the loss was a heavy one. He was clearly so scared by his

mischance in breaking the window and by the approach of Peterson

that he thought of nothing but flight, but since then he must

have bitterly regretted the impulse which caused him to drop his

bird. Then, again, the introduction of his name will cause him to

see it, for everyone who knows him will direct his attention to

it. Here you are, Peterson, run down to the advertising agency

and have this put in the evening papers."

"In which, sir?"

"Oh, in the Globe, Star, Pall Mall, St. James's, Evening News,

Standard, Echo, and any others that occur to you."

"Very well, sir. And this stone?"

"Ah, yes, I shall keep the stone. Thank you. And, I say,

Peterson, just buy a goose on your way back and leave it here

with me, for we must have one to give to this gentleman in place

of the one which your family is now devouring."

When the commissionaire had gone, Holmes took up the stone and

held it against the light. "It's a bonny thing," said he. "Just

see how it glints and sparkles. Of course it is a nucleus and

focus of crime. Every good stone is. They are the devil's pet

baits. In the larger and older jewels every facet may stand for a

bloody deed. This stone is not yet twenty years old. It was found

in the banks of the Amoy River in southern China and is remarkable

in having every characteristic of the carbuncle, save that it is

blue in shade instead of ruby red. In spite of its youth, it has

already a sinister history. There have been two murders, a

vitriol-throwing, a suicide, and several robberies brought about

for the sake of this forty-grain weight of crystallised charcoal.

Who would think that so pretty a toy would be a purveyor to the

gallows and the prison? I'll lock it up in my strong box now and

drop a line to the Countess to say that we have it."

"Do you think that this man Horner is innocent?"

"I cannot tell."

"Well, then, do you imagine that this other one, Henry Baker, had

anything to do with the matter?"

"It is, I think, much more likely that Henry Baker is an

absolutely innocent man, who had no idea that the bird which he

was carrying was of considerably more value than if it were made

of solid gold. That, however, I shall determine by a very simple

test if we have an answer to our advertisement."

"And you can do nothing until then?"

"Nothing."

"In that case I shall continue my professional round. But I shall

come back in the evening at the hour you have mentioned, for I

should like to see the solution of so tangled a business."

"Very glad to see you. I dine at seven. There is a woodcock, I

believe. By the way, in view of recent occurrences, perhaps I

ought to ask Mrs. Hudson to examine its crop."

I had been delayed at a case, and it was a little after half-past

six when I found myself in Baker Street once more. As I

approached the house I saw a tall man in a Scotch bonnet with a

coat which was buttoned up to his chin waiting outside in the

bright semicircle which was thrown from the fanlight. Just as I

arrived the door was opened, and we were shown up together to

Holmes' room.

"Mr. Henry Baker, I believe," said he, rising from his armchair

and greeting his visitor with the easy air of geniality which he

could so readily assume. "Pray take this chair by the fire, Mr.

Baker. It is a cold night, and I observe that your circulation is

more adapted for summer than for winter. Ah, Watson, you have

just come at the right time. Is that your hat, Mr. Baker?"

"Yes, sir, that is undoubtedly my hat."

He was a large man with rounded shoulders, a massive head, and a

broad, intelligent face, sloping down to a pointed beard of

grizzled brown. A touch of red in nose and cheeks, with a slight

tremor of his extended hand, recalled Holmes' surmise as to his

habits. His rusty black frock-coat was buttoned right up in

front, with the collar turned up, and his lank wrists protruded

from his sleeves without a sign of cuff or shirt. He spoke in a

slow staccato fashion, choosing his words with care, and gave the

impression generally of a man of learning and letters who had had

ill-usage at the hands of fortune.

"We have retained these things for some days," said Holmes,

"because we expected to see an advertisement from you giving your

address. I am at a loss to know now why you did not advertise."

Our visitor gave a rather shamefaced laugh. "Shillings have not

been so plentiful with me as they once were," he remarked. "I had

no doubt that the gang of roughs who assaulted me had carried off

both my hat and the bird. I did not care to spend more money in a

hopeless attempt at recovering them."

"Very naturally. By the way, about the bird, we were compelled to

eat it."

"To eat it!" Our visitor half rose from his chair in his

excitement.

"Yes, it would have been of no use to anyone had we not done so.

But I presume that this other goose upon the sideboard, which is

about the same weight and perfectly fresh, will answer your

purpose equally well?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly," answered Mr. Baker with a sigh of

relief.

"Of course, we still have the feathers, legs, crop, and so on of

your own bird, so if you wish--"

The man burst into a hearty laugh. "They might be useful to me as

relics of my adventure," said he, "but beyond that I can hardly

see what use the disjecta membra of my late acquaintance are

going to be to me. No, sir, I think that, with your permission, I

will confine my attentions to the excellent bird which I perceive

upon the sideboard."

Sherlock Holmes glanced sharply across at me with a slight shrug

of his shoulders.

"There is your hat, then, and there your bird," said he. "By the

way, would it bore you to tell me where you got the other one

from? I am somewhat of a fowl fancier, and I have seldom seen a

better grown goose."

"Certainly, sir," said Baker, who had risen and tucked his newly

gained property under his arm. "There are a few of us who

frequent the Alpha Inn, near the Museum--we are to be found in

the Museum itself during the day, you understand. This year our

good host, Windigate by name, instituted a goose club, by which,

on consideration of some few pence every week, we were each to

receive a bird at Christmas. My pence were duly paid, and the

rest is familiar to you. I am much indebted to you, sir, for a

Scotch bonnet is fitted neither to my years nor my gravity." With

a comical pomposity of manner he bowed solemnly to both of us and

strode off upon his way.

"So much for Mr. Henry Baker," said Holmes when he had closed the

door behind him. "It is quite certain that he knows nothing

whatever about the matter. Are you hungry, Watson?"

"Not particularly."

"Then I suggest that we turn our dinner into a supper and follow

up this clue while it is still hot."

"By all means."

It was a bitter night, so we drew on our ulsters and wrapped

cravats about our throats. Outside, the stars were shining coldly

in a cloudless sky, and the breath of the passers-by blew out

into smoke like so many pistol shots. Our footfalls rang out

crisply and loudly as we swung through the doctors' quarter,

Wimpole Street, Harley Street, and so through Wigmore Street into

Oxford Street. In a quarter of an hour we were in Bloomsbury at

the Alpha Inn, which is a small public-house at the corner of one

of the streets which runs down into Holborn. Holmes pushed open

the door of the private bar and ordered two glasses of beer from

the ruddy-faced, white-aproned landlord.

"Your beer should be excellent if it is as good as your geese,"

said he.

"My geese!" The man seemed surprised.

"Yes. I was speaking only half an hour ago to Mr. Henry Baker,

who was a member of your goose club."

"Ah! yes, I see. But you see, sir, them's not our geese."

"Indeed! Whose, then?"

"Well, I got the two dozen from a salesman in Covent Garden."

"Indeed? I know some of them. Which was it?"

"Breckinridge is his name."

"Ah! I don't know him. Well, here's your good health landlord,

and prosperity to your house. Good-night."

"Now for Mr. Breckinridge," he continued, buttoning up his coat

as we came out into the frosty air. "Remember, Watson that though

we have so homely a thing as a goose at one end of this chain, we

have at the other a man who will certainly get seven years' penal

servitude unless we can establish his innocence. It is possible

that our inquiry may but confirm his guilt; but, in any case, we

have a line of investigation which has been missed by the police,

and which a singular chance has placed in our hands. Let us

follow it out to the bitter end. Faces to the south, then, and

quick march!"

We passed across Holborn, down Endell Street, and so through a

zigzag of slums to Covent Garden Market. One of the largest

stalls bore the name of Breckinridge upon it, and the proprietor

a horsey-looking man, with a sharp face and trim side-whiskers was

helping a boy to put up the shutters.

"Good-evening. It's a cold night," said Holmes.

The salesman nodded and shot a questioning glance at my

companion.

"Sold out of geese, I see," continued Holmes, pointing at the

bare slabs of marble.

"Let you have five hundred to-morrow morning."

"That's no good."

"Well, there are some on the stall with the gas-flare."

"Ah, but I was recommended to you."

"Who by?"

"The landlord of the Alpha."

"Oh, yes; I sent him a couple of dozen."

"Fine birds they were, too. Now where did you get them from?"

To my surprise the question provoked a burst of anger from the

salesman.

"Now, then, mister," said he, with his head cocked and his arms

akimbo, "what are you driving at? Let's have it straight, now."

"It is straight enough. I should like to know who sold you the

geese which you supplied to the Alpha."

"Well then, I shan't tell you. So now!"

"Oh, it is a matter of no importance; but I don't know why you

should be so warm over such a trifle."

"Warm! You'd be as warm, maybe, if you were as pestered as I am.

When I pay good money for a good article there should be an end

of the business; but it's 'Where are the geese?' and 'Who did you

sell the geese to?' and 'What will you take for the geese?' One

would think they were the only geese in the world, to hear the

fuss that is made over them."

"Well, I have no connection with any other people who have been

making inquiries," said Holmes carelessly. "If you won't tell us

the bet is off, that is all. But I'm always ready to back my

opinion on a matter of fowls, and I have a fiver on it that the

bird I ate is country bred."

"Well, then, you've lost your fiver, for it's town bred," snapped

the salesman.

"It's nothing of the kind."

"I say it is."

"I don't believe it."

"D'you think you know more about fowls than I, who have handled

them ever since I was a nipper? I tell you, all those birds that

went to the Alpha were town bred."

"You'll never persuade me to believe that."

"Will you bet, then?"

"It's merely taking your money, for I know that I am right. But

I'll have a sovereign on with you, just to teach you not to be

obstinate."

The salesman chuckled grimly. "Bring me the books, Bill," said

he.

The small boy brought round a small thin volume and a great

greasy-backed one, laying them out together beneath the hanging

lamp.

"Now then, Mr. Cocksure," said the salesman, "I thought that I

was out of geese, but before I finish you'll find that there is

still one left in my shop. You see this little book?"

"Well?"

"That's the list of the folk from whom I buy. D'you see? Well,

then, here on this page are the country folk, and the numbers

after their names are where their accounts are in the big ledger.

Now, then! You see this other page in red ink? Well, that is a

list of my town suppliers. Now, look at that third name. Just

read it out to me."

"Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road--249," read Holmes.

"Quite so. Now turn that up in the ledger."

Holmes turned to the page indicated. "Here you are, 'Mrs.

Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road, egg and poultry supplier.'"

"Now, then, what's the last entry?"

"'December 22nd. Twenty-four geese at 7s. 6d.'"

"Quite so. There you are. And underneath?"

"'Sold to Mr. Windigate of the Alpha, at 12s.'"

"What have you to say now?"

Sherlock Holmes looked deeply chagrined. He drew a sovereign from

his pocket and threw it down upon the slab, turning away with the

air of a man whose disgust is too deep for words. A few yards off

he stopped under a lamp-post and laughed in the hearty, noiseless

fashion which was peculiar to him.

"When you see a man with whiskers of that cut and the 'Pink 'un'

protruding out of his pocket, you can always draw him by a bet,"

said he. "I daresay that if I had put 100 pounds down in front of

him, that man would not have given me such complete information

as was drawn from him by the idea that he was doing me on a

wager. Well, Watson, we are, I fancy, nearing the end of our

quest, and the only point which remains to be determined is

whether we should go on to this Mrs. Oakshott to-night, or

whether we should reserve it for to-morrow. It is clear from what

that surly fellow said that there are others besides ourselves

who are anxious about the matter, and I should--"

His remarks were suddenly cut short by a loud hubbub which broke

out from the stall which we had just left. Turning round we saw a

little rat-faced fellow standing in the centre of the circle of

yellow light which was thrown by the swinging lamp, while

Breckinridge, the salesman, framed in the door of his stall, was

shaking his fists fiercely at the cringing figure.

"I've had enough of you and your geese," he shouted. "I wish you

were all at the devil together. If you come pestering me any more

with your silly talk I'll set the dog at you. You bring Mrs.

Oakshott here and I'll answer her, but what have you to do with

it? Did I buy the geese off you?"

"No; but one of them was mine all the same," whined the little

man.

"Well, then, ask Mrs. Oakshott for it."

"She told me to ask you."

"Well, you can ask the King of Proosia, for all I care. I've had

enough of it. Get out of this!" He rushed fiercely forward, and

the inquirer flitted away into the darkness.

"Ha! this may save us a visit to Brixton Road," whispered Holmes.

"Come with me, and we will see what is to be made of this

fellow." Striding through the scattered knots of people who

lounged round the flaring stalls, my companion speedily overtook

the little man and touched him upon the shoulder. He sprang

round, and I could see in the gas-light that every vestige of

colour had been driven from his face.

"Who are you, then? What do you want?" he asked in a quavering

voice.

"You will excuse me," said Holmes blandly, "but I could not help

overhearing the questions which you put to the salesman just now.

I think that I could be of assistance to you."

"You? Who are you? How could you know anything of the matter?"

"My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other

people don't know."

"But you can know nothing of this?"

"Excuse me, I know everything of it. You are endeavouring to

trace some geese which were sold by Mrs. Oakshott, of Brixton

Road, to a salesman named Breckinridge, by him in turn to Mr.

Windigate, of the Alpha, and by him to his club, of which Mr.

Henry Baker is a member."

"Oh, sir, you are the very man whom I have longed to meet," cried

the little fellow with outstretched hands and quivering fingers.

"I can hardly explain to you how interested I am in this matter."

Sherlock Holmes hailed a four-wheeler which was passing. "In that

case we had better discuss it in a cosy room rather than in this

wind-swept market-place," said he. "But pray tell me, before we

go farther, who it is that I have the pleasure of assisting."

The man hesitated for an instant. "My name is John Robinson," he

answered with a sidelong glance.

"No, no; the real name," said Holmes sweetly. "It is always

awkward doing business with an alias."

A flush sprang to the white cheeks of the stranger. "Well then,"

said he, "my real name is James Ryder."

"Precisely so. Head attendant at the Hotel Cosmopolitan. Pray

step into the cab, and I shall soon be able to tell you

everything which you would wish to know."

The little man stood glancing from one to the other of us with

half-frightened, half-hopeful eyes, as one who is not sure

whether he is on the verge of a windfall or of a catastrophe.

Then he stepped into the cab, and in half an hour we were back in

the sitting-room at Baker Street. Nothing had been said during

our drive, but the high, thin breathing of our new companion, and

the claspings and unclaspings of his hands, spoke of the nervous

tension within him.

"Here we are!" said Holmes cheerily as we filed into the room.

"The fire looks very seasonable in this weather. You look cold,

Mr. Ryder. Pray take the basket-chair. I will just put on my

slippers before we settle this little matter of yours. Now, then!

You want to know what became of those geese?"

"Yes, sir."

"Or rather, I fancy, of that goose. It was one bird, I imagine in

which you were interested--white, with a black bar across the

tail."

Ryder quivered with emotion. "Oh, sir," he cried, "can you tell

me where it went to?"

"It came here."

"Here?"

"Yes, and a most remarkable bird it proved. I don't wonder that

you should take an interest in it. It laid an egg after it was

dead--the bonniest, brightest little blue egg that ever was seen.

I have it here in my museum."

Our visitor staggered to his feet and clutched the mantelpiece

with his right hand. Holmes unlocked his strong-box and held up

the blue carbuncle, which shone out like a star, with a cold,

brilliant, many-pointed radiance. Ryder stood glaring with a

drawn face, uncertain whether to claim or to disown it.

"The game's up, Ryder," said Holmes quietly. "Hold up, man, or

you'll be into the fire! Give him an arm back into his chair,

Watson. He's not got blood enough to go in for felony with

impunity. Give him a dash of brandy. So! Now he looks a little

more human. What a shrimp it is, to be sure!"

For a moment he had staggered and nearly fallen, but the brandy

brought a tinge of colour into his cheeks, and he sat staring

with frightened eyes at his accuser.

"I have almost every link in my hands, and all the proofs which I

could possibly need, so there is little which you need tell me.

Still, that little may as well be cleared up to make the case

complete. You had heard, Ryder, of this blue stone of the

Countess of Morcar's?"

"It was Catherine Cusack who told me of it," said he in a

crackling voice.

"I see--her ladyship's waiting-maid. Well, the temptation of

sudden wealth so easily acquired was too much for you, as it has

been for better men before you; but you were not very scrupulous

in the means you used. It seems to me, Ryder, that there is the

making of a very pretty villain in you. You knew that this man

Horner, the plumber, had been concerned in some such matter

before, and that suspicion would rest the more readily upon him.

What did you do, then? You made some small job in my lady's

room--you and your confederate Cusack--and you managed that he

should be the man sent for. Then, when he had left, you rifled

the jewel-case, raised the alarm, and had this unfortunate man

arrested. You then--"

Ryder threw himself down suddenly upon the rug and clutched at my

companion's knees. "For God's sake, have mercy!" he shrieked.

"Think of my father! Of my mother! It would break their hearts. I

never went wrong before! I never will again. I swear it. I'll

swear it on a Bible. Oh, don't bring it into court! For Christ's

sake, don't!"

"Get back into your chair!" said Holmes sternly. "It is very well

to cringe and crawl now, but you thought little enough of this

poor Horner in the dock for a crime of which he knew nothing."

"I will fly, Mr. Holmes. I will leave the country, sir. Then the

charge against him will break down."

"Hum! We will talk about that. And now let us hear a true account

of the next act. How came the stone into the goose, and how came

the goose into the open market? Tell us the truth, for there lies

your only hope of safety."

Ryder passed his tongue over his parched lips. "I will tell you

it just as it happened, sir," said he. "When Horner had been

arrested, it seemed to me that it would be best for me to get

away with the stone at once, for I did not know at what moment

the police might not take it into their heads to search me and my

room. There was no place about the hotel where it would be safe.

I went out, as if on some commission, and I made for my sister's

house. She had married a man named Oakshott, and lived in Brixton

Road, where she fattened fowls for the market. All the way there

every man I met seemed to me to be a policeman or a detective;

and, for all that it was a cold night, the sweat was pouring down

my face before I came to the Brixton Road. My sister asked me

what was the matter, and why I was so pale; but I told her that I

had been upset by the jewel robbery at the hotel. Then I went

into the back yard and smoked a pipe and wondered what it would

be best to do.

"I had a friend once called Maudsley, who went to the bad, and

has just been serving his time in Pentonville. One day he had met

me, and fell into talk about the ways of thieves, and how they

could get rid of what they stole. I knew that he would be true to

me, for I knew one or two things about him; so I made up my mind

to go right on to Kilburn, where he lived, and take him into my

confidence. He would show me how to turn the stone into money.

But how to get to him in safety? I thought of the agonies I had

gone through in coming from the hotel. I might at any moment be

seized and searched, and there would be the stone in my waistcoat

pocket. I was leaning against the wall at the time and looking at

the geese which were waddling about round my feet, and suddenly

an idea came into my head which showed me how I could beat the

best detective that ever lived.

"My sister had told me some weeks before that I might have the

pick of her geese for a Christmas present, and I knew that she

was always as good as her word. I would take my goose now, and in

it I would carry my stone to Kilburn. There was a little shed in

the yard, and behind this I drove one of the birds--a fine big

one, white, with a barred tail. I caught it, and prying its bill

open, I thrust the stone down its throat as far as my finger

could reach. The bird gave a gulp, and I felt the stone pass

along its gullet and down into its crop. But the creature flapped

and struggled, and out came my sister to know what was the

matter. As I turned to speak to her the brute broke loose and

fluttered off among the others.

"'Whatever were you doing with that bird, Jem?' says she.

"'Well,' said I, 'you said you'd give me one for Christmas, and I

was feeling which was the fattest.'

"'Oh,' says she, 'we've set yours aside for you--Jem's bird, we

call it. It's the big white one over yonder. There's twenty-six

of them, which makes one for you, and one for us, and two dozen

for the market.'

"'Thank you, Maggie,' says I; 'but if it is all the same to you,

I'd rather have that one I was handling just now.'

"'The other is a good three pound heavier,' said she, 'and we

fattened it expressly for you.'

"'Never mind. I'll have the other, and I'll take it now,' said I.

"'Oh, just as you like,' said she, a little huffed. 'Which is it

you want, then?'

"'That white one with the barred tail, right in the middle of the

flock.'

"'Oh, very well. Kill it and take it with you.'

"Well, I did what she said, Mr. Holmes, and I carried the bird

all the way to Kilburn. I told my pal what I had done, for he was

a man that it was easy to tell a thing like that to. He laughed

until he choked, and we got a knife and opened the goose. My

heart turned to water, for there was no sign of the stone, and I

knew that some terrible mistake had occurred. I left the bird,

rushed back to my sister's, and hurried into the back yard. There

was not a bird to be seen there.

"'Where are they all, Maggie?' I cried.

"'Gone to the dealer's, Jem.'

"'Which dealer's?'

"'Breckinridge, of Covent Garden.'

"'But was there another with a barred tail?' I asked, 'the same

as the one I chose?'

"'Yes, Jem; there were two barred-tailed ones, and I could never

tell them apart.'

"Well, then, of course I saw it all, and I ran off as hard as my

feet would carry me to this man Breckinridge; but he had sold the

lot at once, and not one word would he tell me as to where they

had gone. You heard him yourselves to-night. Well, he has always

answered me like that. My sister thinks that I am going mad.

Sometimes I think that I am myself. And now--and now I am myself

a branded thief, without ever having touched the wealth for which

I sold my character. God help me! God help me!" He burst into

convulsive sobbing, with his face buried in his hands.

There was a long silence, broken only by his heavy breathing and

by the measured tapping of Sherlock Holmes' finger-tips upon the

edge of the table. Then my friend rose and threw open the door.

"Get out!" said he.

"What, sir! Oh, Heaven bless you!"

"No more words. Get out!"

And no more words were needed. There was a rush, a clatter upon

the stairs, the bang of a door, and the crisp rattle of running

footfalls from the street.

"After all, Watson," said Holmes, reaching up his hand for his

clay pipe, "I am not retained by the police to supply their

deficiencies. If Horner were in danger it would be another thing;

but this fellow will not appear against him, and the case must

collapse. I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just

possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong

again; he is too terribly frightened. Send him to gaol now, and

you make him a gaol-bird for life. Besides, it is the season of

forgiveness. Chance has put in our way a most singular and

whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward. If you

will have the goodness to touch the bell, Doctor, we will begin

another investigation, in which, also a bird will be the chief

feature."

VIII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND

On glancing over my notes of the seventy odd cases in which I

have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend

Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number

merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did

rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of

wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation

which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic.

Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which

presented more singular features than that which was associated

with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran.

The events in question occurred in the early days of my

association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors

in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them

upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the

time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by

the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It

is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I

have reasons to know that there are widespread rumours as to the

death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even

more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April in the year '83 that I woke one morning to

find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my

bed. He was a late riser, as a rule, and as the clock on the

mantelpiece showed me that it was only a quarter-past seven, I

blinked up at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little

resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

"Very sorry to knock you up, Watson," said he, "but it's the

common lot this morning. Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she

retorted upon me, and I on you."

"What is it, then--a fire?"

"No; a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a

considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She

is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander

about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock

sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is

something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it

prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to

follow it from the outset. I thought, at any rate, that I should

call you and give you the chance."

"My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything."

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his

professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid

deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a

logical basis with which he unravelled the problems which were

submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes and was ready in

a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A

lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in

the window, rose as we entered.

"Good-morning, madam," said Holmes cheerily. "My name is Sherlock

Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson,

before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am

glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the

fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot

coffee, for I observe that you are shivering."

"It is not cold which makes me shiver," said the woman in a low

voice, changing her seat as requested.

"What, then?"

"It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror." She raised her veil as

she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable

state of agitation, her face all drawn and grey, with restless

frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features

and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot

with premature grey, and her expression was weary and haggard.

Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick,

all-comprehensive glances.

"You must not fear," said he soothingly, bending forward and

patting her forearm. "We shall soon set matters right, I have no

doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see."

"You know me, then?"

"No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm

of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had

a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached

the station."

The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my

companion.

"There is no mystery, my dear madam," said he, smiling. "The left

arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven

places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a

dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you

sit on the left-hand side of the driver."

"Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct," said

she. "I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at

twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I

can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues.

I have no one to turn to--none, save only one, who cares for me,

and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you,

Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you

helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had

your address. Oh, sir, do you not think that you could help me,

too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness

which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward

you for your services, but in a month or six weeks I shall be

married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you

shall not find me ungrateful."

Holmes turned to his desk and, unlocking it, drew out a small

case-book, which he consulted.

"Farintosh," said he. "Ah yes, I recall the case; it was

concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time,

Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote

the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to

reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty

to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which

suits you best. And now I beg that you will lay before us

everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the

matter."

"Alas!" replied our visitor, "the very horror of my situation

lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions

depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to

another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to

look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it

as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can

read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes. But I have

heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold

wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid

the dangers which encompass me."

"I am all attention, madam."

"My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my stepfather, who

is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in

England, the Roylotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of

Surrey."

Holmes nodded his head. "The name is familiar to me," said he.

"The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the

estates extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north,

and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four

successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition,

and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler in the

days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground,

and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under

a heavy mortgage. The last squire dragged out his existence

there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper; but

his only son, my stepfather, seeing that he must adapt himself to

the new conditions, obtained an advance from a relative, which

enabled him to take a medical degree and went out to Calcutta,

where, by his professional skill and his force of character, he

established a large practice. In a fit of anger, however, caused

by some robberies which had been perpetrated in the house, he

beat his native butler to death and narrowly escaped a capital

sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment and

afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

"When Dr. Roylott was in India he married my mother, Mrs. Stoner,

the young widow of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery.

My sister Julia and I were twins, and we were only two years old

at the time of my mother's re-marriage. She had a considerable

sum of money--not less than 1000 pounds a year--and this she

bequeathed to Dr. Roylott entirely while we resided with him,

with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to

each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return

to England my mother died--she was killed eight years ago in a

railway accident near Crewe. Dr. Roylott then abandoned his

attempts to establish himself in practice in London and took us

to live with him in the old ancestral house at Stoke Moran. The

money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and

there seemed to be no obstacle to our happiness.

"But a terrible change came over our stepfather about this time.

Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our

neighbours, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of

Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in

his house and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious

quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper

approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the

family, and in my stepfather's case it had, I believe, been

intensified by his long residence in the tropics. A series of

disgraceful brawls took place, two of which ended in the

police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village,

and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of

immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger.

"Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a

stream, and it was only by paying over all the money which I

could gather together that I was able to avert another public

exposure. He had no friends at all save the wandering gipsies,

and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few

acres of bramble-covered land which represent the family estate,

and would accept in return the hospitality of their tents,

wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a

passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a

correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon,

which wander freely over his grounds and are feared by the

villagers almost as much as their master.

"You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I

had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with

us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was

but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already

begun to whiten, even as mine has."

"Your sister is dead, then?"

"She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish

to speak to you. You can understand that, living the life which I

have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own

age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother's maiden

sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we

were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this lady's

house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there

a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. My

stepfather learned of the engagement when my sister returned and

offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of

the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event

occurred which has deprived me of my only companion."

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes

closed and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half opened his

lids now and glanced across at his visitor.

"Pray be precise as to details," said he.

"It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful

time is seared into my memory. The manor-house is, as I have

already said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. The

bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms

being in the central block of the buildings. Of these bedrooms

the first is Dr. Roylott's, the second my sister's, and the third

my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open

out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?"

"Perfectly so."

"The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That

fatal night Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early, though we

knew that he had not retired to rest, for my sister was troubled

by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom

to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where

she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. At

eleven o'clock she rose to leave me, but she paused at the door

and looked back.

"'Tell me, Helen,' said she, 'have you ever heard anyone whistle

in the dead of the night?'

"'Never,' said I.

"'I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in

your sleep?'

"'Certainly not. But why?'

"'Because during the last few nights I have always, about three

in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. I am a light sleeper,

and it has awakened me. I cannot tell where it came from--perhaps

from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I thought that I would

just ask you whether you had heard it.'

"'No, I have not. It must be those wretched gipsies in the

plantation.'

"'Very likely. And yet if it were on the lawn, I wonder that you

did not hear it also.'

"'Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.'

"'Well, it is of no great consequence, at any rate.' She smiled

back at me, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her

key turn in the lock."

"Indeed," said Holmes. "Was it your custom always to lock

yourselves in at night?"

"Always."

"And why?"

"I think that I mentioned to you that the doctor kept a cheetah

and a baboon. We had no feeling of security unless our doors were

locked."

"Quite so. Pray proceed with your statement."

"I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending

misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect,

were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two

souls which are so closely allied. It was a wild night. The wind

was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing

against the windows. Suddenly, amid all the hubbub of the gale,

there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. I knew

that it was my sister's voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a

shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door

I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and

a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had

fallen. As I ran down the passage, my sister's door was unlocked,

and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I stared at it

horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By

the light of the corridor-lamp I saw my sister appear at the

opening, her face blanched with terror, her hands groping for

help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a

drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that

moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground.

She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were

dreadfully convulsed. At first I thought that she had not

recognised me, but as I bent over her she suddenly shrieked out

in a voice which I shall never forget, 'Oh, my God! Helen! It was

the band! The speckled band!' There was something else which she

would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the

air in the direction of the doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion

seized her and choked her words. I rushed out, calling loudly for

my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his

dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was

unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat and sent

for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain, for

she slowly sank and died without having recovered her

consciousness. Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister."

"One moment," said Holmes, "are you sure about this whistle and

metallic sound? Could you swear to it?"

"That was what the county coroner asked me at the inquiry. It is

my strong impression that I heard it, and yet, among the crash of

the gale and the creaking of an old house, I may possibly have

been deceived."

"Was your sister dressed?"

"No, she was in her night-dress. In her right hand was found the

charred stump of a match, and in her left a match-box."

"Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when

the alarm took place. That is important. And what conclusions did

the coroner come to?"

"He investigated the case with great care, for Dr. Roylott's

conduct had long been notorious in the county, but he was unable

to find any satisfactory cause of death. My evidence showed that

the door had been fastened upon the inner side, and the windows

were blocked by old-fashioned shutters with broad iron bars,

which were secured every night. The walls were carefully sounded,

and were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was

also thoroughly examined, with the same result. The chimney is

wide, but is barred up by four large staples. It is certain,

therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end.

Besides, there were no marks of any violence upon her."

"How about poison?"

"The doctors examined her for it, but without success."

"What do you think that this unfortunate lady died of, then?"

"It is my belief that she died of pure fear and nervous shock,

though what it was that frightened her I cannot imagine."

"Were there gipsies in the plantation at the time?"

"Yes, there are nearly always some there."

"Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band--a

speckled band?"

"Sometimes I have thought that it was merely the wild talk of

delirium, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of

people, perhaps to these very gipsies in the plantation. I do not

know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear

over their heads might have suggested the strange adjective which

she used."

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.

"These are very deep waters," said he; "pray go on with your

narrative."

"Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until

lately lonelier than ever. A month ago, however, a dear friend,

whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask

my hand in marriage. His name is Armitage--Percy Armitage--the

second son of Mr. Armitage, of Crane Water, near Reading. My

stepfather has offered no opposition to the match, and we are to

be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs

were started in the west wing of the building, and my bedroom

wall has been pierced, so that I have had to move into the

chamber in which my sister died, and to sleep in the very bed in

which she slept. Imagine, then, my thrill of terror when last

night, as I lay awake, thinking over her terrible fate, I

suddenly heard in the silence of the night the low whistle which

had been the herald of her own death. I sprang up and lit the

lamp, but nothing was to be seen in the room. I was too shaken to

go to bed again, however, so I dressed, and as soon as it was

daylight I slipped down, got a dog-cart at the Crown Inn, which

is opposite, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come on

this morning with the one object of seeing you and asking your

advice."

"You have done wisely," said my friend. "But have you told me

all?"

"Yes, all."

"Miss Roylott, you have not. You are screening your stepfather."

"Why, what do you mean?"

For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which

fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor's knee. Five little

livid spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed

upon the white wrist.

"You have been cruelly used," said Holmes.

The lady coloured deeply and covered over her injured wrist. "He

is a hard man," she said, "and perhaps he hardly knows his own

strength."

There was a long silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin

upon his hands and stared into the crackling fire.

"This is a very deep business," he said at last. "There are a

thousand details which I should desire to know before I decide

upon our course of action. Yet we have not a moment to lose. If

we were to come to Stoke Moran to-day, would it be possible for

us to see over these rooms without the knowledge of your

stepfather?"

"As it happens, he spoke of coming into town to-day upon some

most important business. It is probable that he will be away all

day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. We have a

housekeeper now, but she is old and foolish, and I could easily

get her out of the way."

"Excellent. You are not averse to this trip, Watson?"

"By no means."

"Then we shall both come. What are you going to do yourself?"

"I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am

in town. But I shall return by the twelve o'clock train, so as to

be there in time for your coming."

"And you may expect us early in the afternoon. I have myself some

small business matters to attend to. Will you not wait and

breakfast?"

"No, I must go. My heart is lightened already since I have

confided my trouble to you. I shall look forward to seeing you

again this afternoon." She dropped her thick black veil over her

face and glided from the room.

"And what do you think of it all, Watson?" asked Sherlock Holmes,

leaning back in his chair.

"It seems to me to be a most dark and sinister business."

"Dark enough and sinister enough."

"Yet if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls

are sound, and that the door, window, and chimney are impassable,

then her sister must have been undoubtedly alone when she met her

mysterious end."

"What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the

very peculiar words of the dying woman?"

"I cannot think."

"When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the presence of

a band of gipsies who are on intimate terms with this old doctor,

the fact that we have every reason to believe that the doctor has

an interest in preventing his stepdaughter's marriage, the dying

allusion to a band, and, finally, the fact that Miss Helen Stoner

heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of

those metal bars that secured the shutters falling back into its

place, I think that there is good ground to think that the

mystery may be cleared along those lines."

"But what, then, did the gipsies do?"

"I cannot imagine."

"I see many objections to any such theory."

"And so do I. It is precisely for that reason that we are going

to Stoke Moran this day. I want to see whether the objections are

fatal, or if they may be explained away. But what in the name of

the devil!"

The ejaculation had been drawn from my companion by the fact that

our door had been suddenly dashed open, and that a huge man had

framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar

mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a

black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters,

with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his

hat actually brushed the cross bar of the doorway, and his

breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face,

seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and

marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other

of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin,

fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old

bird of prey.

"Which of you is Holmes?" asked this apparition.

"My name, sir; but you have the advantage of me," said my

companion quietly.

"I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran."

"Indeed, Doctor," said Holmes blandly. "Pray take a seat."

"I will do nothing of the kind. My stepdaughter has been here. I

have traced her. What has she been saying to you?"

"It is a little cold for the time of the year," said Holmes.

"What has she been saying to you?" screamed the old man

furiously.

"But I have heard that the crocuses promise well," continued my

companion imperturbably.

"Ha! You put me off, do you?" said our new visitor, taking a step

forward and shaking his hunting-crop. "I know you, you scoundrel!

I have heard of you before. You are Holmes, the meddler."

My friend smiled.

"Holmes, the busybody!"

His smile broadened.

"Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!"

Holmes chuckled heartily. "Your conversation is most

entertaining," said he. "When you go out close the door, for

there is a decided draught."

"I will go when I have said my say. Don't you dare to meddle with

my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here. I traced her!

I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here." He stepped

swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with

his huge brown hands.

"See that you keep yourself out of my grip," he snarled, and

hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace he strode out of the

room.

"He seems a very amiable person," said Holmes, laughing. "I am

not quite so bulky, but if he had remained I might have shown him

that my grip was not much more feeble than his own." As he spoke

he picked up the steel poker and, with a sudden effort,

straightened it out again.

"Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official

detective force! This incident gives zest to our investigation,

however, and I only trust that our little friend will not suffer

from her imprudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now,

Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I shall walk

down to Doctors' Commons, where I hope to get some data which may

help us in this matter."

It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his

excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled

over with notes and figures.

"I have seen the will of the deceased wife," said he. "To

determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the

present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The

total income, which at the time of the wife's death was little

short of 1100 pounds, is now, through the fall in agricultural

prices, not more than 750 pounds. Each daughter can claim an

income of 250 pounds, in case of marriage. It is evident,

therefore, that if both girls had married, this beauty would have

had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to

a very serious extent. My morning's work has not been wasted,

since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for

standing in the way of anything of the sort. And now, Watson,

this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is

aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs; so if you

are ready, we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be

very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your

pocket. An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen

who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a tooth-brush

are, I think, all that we need."

At Waterloo we were fortunate in catching a train for

Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn and drove

for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. It was a

perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the

heavens. The trees and wayside hedges were just throwing out

their first green shoots, and the air was full of the pleasant

smell of the moist earth. To me at least there was a strange

contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this

sinister quest upon which we were engaged. My companion sat in

the front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over

his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the

deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the

shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

"Look there!" said he.

A heavily timbered park stretched up in a gentle slope,

thickening into a grove at the highest point. From amid the

branches there jutted out the grey gables and high roof-tree of a

very old mansion.

"Stoke Moran?" said he.

"Yes, sir, that be the house of Dr. Grimesby Roylott," remarked

the driver.

"There is some building going on there," said Holmes; "that is

where we are going."

"There's the village," said the driver, pointing to a cluster of

roofs some distance to the left; "but if you want to get to the

house, you'll find it shorter to get over this stile, and so by

the foot-path over the fields. There it is, where the lady is

walking."

"And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner," observed Holmes, shading

his eyes. "Yes, I think we had better do as you suggest."

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way

to Leatherhead.

"I thought it as well," said Holmes as we climbed the stile,

"that this fellow should think we had come here as architects, or

on some definite business. It may stop his gossip.

Good-afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as good as

our word."

Our client of the morning had hurried forward to meet us with a

face which spoke her joy. "I have been waiting so eagerly for

you," she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. "All has turned

out splendidly. Dr. Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely

that he will be back before evening."

"We have had the pleasure of making the doctor's acquaintance,"

said Holmes, and in a few words he sketched out what had

occurred. Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "he has followed me, then."

"So it appears."

"He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him. What

will he say when he returns?"

"He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone

more cunning than himself upon his track. You must lock yourself

up from him to-night. If he is violent, we shall take you away to

your aunt's at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our

time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to

examine."

The building was of grey, lichen-blotched stone, with a high

central portion and two curving wings, like the claws of a crab,

thrown out on each side. In one of these wings the windows were

broken and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly

caved in, a picture of ruin. The central portion was in little

better repair, but the right-hand block was comparatively modern,

and the blinds in the windows, with the blue smoke curling up

from the chimneys, showed that this was where the family resided.

Some scaffolding had been erected against the end wall, and the

stone-work had been broken into, but there were no signs of any

workmen at the moment of our visit. Holmes walked slowly up and

down the ill-trimmed lawn and examined with deep attention the

outsides of the windows.

"This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep,

the centre one to your sister's, and the one next to the main

building to Dr. Roylott's chamber?"

"Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one."

"Pending the alterations, as I understand. By the way, there does

not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end

wall."

"There were none. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from

my room."

"Ah! that is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow

wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. There

are windows in it, of course?"

"Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for anyone to pass

through."

"As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were

unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness

to go into your room and bar your shutters?"

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination

through the open window, endeavoured in every way to force the

shutter open, but without success. There was no slit through

which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then with his

lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built

firmly into the massive masonry. "Hum!" said he, scratching his

chin in some perplexity, "my theory certainly presents some

difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were

bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon

the matter."

A small side door led into the whitewashed corridor from which

the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third

chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss

Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met with her

fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a

gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country-houses. A

brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow

white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the

left-hand side of the window. These articles, with two small

wicker-work chairs, made up all the furniture in the room save

for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre. The boards round and

the panelling of the walls were of brown, worm-eaten oak, so old

and discoloured that it may have dated from the original building

of the house. Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat

silent, while his eyes travelled round and round and up and down,

taking in every detail of the apartment.

"Where does that bell communicate with?" he asked at last

pointing to a thick bell-rope which hung down beside the bed, the

tassel actually lying upon the pillow.

"It goes to the housekeeper's room."

"It looks newer than the other things?"

"Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago."

"Your sister asked for it, I suppose?"

"No, I never heard of her using it. We used always to get what we

wanted for ourselves."

"Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there.

You will excuse me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to

this floor." He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in

his hand and crawled swiftly backward and forward, examining

minutely the cracks between the boards. Then he did the same with

the wood-work with which the chamber was panelled. Finally he

walked over to the bed and spent some time in staring at it and

in running his eye up and down the wall. Finally he took the

bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

"Why, it's a dummy," said he.

"Won't it ring?"

"No, it is not even attached to a wire. This is very interesting.

You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where

the little opening for the ventilator is."

"How very absurd! I never noticed that before."

"Very strange!" muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. "There are

one or two very singular points about this room. For example,

what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator into another

room, when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated

with the outside air!"

"That is also quite modern," said the lady.

"Done about the same time as the bell-rope?" remarked Holmes.

"Yes, there were several little changes carried out about that

time."

"They seem to have been of a most interesting character--dummy

bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your

permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into

the inner apartment."

Dr. Grimesby Roylott's chamber was larger than that of his

step-daughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a small

wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an

armchair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a

round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things

which met the eye. Holmes walked slowly round and examined each

and all of them with the keenest interest.

"What's in here?" he asked, tapping the safe.

"My stepfather's business papers."

"Oh! you have seen inside, then?"

"Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was full of

papers."

"There isn't a cat in it, for example?"

"No. What a strange idea!"

"Well, look at this!" He took up a small saucer of milk which

stood on the top of it.

"No; we don't keep a cat. But there is a cheetah and a baboon."

"Ah, yes, of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a

saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I

daresay. There is one point which I should wish to determine." He

squatted down in front of the wooden chair and examined the seat

of it with the greatest attention.

"Thank you. That is quite settled," said he, rising and putting

his lens in his pocket. "Hullo! Here is something interesting!"

The object which had caught his eye was a small dog lash hung on

one corner of the bed. The lash, however, was curled upon itself

and tied so as to make a loop of whipcord.

"What do you make of that, Watson?"

"It's a common enough lash. But I don't know why it should be

tied."

"That is not quite so common, is it? Ah, me! it's a wicked world,

and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst

of all. I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and

with your permission we shall walk out upon the lawn."

I had never seen my friend's face so grim or his brow so dark as

it was when we turned from the scene of this investigation. We

had walked several times up and down the lawn, neither Miss

Stoner nor myself liking to break in upon his thoughts before he

roused himself from his reverie.

"It is very essential, Miss Stoner," said he, "that you should

absolutely follow my advice in every respect."

"I shall most certainly do so."

"The matter is too serious for any hesitation. Your life may

depend upon your compliance."

"I assure you that I am in your hands."

"In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in

your room."

Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.

"Yes, it must be so. Let me explain. I believe that that is the

village inn over there?"

"Yes, that is the Crown."

"Very good. Your windows would be visible from there?"

"Certainly."

"You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a

headache, when your stepfather comes back. Then when you hear him

retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window,

undo the hasp, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then

withdraw quietly with everything which you are likely to want

into the room which you used to occupy. I have no doubt that, in

spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night."

"Oh, yes, easily."

"The rest you will leave in our hands."

"But what will you do?"

"We shall spend the night in your room, and we shall investigate

the cause of this noise which has disturbed you."

"I believe, Mr. Holmes, that you have already made up your mind,"

said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my companion's sleeve.

"Perhaps I have."

"Then, for pity's sake, tell me what was the cause of my sister's

death."

"I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak."

"You can at least tell me whether my own thought is correct, and

if she died from some sudden fright."

"No, I do not think so. I think that there was probably some more

tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you for if

Dr. Roylott returned and saw us our journey would be in vain.

Good-bye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you,

you may rest assured that we shall soon drive away the dangers

that threaten you."

Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and

sitting-room at the Crown Inn. They were on the upper floor, and

from our window we could command a view of the avenue gate, and

of the inhabited wing of Stoke Moran Manor House. At dusk we saw

Dr. Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form looming up beside

the little figure of the lad who drove him. The boy had some

slight difficulty in undoing the heavy iron gates, and we heard

the hoarse roar of the doctor's voice and saw the fury with which

he shook his clinched fists at him. The trap drove on, and a few

minutes later we saw a sudden light spring up among the trees as

the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.

"Do you know, Watson," said Holmes as we sat together in the

gathering darkness, "I have really some scruples as to taking you

to-night. There is a distinct element of danger."

"Can I be of assistance?"

"Your presence might be invaluable."

"Then I shall certainly come."

"It is very kind of you."

"You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms

than was visible to me."

"No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine

that you saw all that I did."

"I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose

that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine."

"You saw the ventilator, too?"

"Yes, but I do not think that it is such a very unusual thing to

have a small opening between two rooms. It was so small that a

rat could hardly pass through."

"I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to

Stoke Moran."

"My dear Holmes!"

"Oh, yes, I did. You remember in her statement she said that her

sister could smell Dr. Roylott's cigar. Now, of course that

suggested at once that there must be a communication between the

two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been

remarked upon at the coroner's inquiry. I deduced a ventilator."

"But what harm can there be in that?"

"Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A

ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the

bed dies. Does not that strike you?"

"I cannot as yet see any connection."

"Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?"

"No."

"It was clamped to the floor. Did you ever see a bed fastened

like that before?"

"I cannot say that I have."

"The lady could not move her bed. It must always be in the same

relative position to the ventilator and to the rope--or so we may

call it, since it was clearly never meant for a bell-pull."

"Holmes," I cried, "I seem to see dimly what you are hinting at.

We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible

crime."

"Subtle enough and horrible enough. When a doctor does go wrong

he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge.

Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession.

This man strikes even deeper, but I think, Watson, that we shall

be able to strike deeper still. But we shall have horrors enough

before the night is over; for goodness' sake let us have a quiet

pipe and turn our minds for a few hours to something more

cheerful."

About nine o'clock the light among the trees was extinguished,

and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. Two hours

passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of

eleven, a single bright light shone out right in front of us.

"That is our signal," said Holmes, springing to his feet; "it

comes from the middle window."

As we passed out he exchanged a few words with the landlord,

explaining that we were going on a late visit to an acquaintance,

and that it was possible that we might spend the night there. A

moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing

in our faces, and one yellow light twinkling in front of us

through the gloom to guide us on our sombre errand.

There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for

unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. Making our way

among the trees, we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about

to enter through the window when out from a clump of laurel

bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted

child, who threw itself upon the grass with writhing limbs and

then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

"My God!" I whispered; "did you see it?"

Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. His hand closed like

a vice upon my wrist in his agitation. Then he broke into a low

laugh and put his lips to my ear.

"It is a nice household," he murmured. "That is the baboon."

I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. There

was a cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders

at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when,

after following Holmes' example and slipping off my shoes, I

found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed

the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes

round the room. All was as we had seen it in the daytime. Then

creeping up to me and making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered

into my ear again so gently that it was all that I could do to

distinguish the words:

"The least sound would be fatal to our plans."

I nodded to show that I had heard.

"We must sit without light. He would see it through the

ventilator."

I nodded again.

"Do not go asleep; your very life may depend upon it. Have your

pistol ready in case we should need it. I will sit on the side of

the bed, and you in that chair."

I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table.

Holmes had brought up a long thin cane, and this he placed upon

the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of matches and the

stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left

in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I could not hear a

sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my

companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet of me, in the same

state of nervous tension in which I was myself. The shutters cut

off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness.

From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at

our very window a long drawn catlike whine, which told us that

the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away we could hear the

deep tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of

an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve struck, and

one and two and three, and still we sat waiting silently for

whatever might befall.

Suddenly there was the momentary gleam of a light up in the

direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was

succeeded by a strong smell of burning oil and heated metal.

Someone in the next room had lit a dark-lantern. I heard a gentle

sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the

smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears.

Then suddenly another sound became audible--a very gentle,

soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping

continually from a kettle. The instant that we heard it, Holmes

sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with

his cane at the bell-pull.

"You see it, Watson?" he yelled. "You see it?"

But I saw nothing. At the moment when Holmes struck the light I

heard a low, clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my

weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which

my friend lashed so savagely. I could, however, see that his face

was deadly pale and filled with horror and loathing. He had

ceased to strike and was gazing up at the ventilator when

suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most

horrible cry to which I have ever listened. It swelled up louder

and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled

in the one dreadful shriek. They say that away down in the

village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the

sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I

stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes of it

had died away into the silence from which it rose.

"What can it mean?" I gasped.

"It means that it is all over," Holmes answered. "And perhaps,

after all, it is for the best. Take your pistol, and we will

enter Dr. Roylott's room."

With a grave face he lit the lamp and led the way down the

corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply

from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his

heels, with the cocked pistol in my hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the table stood a

dark-lantern with the shutter half open, throwing a brilliant

beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar.

Beside this table, on the wooden chair, sat Dr. Grimesby Roylott

clad in a long grey dressing-gown, his bare ankles protruding

beneath, and his feet thrust into red heelless Turkish slippers.

Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we

had noticed during the day. His chin was cocked upward and his

eyes were fixed in a dreadful, rigid stare at the corner of the

ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with

brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his

head. As we entered he made neither sound nor motion.

"The band! the speckled band!" whispered Holmes.

I took a step forward. In an instant his strange headgear began

to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat

diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent.

"It is a swamp adder!" cried Holmes; "the deadliest snake in

India. He has died within ten seconds of being bitten. Violence

does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls

into the pit which he digs for another. Let us thrust this

creature back into its den, and we can then remove Miss Stoner to

some place of shelter and let the county police know what has

happened."

As he spoke he drew the dog-whip swiftly from the dead man's lap,

and throwing the noose round the reptile's neck he drew it from

its horrid perch and, carrying it at arm's length, threw it into

the iron safe, which he closed upon it.

Such are the true facts of the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of

Stoke Moran. It is not necessary that I should prolong a

narrative which has already run to too great a length by telling

how we broke the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed

her by the morning train to the care of her good aunt at Harrow,

of how the slow process of official inquiry came to the

conclusion that the doctor met his fate while indiscreetly

playing with a dangerous pet. The little which I had yet to learn

of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back

next day.

"I had," said he, "come to an entirely erroneous conclusion which

shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from

insufficient data. The presence of the gipsies, and the use of

the word 'band,' which was used by the poor girl, no doubt, to

explain the appearance which she had caught a hurried glimpse of

by the light of her match, were sufficient to put me upon an

entirely wrong scent. I can only claim the merit that I instantly

reconsidered my position when, however, it became clear to me

that whatever danger threatened an occupant of the room could not

come either from the window or the door. My attention was

speedily drawn, as I have already remarked to you, to this

ventilator, and to the bell-rope which hung down to the bed. The

discovery that this was a dummy, and that the bed was clamped to

the floor, instantly gave rise to the suspicion that the rope was

there as a bridge for something passing through the hole and

coming to the bed. The idea of a snake instantly occurred to me,

and when I coupled it with my knowledge that the doctor was

furnished with a supply of creatures from India, I felt that I

was probably on the right track. The idea of using a form of

poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical

test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless

man who had had an Eastern training. The rapidity with which such

a poison would take effect would also, from his point of view, be

an advantage. It would be a sharp-eyed coroner, indeed, who could

distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where

the poison fangs had done their work. Then I thought of the

whistle. Of course he must recall the snake before the morning

light revealed it to the victim. He had trained it, probably by

the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned.

He would put it through this ventilator at the hour that he

thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the

rope and land on the bed. It might or might not bite the

occupant, perhaps she might escape every night for a week, but

sooner or later she must fall a victim.

"I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his

room. An inspection of his chair showed me that he had been in

the habit of standing on it, which of course would be necessary

in order that he should reach the ventilator. The sight of the

safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to

finally dispel any doubts which may have remained. The metallic

clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her stepfather

hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant.

Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took in

order to put the matter to the proof. I heard the creature hiss

as I have no doubt that you did also, and I instantly lit the

light and attacked it."

"With the result of driving it through the ventilator."

"And also with the result of causing it to turn upon its master

at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home and

roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person

it saw. In this way I am no doubt indirectly responsible for Dr.

Grimesby Roylott's death, and I cannot say that it is likely to

weigh very heavily upon my conscience."

IX. THE ADVENTURE OF THE ENGINEER'S THUMB

Of all the problems which have been submitted to my friend, Mr.

Sherlock Holmes, for solution during the years of our intimacy,

there were only two which I was the means of introducing to his

notice--that of Mr. Hatherley's thumb, and that of Colonel

Warburton's madness. Of these the latter may have afforded a

finer field for an acute and original observer, but the other was

so strange in its inception and so dramatic in its details that

it may be the more worthy of being placed upon record, even if it

gave my friend fewer openings for those deductive methods of

reasoning by which he achieved such remarkable results. The story

has, I believe, been told more than once in the newspapers, but,

like all such narratives, its effect is much less striking when

set forth en bloc in a single half-column of print than when the

facts slowly evolve before your own eyes, and the mystery clears

gradually away as each new discovery furnishes a step which leads

on to the complete truth. At the time the circumstances made a

deep impression upon me, and the lapse of two years has hardly

served to weaken the effect.

It was in the summer of '89, not long after my marriage, that the

events occurred which I am now about to summarise. I had returned

to civil practice and had finally abandoned Holmes in his Baker

Street rooms, although I continually visited him and occasionally

even persuaded him to forgo his Bohemian habits so far as to come

and visit us. My practice had steadily increased, and as I

happened to live at no very great distance from Paddington

Station, I got a few patients from among the officials. One of

these, whom I had cured of a painful and lingering disease, was

never weary of advertising my virtues and of endeavouring to send

me on every sufferer over whom he might have any influence.

One morning, at a little before seven o'clock, I was awakened by

the maid tapping at the door to announce that two men had come

from Paddington and were waiting in the consulting-room. I

dressed hurriedly, for I knew by experience that railway cases

were seldom trivial, and hastened downstairs. As I descended, my

old ally, the guard, came out of the room and closed the door

tightly behind him.

"I've got him here," he whispered, jerking his thumb over his

shoulder; "he's all right."

"What is it, then?" I asked, for his manner suggested that it was

some strange creature which he had caged up in my room.

"It's a new patient," he whispered. "I thought I'd bring him

round myself; then he couldn't slip away. There he is, all safe

and sound. I must go now, Doctor; I have my dooties, just the

same as you." And off he went, this trusty tout, without even

giving me time to thank him.

I entered my consulting-room and found a gentleman seated by the

table. He was quietly dressed in a suit of heather tweed with a

soft cloth cap which he had laid down upon my books. Round one of

his hands he had a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all

over with bloodstains. He was young, not more than

five-and-twenty, I should say, with a strong, masculine face; but

he was exceedingly pale and gave me the impression of a man who

was suffering from some strong agitation, which it took all his

strength of mind to control.

"I am sorry to knock you up so early, Doctor," said he, "but I

have had a very serious accident during the night. I came in by

train this morning, and on inquiring at Paddington as to where I

might find a doctor, a worthy fellow very kindly escorted me

here. I gave the maid a card, but I see that she has left it upon

the side-table."

I took it up and glanced at it. "Mr. Victor Hatherley, hydraulic

engineer, 16A, Victoria Street (3rd floor)." That was the name,

style, and abode of my morning visitor. "I regret that I have

kept you waiting," said I, sitting down in my library-chair. "You

are fresh from a night journey, I understand, which is in itself

a monotonous occupation."

"Oh, my night could not be called monotonous," said he, and

laughed. He laughed very heartily, with a high, ringing note,

leaning back in his chair and shaking his sides. All my medical

instincts rose up against that laugh.

"Stop it!" I cried; "pull yourself together!" and I poured out

some water from a caraffe.

It was useless, however. He was off in one of those hysterical

outbursts which come upon a strong nature when some great crisis

is over and gone. Presently he came to himself once more, very

weary and pale-looking.

"I have been making a fool of myself," he gasped.

"Not at all. Drink this." I dashed some brandy into the water,

and the colour began to come back to his bloodless cheeks.

"That's better!" said he. "And now, Doctor, perhaps you would

kindly attend to my thumb, or rather to the place where my thumb

used to be."

He unwound the handkerchief and held out his hand. It gave even

my hardened nerves a shudder to look at it. There were four

protruding fingers and a horrid red, spongy surface where the

thumb should have been. It had been hacked or torn right out from

the roots.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "this is a terrible injury. It must have

bled considerably."

"Yes, it did. I fainted when it was done, and I think that I must

have been senseless for a long time. When I came to I found that

it was still bleeding, so I tied one end of my handkerchief very

tightly round the wrist and braced it up with a twig."

"Excellent! You should have been a surgeon."

"It is a question of hydraulics, you see, and came within my own

province."

"This has been done," said I, examining the wound, "by a very

heavy and sharp instrument."

"A thing like a cleaver," said he.

"An accident, I presume?"

"By no means."

"What! a murderous attack?"

"Very murderous indeed."

"You horrify me."

I sponged the wound, cleaned it, dressed it, and finally covered

it over with cotton wadding and carbolised bandages. He lay back

without wincing, though he bit his lip from time to time.

"How is that?" I asked when I had finished.

"Capital! Between your brandy and your bandage, I feel a new man.

I was very weak, but I have had a good deal to go through."

"Perhaps you had better not speak of the matter. It is evidently

trying to your nerves."

"Oh, no, not now. I shall have to tell my tale to the police;

but, between ourselves, if it were not for the convincing

evidence of this wound of mine, I should be surprised if they

believed my statement, for it is a very extraordinary one, and I

have not much in the way of proof with which to back it up; and,

even if they believe me, the clues which I can give them are so

vague that it is a question whether justice will be done."

"Ha!" cried I, "if it is anything in the nature of a problem

which you desire to see solved, I should strongly recommend you

to come to my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, before you go to the

official police."

"Oh, I have heard of that fellow," answered my visitor, "and I

should be very glad if he would take the matter up, though of

course I must use the official police as well. Would you give me

an introduction to him?"

"I'll do better. I'll take you round to him myself."

"I should be immensely obliged to you."

"We'll call a cab and go together. We shall just be in time to

have a little breakfast with him. Do you feel equal to it?"

"Yes; I shall not feel easy until I have told my story."

"Then my servant will call a cab, and I shall be with you in an

instant." I rushed upstairs, explained the matter shortly to my

wife, and in five minutes was inside a hansom, driving with my

new acquaintance to Baker Street.

Sherlock Holmes was, as I expected, lounging about his

sitting-room in his dressing-gown, reading the agony column of The

Times and smoking his before-breakfast pipe, which was composed

of all the plugs and dottles left from his smokes of the day

before, all carefully dried and collected on the corner of the

mantelpiece. He received us in his quietly genial fashion,

ordered fresh rashers and eggs, and joined us in a hearty meal.

When it was concluded he settled our new acquaintance upon the

sofa, placed a pillow beneath his head, and laid a glass of

brandy and water within his reach.

"It is easy to see that your experience has been no common one,

Mr. Hatherley," said he. "Pray, lie down there and make yourself

absolutely at home. Tell us what you can, but stop when you are

tired and keep up your strength with a little stimulant."

"Thank you," said my patient, "but I have felt another man since

the doctor bandaged me, and I think that your breakfast has

completed the cure. I shall take up as little of your valuable

time as possible, so I shall start at once upon my peculiar

experiences."

Holmes sat in his big armchair with the weary, heavy-lidded

expression which veiled his keen and eager nature, while I sat

opposite to him, and we listened in silence to the strange story

which our visitor detailed to us.

"You must know," said he, "that I am an orphan and a bachelor,

residing alone in lodgings in London. By profession I am a

hydraulic engineer, and I have had considerable experience of my

work during the seven years that I was apprenticed to Venner &

Matheson, the well-known firm, of Greenwich. Two years ago,

having served my time, and having also come into a fair sum of

money through my poor father's death, I determined to start in

business for myself and took professional chambers in Victoria

Street.

"I suppose that everyone finds his first independent start in

business a dreary experience. To me it has been exceptionally so.

During two years I have had three consultations and one small

job, and that is absolutely all that my profession has brought

me. My gross takings amount to 27 pounds 10s. Every day, from

nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, I waited in my

little den, until at last my heart began to sink, and I came to

believe that I should never have any practice at all.

"Yesterday, however, just as I was thinking of leaving the

office, my clerk entered to say there was a gentleman waiting who

wished to see me upon business. He brought up a card, too, with

the name of 'Colonel Lysander Stark' engraved upon it. Close at

his heels came the colonel himself, a man rather over the middle

size, but of an exceeding thinness. I do not think that I have

ever seen so thin a man. His whole face sharpened away into nose

and chin, and the skin of his cheeks was drawn quite tense over

his outstanding bones. Yet this emaciation seemed to be his

natural habit, and due to no disease, for his eye was bright, his

step brisk, and his bearing assured. He was plainly but neatly

dressed, and his age, I should judge, would be nearer forty than

thirty.

"'Mr. Hatherley?' said he, with something of a German accent.

'You have been recommended to me, Mr. Hatherley, as being a man

who is not only proficient in his profession but is also discreet

and capable of preserving a secret.'

"I bowed, feeling as flattered as any young man would at such an

address. 'May I ask who it was who gave me so good a character?'

"'Well, perhaps it is better that I should not tell you that just

at this moment. I have it from the same source that you are both

an orphan and a bachelor and are residing alone in London.'

"'That is quite correct,' I answered; 'but you will excuse me if

I say that I cannot see how all this bears upon my professional

qualifications. I understand that it was on a professional matter

that you wished to speak to me?'

"'Undoubtedly so. But you will find that all I say is really to

the point. I have a professional commission for you, but absolute

secrecy is quite essential--absolute secrecy, you understand, and

of course we may expect that more from a man who is alone than

from one who lives in the bosom of his family.'

"'If I promise to keep a secret,' said I, 'you may absolutely

depend upon my doing so.'

"He looked very hard at me as I spoke, and it seemed to me that I

had never seen so suspicious and questioning an eye.

"'Do you promise, then?' said he at last.

"'Yes, I promise.'

"'Absolute and complete silence before, during, and after? No

reference to the matter at all, either in word or writing?'

"'I have already given you my word.'

"'Very good.' He suddenly sprang up, and darting like lightning

across the room he flung open the door. The passage outside was

empty.

"'That's all right,' said he, coming back. 'I know that clerks are

sometimes curious as to their master's affairs. Now we can talk

in safety.' He drew up his chair very close to mine and began to

stare at me again with the same questioning and thoughtful look.

"A feeling of repulsion, and of something akin to fear had begun

to rise within me at the strange antics of this fleshless man.

Even my dread of losing a client could not restrain me from

showing my impatience.

"'I beg that you will state your business, sir,' said I; 'my time

is of value.' Heaven forgive me for that last sentence, but the

words came to my lips.

"'How would fifty guineas for a night's work suit you?' he asked.

"'Most admirably.'

"'I say a night's work, but an hour's would be nearer the mark. I

simply want your opinion about a hydraulic stamping machine which

has got out of gear. If you show us what is wrong we shall soon

set it right ourselves. What do you think of such a commission as

that?'

"'The work appears to be light and the pay munificent.'

"'Precisely so. We shall want you to come to-night by the last

train.'

"'Where to?'

"'To Eyford, in Berkshire. It is a little place near the borders

of Oxfordshire, and within seven miles of Reading. There is a

train from Paddington which would bring you there at about

11:15.'

"'Very good.'

"'I shall come down in a carriage to meet you.'

"'There is a drive, then?'

"'Yes, our little place is quite out in the country. It is a good

seven miles from Eyford Station.'

"'Then we can hardly get there before midnight. I suppose there

would be no chance of a train back. I should be compelled to stop

the night.'

"'Yes, we could easily give you a shake-down.'

"'That is very awkward. Could I not come at some more convenient

hour?'

"'We have judged it best that you should come late. It is to

recompense you for any inconvenience that we are paying to you, a

young and unknown man, a fee which would buy an opinion from the

very heads of your profession. Still, of course, if you would

like to draw out of the business, there is plenty of time to do

so.'

"I thought of the fifty guineas, and of how very useful they

would be to me. 'Not at all,' said I, 'I shall be very happy to

accommodate myself to your wishes. I should like, however, to

understand a little more clearly what it is that you wish me to

do.'

"'Quite so. It is very natural that the pledge of secrecy which

we have exacted from you should have aroused your curiosity. I

have no wish to commit you to anything without your having it all

laid before you. I suppose that we are absolutely safe from

eavesdroppers?'

"'Entirely.'

"'Then the matter stands thus. You are probably aware that

fuller's-earth is a valuable product, and that it is only found

in one or two places in England?'

"'I have heard so.'

"'Some little time ago I bought a small place--a very small

place--within ten miles of Reading. I was fortunate enough to

discover that there was a deposit of fuller's-earth in one of my

fields. On examining it, however, I found that this deposit was a

comparatively small one, and that it formed a link between two

very much larger ones upon the right and left--both of them,

however, in the grounds of my neighbours. These good people were

absolutely ignorant that their land contained that which was

quite as valuable as a gold-mine. Naturally, it was to my

interest to buy their land before they discovered its true value,

but unfortunately I had no capital by which I could do this. I

took a few of my friends into the secret, however, and they

suggested that we should quietly and secretly work our own little

deposit and that in this way we should earn the money which would

enable us to buy the neighbouring fields. This we have now been

doing for some time, and in order to help us in our operations we

erected a hydraulic press. This press, as I have already

explained, has got out of order, and we wish your advice upon the

subject. We guard our secret very jealously, however, and if it

once became known that we had hydraulic engineers coming to our

little house, it would soon rouse inquiry, and then, if the facts

came out, it would be good-bye to any chance of getting these

fields and carrying out our plans. That is why I have made you

promise me that you will not tell a human being that you are

going to Eyford to-night. I hope that I make it all plain?'

"'I quite follow you,' said I. 'The only point which I could not

quite understand was what use you could make of a hydraulic press

in excavating fuller's-earth, which, as I understand, is dug out

like gravel from a pit.'

"'Ah!' said he carelessly, 'we have our own process. We compress

the earth into bricks, so as to remove them without revealing

what they are. But that is a mere detail. I have taken you fully

into my confidence now, Mr. Hatherley, and I have shown you how I

trust you.' He rose as he spoke. 'I shall expect you, then, at

Eyford at 11:15.'

"'I shall certainly be there.'

"'And not a word to a soul.' He looked at me with a last long,

questioning gaze, and then, pressing my hand in a cold, dank

grasp, he hurried from the room.

"Well, when I came to think it all over in cool blood I was very

much astonished, as you may both think, at this sudden commission

which had been intrusted to me. On the one hand, of course, I was

glad, for the fee was at least tenfold what I should have asked

had I set a price upon my own services, and it was possible that

this order might lead to other ones. On the other hand, the face

and manner of my patron had made an unpleasant impression upon

me, and I could not think that his explanation of the

fuller's-earth was sufficient to explain the necessity for my

coming at midnight, and his extreme anxiety lest I should tell

anyone of my errand. However, I threw all fears to the winds, ate

a hearty supper, drove to Paddington, and started off, having

obeyed to the letter the injunction as to holding my tongue.

"At Reading I had to change not only my carriage but my station.

However, I was in time for the last train to Eyford, and I

reached the little dim-lit station after eleven o'clock. I was the

only passenger who got out there, and there was no one upon the

platform save a single sleepy porter with a lantern. As I passed

out through the wicket gate, however, I found my acquaintance of

the morning waiting in the shadow upon the other side. Without a

word he grasped my arm and hurried me into a carriage, the door

of which was standing open. He drew up the windows on either

side, tapped on the wood-work, and away we went as fast as the

horse could go."

"One horse?" interjected Holmes.

"Yes, only one."

"Did you observe the colour?"

"Yes, I saw it by the side-lights when I was stepping into the

carriage. It was a chestnut."

"Tired-looking or fresh?"

"Oh, fresh and glossy."

"Thank you. I am sorry to have interrupted you. Pray continue

your most interesting statement."

"Away we went then, and we drove for at least an hour. Colonel

Lysander Stark had said that it was only seven miles, but I

should think, from the rate that we seemed to go, and from the

time that we took, that it must have been nearer twelve. He sat

at my side in silence all the time, and I was aware, more than

once when I glanced in his direction, that he was looking at me

with great intensity. The country roads seem to be not very good

in that part of the world, for we lurched and jolted terribly. I

tried to look out of the windows to see something of where we

were, but they were made of frosted glass, and I could make out

nothing save the occasional bright blur of a passing light. Now

and then I hazarded some remark to break the monotony of the

journey, but the colonel answered only in monosyllables, and the

conversation soon flagged. At last, however, the bumping of the

road was exchanged for the crisp smoothness of a gravel-drive,

and the carriage came to a stand. Colonel Lysander Stark sprang

out, and, as I followed after him, pulled me swiftly into a porch

which gaped in front of us. We stepped, as it were, right out of

the carriage and into the hall, so that I failed to catch the

most fleeting glance of the front of the house. The instant that

I had crossed the threshold the door slammed heavily behind us,

and I heard faintly the rattle of the wheels as the carriage

drove away.

"It was pitch dark inside the house, and the colonel fumbled

about looking for matches and muttering under his breath.

Suddenly a door opened at the other end of the passage, and a

long, golden bar of light shot out in our direction. It grew

broader, and a woman appeared with a lamp in her hand, which she

held above her head, pushing her face forward and peering at us.

I could see that she was pretty, and from the gloss with which

the light shone upon her dark dress I knew that it was a rich

material. She spoke a few words in a foreign tongue in a tone as

though asking a question, and when my companion answered in a

gruff monosyllable she gave such a start that the lamp nearly

fell from her hand. Colonel Stark went up to her, whispered

something in her ear, and then, pushing her back into the room

from whence she had come, he walked towards me again with the

lamp in his hand.

"'Perhaps you will have the kindness to wait in this room for a

few minutes,' said he, throwing open another door. It was a

quiet, little, plainly furnished room, with a round table in the

centre, on which several German books were scattered. Colonel

Stark laid down the lamp on the top of a harmonium beside the

door. 'I shall not keep you waiting an instant,' said he, and

vanished into the darkness.

"I glanced at the books upon the table, and in spite of my

ignorance of German I could see that two of them were treatises

on science, the others being volumes of poetry. Then I walked

across to the window, hoping that I might catch some glimpse of

the country-side, but an oak shutter, heavily barred, was folded

across it. It was a wonderfully silent house. There was an old

clock ticking loudly somewhere in the passage, but otherwise

everything was deadly still. A vague feeling of uneasiness began

to steal over me. Who were these German people, and what were

they doing living in this strange, out-of-the-way place? And

where was the place? I was ten miles or so from Eyford, that was

all I knew, but whether north, south, east, or west I had no

idea. For that matter, Reading, and possibly other large towns,

were within that radius, so the place might not be so secluded,

after all. Yet it was quite certain, from the absolute stillness,

that we were in the country. I paced up and down the room,

humming a tune under my breath to keep up my spirits and feeling

that I was thoroughly earning my fifty-guinea fee.

"Suddenly, without any preliminary sound in the midst of the

utter stillness, the door of my room swung slowly open. The woman

was standing in the aperture, the darkness of the hall behind

her, the yellow light from my lamp beating upon her eager and

beautiful face. I could see at a glance that she was sick with

fear, and the sight sent a chill to my own heart. She held up one

shaking finger to warn me to be silent, and she shot a few

whispered words of broken English at me, her eyes glancing back,

like those of a frightened horse, into the gloom behind her.

"'I would go,' said she, trying hard, as it seemed to me, to

speak calmly; 'I would go. I should not stay here. There is no

good for you to do.'

"'But, madam,' said I, 'I have not yet done what I came for. I

cannot possibly leave until I have seen the machine.'

"'It is not worth your while to wait,' she went on. 'You can pass

through the door; no one hinders.' And then, seeing that I smiled

and shook my head, she suddenly threw aside her constraint and

made a step forward, with her hands wrung together. 'For the love

of Heaven!' she whispered, 'get away from here before it is too

late!'

"But I am somewhat headstrong by nature, and the more ready to

engage in an affair when there is some obstacle in the way. I

thought of my fifty-guinea fee, of my wearisome journey, and of

the unpleasant night which seemed to be before me. Was it all to

go for nothing? Why should I slink away without having carried

out my commission, and without the payment which was my due? This

woman might, for all I knew, be a monomaniac. With a stout

bearing, therefore, though her manner had shaken me more than I

cared to confess, I still shook my head and declared my intention

of remaining where I was. She was about to renew her entreaties

when a door slammed overhead, and the sound of several footsteps

was heard upon the stairs. She listened for an instant, threw up

her hands with a despairing gesture, and vanished as suddenly and

as noiselessly as she had come.

"The newcomers were Colonel Lysander Stark and a short thick man

with a chinchilla beard growing out of the creases of his double

chin, who was introduced to me as Mr. Ferguson.

"'This is my secretary and manager,' said the colonel. 'By the

way, I was under the impression that I left this door shut just

now. I fear that you have felt the draught.'

"'On the contrary,' said I, 'I opened the door myself because I

felt the room to be a little close.'

"He shot one of his suspicious looks at me. 'Perhaps we had

better proceed to business, then,' said he. 'Mr. Ferguson and I

will take you up to see the machine.'

"'I had better put my hat on, I suppose.'

"'Oh, no, it is in the house.'

"'What, you dig fuller's-earth in the house?'

"'No, no. This is only where we compress it. But never mind that.

All we wish you to do is to examine the machine and to let us

know what is wrong with it.'

"We went upstairs together, the colonel first with the lamp, the

fat manager and I behind him. It was a labyrinth of an old house,

with corridors, passages, narrow winding staircases, and little

low doors, the thresholds of which were hollowed out by the

generations who had crossed them. There were no carpets and no

signs of any furniture above the ground floor, while the plaster

was peeling off the walls, and the damp was breaking through in

green, unhealthy blotches. I tried to put on as unconcerned an

air as possible, but I had not forgotten the warnings of the

lady, even though I disregarded them, and I kept a keen eye upon

my two companions. Ferguson appeared to be a morose and silent

man, but I could see from the little that he said that he was at

least a fellow-countryman.

"Colonel Lysander Stark stopped at last before a low door, which

he unlocked. Within was a small, square room, in which the three

of us could hardly get at one time. Ferguson remained outside,

and the colonel ushered me in.

"'We are now,' said he, 'actually within the hydraulic press, and

it would be a particularly unpleasant thing for us if anyone were

to turn it on. The ceiling of this small chamber is really the

end of the descending piston, and it comes down with the force of

many tons upon this metal floor. There are small lateral columns

of water outside which receive the force, and which transmit and

multiply it in the manner which is familiar to you. The machine

goes readily enough, but there is some stiffness in the working

of it, and it has lost a little of its force. Perhaps you will

have the goodness to look it over and to show us how we can set

it right.'

"I took the lamp from him, and I examined the machine very

thoroughly. It was indeed a gigantic one, and capable of

exercising enormous pressure. When I passed outside, however, and

pressed down the levers which controlled it, I knew at once by

the whishing sound that there was a slight leakage, which allowed

a regurgitation of water through one of the side cylinders. An

examination showed that one of the india-rubber bands which was

round the head of a driving-rod had shrunk so as not quite to

fill the socket along which it worked. This was clearly the cause

of the loss of power, and I pointed it out to my companions, who

followed my remarks very carefully and asked several practical

questions as to how they should proceed to set it right. When I

had made it clear to them, I returned to the main chamber of the

machine and took a good look at it to satisfy my own curiosity.

It was obvious at a glance that the story of the fuller's-earth

was the merest fabrication, for it would be absurd to suppose

that so powerful an engine could be designed for so inadequate a

purpose. The walls were of wood, but the floor consisted of a

large iron trough, and when I came to examine it I could see a

crust of metallic deposit all over it. I had stooped and was

scraping at this to see exactly what it was when I heard a

muttered exclamation in German and saw the cadaverous face of the

colonel looking down at me.

"'What are you doing there?' he asked.

"I felt angry at having been tricked by so elaborate a story as

that which he had told me. 'I was admiring your fuller's-earth,'

said I; 'I think that I should be better able to advise you as to

your machine if I knew what the exact purpose was for which it

was used.'

"The instant that I uttered the words I regretted the rashness of

my speech. His face set hard, and a baleful light sprang up in

his grey eyes.

"'Very well,' said he, 'you shall know all about the machine.' He

took a step backward, slammed the little door, and turned the key

in the lock. I rushed towards it and pulled at the handle, but it

was quite secure, and did not give in the least to my kicks and

shoves. 'Hullo!' I yelled. 'Hullo! Colonel! Let me out!'

"And then suddenly in the silence I heard a sound which sent my

heart into my mouth. It was the clank of the levers and the swish

of the leaking cylinder. He had set the engine at work. The lamp

still stood upon the floor where I had placed it when examining

the trough. By its light I saw that the black ceiling was coming

down upon me, slowly, jerkily, but, as none knew better than

myself, with a force which must within a minute grind me to a

shapeless pulp. I threw myself, screaming, against the door, and

dragged with my nails at the lock. I implored the colonel to let

me out, but the remorseless clanking of the levers drowned my

cries. The ceiling was only a foot or two above my head, and with

my hand upraised I could feel its hard, rough surface. Then it

flashed through my mind that the pain of my death would depend

very much upon the position in which I met it. If I lay on my

face the weight would come upon my spine, and I shuddered to

think of that dreadful snap. Easier the other way, perhaps; and

yet, had I the nerve to lie and look up at that deadly black

shadow wavering down upon me? Already I was unable to stand

erect, when my eye caught something which brought a gush of hope

back to my heart.

"I have said that though the floor and ceiling were of iron, the

walls were of wood. As I gave a last hurried glance around, I saw

a thin line of yellow light between two of the boards, which

broadened and broadened as a small panel was pushed backward. For

an instant I could hardly believe that here was indeed a door

which led away from death. The next instant I threw myself

through, and lay half-fainting upon the other side. The panel had

closed again behind me, but the crash of the lamp, and a few

moments afterwards the clang of the two slabs of metal, told me

how narrow had been my escape.

"I was recalled to myself by a frantic plucking at my wrist, and

I found myself lying upon the stone floor of a narrow corridor,

while a woman bent over me and tugged at me with her left hand,

while she held a candle in her right. It was the same good friend

whose warning I had so foolishly rejected.

"'Come! come!' she cried breathlessly. 'They will be here in a

moment. They will see that you are not there. Oh, do not waste

the so-precious time, but come!'

"This time, at least, I did not scorn her advice. I staggered to

my feet and ran with her along the corridor and down a winding

stair. The latter led to another broad passage, and just as we

reached it we heard the sound of running feet and the shouting of

two voices, one answering the other from the floor on which we

were and from the one beneath. My guide stopped and looked about

her like one who is at her wit's end. Then she threw open a door

which led into a bedroom, through the window of which the moon

was shining brightly.

"'It is your only chance,' said she. 'It is high, but it may be

that you can jump it.'

"As she spoke a light sprang into view at the further end of the

passage, and I saw the lean figure of Colonel Lysander Stark

rushing forward with a lantern in one hand and a weapon like a

butcher's cleaver in the other. I rushed across the bedroom,

flung open the window, and looked out. How quiet and sweet and

wholesome the garden looked in the moonlight, and it could not be

more than thirty feet down. I clambered out upon the sill, but I

hesitated to jump until I should have heard what passed between

my saviour and the ruffian who pursued me. If she were ill-used,

then at any risks I was determined to go back to her assistance.

The thought had hardly flashed through my mind before he was at

the door, pushing his way past her; but she threw her arms round

him and tried to hold him back.

"'Fritz! Fritz!' she cried in English, 'remember your promise

after the last time. You said it should not be again. He will be

silent! Oh, he will be silent!'

"'You are mad, Elise!' he shouted, struggling to break away from

her. 'You will be the ruin of us. He has seen too much. Let me

pass, I say!' He dashed her to one side, and, rushing to the

window, cut at me with his heavy weapon. I had let myself go, and

was hanging by the hands to the sill, when his blow fell. I was

conscious of a dull pain, my grip loosened, and I fell into the

garden below.

"I was shaken but not hurt by the fall; so I picked myself up and

rushed off among the bushes as hard as I could run, for I

understood that I was far from being out of danger yet. Suddenly,

however, as I ran, a deadly dizziness and sickness came over me.

I glanced down at my hand, which was throbbing painfully, and

then, for the first time, saw that my thumb had been cut off and

that the blood was pouring from my wound. I endeavoured to tie my

handkerchief round it, but there came a sudden buzzing in my

ears, and next moment I fell in a dead faint among the

rose-bushes.

"How long I remained unconscious I cannot tell. It must have been

a very long time, for the moon had sunk, and a bright morning was

breaking when I came to myself. My clothes were all sodden with

dew, and my coat-sleeve was drenched with blood from my wounded

thumb. The smarting of it recalled in an instant all the

particulars of my night's adventure, and I sprang to my feet with

the feeling that I might hardly yet be safe from my pursuers. But

to my astonishment, when I came to look round me, neither house

nor garden were to be seen. I had been lying in an angle of the

hedge close by the highroad, and just a little lower down was a

long building, which proved, upon my approaching it, to be the

very station at which I had arrived upon the previous night. Were

it not for the ugly wound upon my hand, all that had passed

during those dreadful hours might have been an evil dream.

"Half dazed, I went into the station and asked about the morning

train. There would be one to Reading in less than an hour. The

same porter was on duty, I found, as had been there when I

arrived. I inquired of him whether he had ever heard of Colonel

Lysander Stark. The name was strange to him. Had he observed a

carriage the night before waiting for me? No, he had not. Was

there a police-station anywhere near? There was one about three

miles off.

"It was too far for me to go, weak and ill as I was. I determined

to wait until I got back to town before telling my story to the

police. It was a little past six when I arrived, so I went first

to have my wound dressed, and then the doctor was kind enough to

bring me along here. I put the case into your hands and shall do

exactly what you advise."

We both sat in silence for some little time after listening to

this extraordinary narrative. Then Sherlock Holmes pulled down

from the shelf one of the ponderous commonplace books in which he

placed his cuttings.

"Here is an advertisement which will interest you," said he. "It

appeared in all the papers about a year ago. Listen to this:

'Lost, on the 9th inst., Mr. Jeremiah Hayling, aged

twenty-six, a hydraulic engineer. Left his lodgings at ten

o'clock at night, and has not been heard of since. Was

dressed in,' etc., etc. Ha! That represents the last time that

the colonel needed to have his machine overhauled, I fancy."

"Good heavens!" cried my patient. "Then that explains what the

girl said."

"Undoubtedly. It is quite clear that the colonel was a cool and

desperate man, who was absolutely determined that nothing should

stand in the way of his little game, like those out-and-out

pirates who will leave no survivor from a captured ship. Well,

every moment now is precious, so if you feel equal to it we shall

go down to Scotland Yard at once as a preliminary to starting for

Eyford."

Some three hours or so afterwards we were all in the train

together, bound from Reading to the little Berkshire village.

There were Sherlock Holmes, the hydraulic engineer, Inspector

Bradstreet, of Scotland Yard, a plain-clothes man, and myself.

Bradstreet had spread an ordnance map of the county out upon the

seat and was busy with his compasses drawing a circle with Eyford

for its centre.

"There you are," said he. "That circle is drawn at a radius of

ten miles from the village. The place we want must be somewhere

near that line. You said ten miles, I think, sir."

"It was an hour's good drive."

"And you think that they brought you back all that way when you

were unconscious?"

"They must have done so. I have a confused memory, too, of having

been lifted and conveyed somewhere."

"What I cannot understand," said I, "is why they should have

spared you when they found you lying fainting in the garden.

Perhaps the villain was softened by the woman's entreaties."

"I hardly think that likely. I never saw a more inexorable face

in my life."

"Oh, we shall soon clear up all that," said Bradstreet. "Well, I

have drawn my circle, and I only wish I knew at what point upon

it the folk that we are in search of are to be found."

"I think I could lay my finger on it," said Holmes quietly.

"Really, now!" cried the inspector, "you have formed your

opinion! Come, now, we shall see who agrees with you. I say it is

south, for the country is more deserted there."

"And I say east," said my patient.

"I am for west," remarked the plain-clothes man. "There are

several quiet little villages up there."

"And I am for north," said I, "because there are no hills there,

and our friend says that he did not notice the carriage go up

any."

"Come," cried the inspector, laughing; "it's a very pretty

diversity of opinion. We have boxed the compass among us. Who do

you give your casting vote to?"

"You are all wrong."

"But we can't all be."

"Oh, yes, you can. This is my point." He placed his finger in the

centre of the circle. "This is where we shall find them."

"But the twelve-mile drive?" gasped Hatherley.

"Six out and six back. Nothing simpler. You say yourself that the

horse was fresh and glossy when you got in. How could it be that

if it had gone twelve miles over heavy roads?"

"Indeed, it is a likely ruse enough," observed Bradstreet

thoughtfully. "Of course there can be no doubt as to the nature

of this gang."

"None at all," said Holmes. "They are coiners on a large scale,

and have used the machine to form the amalgam which has taken the

place of silver."

"We have known for some time that a clever gang was at work,"

said the inspector. "They have been turning out half-crowns by

the thousand. We even traced them as far as Reading, but could

get no farther, for they had covered their traces in a way that

showed that they were very old hands. But now, thanks to this

lucky chance, I think that we have got them right enough."

But the inspector was mistaken, for those criminals were not

destined to fall into the hands of justice. As we rolled into

Eyford Station we saw a gigantic column of smoke which streamed

up from behind a small clump of trees in the neighbourhood and

hung like an immense ostrich feather over the landscape.

"A house on fire?" asked Bradstreet as the train steamed off

again on its way.

"Yes, sir!" said the station-master.

"When did it break out?"

"I hear that it was during the night, sir, but it has got worse,

and the whole place is in a blaze."

"Whose house is it?"

"Dr. Becher's."

"Tell me," broke in the engineer, "is Dr. Becher a German, very

thin, with a long, sharp nose?"

The station-master laughed heartily. "No, sir, Dr. Becher is an

Englishman, and there isn't a man in the parish who has a

better-lined waistcoat. But he has a gentleman staying with him,

a patient, as I understand, who is a foreigner, and he looks as

if a little good Berkshire beef would do him no harm."

The station-master had not finished his speech before we were all

hastening in the direction of the fire. The road topped a low

hill, and there was a great widespread whitewashed building in

front of us, spouting fire at every chink and window, while in

the garden in front three fire-engines were vainly striving to

keep the flames under.

"That's it!" cried Hatherley, in intense excitement. "There is

the gravel-drive, and there are the rose-bushes where I lay. That

second window is the one that I jumped from."

"Well, at least," said Holmes, "you have had your revenge upon

them. There can be no question that it was your oil-lamp which,

when it was crushed in the press, set fire to the wooden walls,

though no doubt they were too excited in the chase after you to

observe it at the time. Now keep your eyes open in this crowd for

your friends of last night, though I very much fear that they are

a good hundred miles off by now."

And Holmes' fears came to be realised, for from that day to this

no word has ever been heard either of the beautiful woman, the

sinister German, or the morose Englishman. Early that morning a

peasant had met a cart containing several people and some very

bulky boxes driving rapidly in the direction of Reading, but

there all traces of the fugitives disappeared, and even Holmes'

ingenuity failed ever to discover the least clue as to their

whereabouts.

The firemen had been much perturbed at the strange arrangements

which they had found within, and still more so by discovering a

newly severed human thumb upon a window-sill of the second floor.

About sunset, however, their efforts were at last successful, and

they subdued the flames, but not before the roof had fallen in,

and the whole place been reduced to such absolute ruin that, save

some twisted cylinders and iron piping, not a trace remained of

the machinery which had cost our unfortunate acquaintance so

dearly. Large masses of nickel and of tin were discovered stored

in an out-house, but no coins were to be found, which may have

explained the presence of those bulky boxes which have been

already referred to.

How our hydraulic engineer had been conveyed from the garden to

the spot where he recovered his senses might have remained

forever a mystery were it not for the soft mould, which told us a

very plain tale. He had evidently been carried down by two

persons, one of whom had remarkably small feet and the other

unusually large ones. On the whole, it was most probable that the

silent Englishman, being less bold or less murderous than his

companion, had assisted the woman to bear the unconscious man out

of the way of danger.

"Well," said our engineer ruefully as we took our seats to return

once more to London, "it has been a pretty business for me! I

have lost my thumb and I have lost a fifty-guinea fee, and what

have I gained?"

"Experience," said Holmes, laughing. "Indirectly it may be of

value, you know; you have only to put it into words to gain the

reputation of being excellent company for the remainder of your

existence."

X. THE ADVENTURE OF THE NOBLE BACHELOR

The Lord St. Simon marriage, and its curious termination, have

long ceased to be a subject of interest in those exalted circles

in which the unfortunate bridegroom moves. Fresh scandals have

eclipsed it, and their more piquant details have drawn the

gossips away from this four-year-old drama. As I have reason to

believe, however, that the full facts have never been revealed to

the general public, and as my friend Sherlock Holmes had a

considerable share in clearing the matter up, I feel that no

memoir of him would be complete without some little sketch of

this remarkable episode.

It was a few weeks before my own marriage, during the days when I

was still sharing rooms with Holmes in Baker Street, that he came

home from an afternoon stroll to find a letter on the table

waiting for him. I had remained indoors all day, for the weather

had taken a sudden turn to rain, with high autumnal winds, and

the Jezail bullet which I had brought back in one of my limbs as

a relic of my Afghan campaign throbbed with dull persistence.

With my body in one easy-chair and my legs upon another, I had

surrounded myself with a cloud of newspapers until at last,

saturated with the news of the day, I tossed them all aside and

lay listless, watching the huge crest and monogram upon the

envelope upon the table and wondering lazily who my friend's

noble correspondent could be.

"Here is a very fashionable epistle," I remarked as he entered.

"Your morning letters, if I remember right, were from a

fish-monger and a tide-waiter."

"Yes, my correspondence has certainly the charm of variety," he

answered, smiling, "and the humbler are usually the more

interesting. This looks like one of those unwelcome social

summonses which call upon a man either to be bored or to lie."

He broke the seal and glanced over the contents.

"Oh, come, it may prove to be something of interest, after all."

"Not social, then?"

"No, distinctly professional."

"And from a noble client?"

"One of the highest in England."

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you."

"I assure you, Watson, without affectation, that the status of my

client is a matter of less moment to me than the interest of his

case. It is just possible, however, that that also may not be

wanting in this new investigation. You have been reading the

papers diligently of late, have you not?"

"It looks like it," said I ruefully, pointing to a huge bundle in

the corner. "I have had nothing else to do."

"It is fortunate, for you will perhaps be able to post me up. I

read nothing except the criminal news and the agony column. The

latter is always instructive. But if you have followed recent

events so closely you must have read about Lord St. Simon and his

wedding?"

"Oh, yes, with the deepest interest."

"That is well. The letter which I hold in my hand is from Lord

St. Simon. I will read it to you, and in return you must turn

over these papers and let me have whatever bears upon the matter.

This is what he says:

"'MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES:--Lord Backwater tells me that I

may place implicit reliance upon your judgment and discretion. I

have determined, therefore, to call upon you and to consult you

in reference to the very painful event which has occurred in

connection with my wedding. Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, is

acting already in the matter, but he assures me that he sees no

objection to your co-operation, and that he even thinks that

it might be of some assistance. I will call at four o'clock in

the afternoon, and, should you have any other engagement at that

time, I hope that you will postpone it, as this matter is of

paramount importance. Yours faithfully, ST. SIMON.'

"It is dated from Grosvenor Mansions, written with a quill pen,

and the noble lord has had the misfortune to get a smear of ink

upon the outer side of his right little finger," remarked Holmes

as he folded up the epistle.

"He says four o'clock. It is three now. He will be here in an

hour."

"Then I have just time, with your assistance, to get clear upon

the subject. Turn over those papers and arrange the extracts in

their order of time, while I take a glance as to who our client

is." He picked a red-covered volume from a line of books of

reference beside the mantelpiece. "Here he is," said he, sitting

down and flattening it out upon his knee. "'Lord Robert Walsingham

de Vere St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral.' Hum! 'Arms:

Azure, three caltrops in chief over a fess sable. Born in 1846.'

He's forty-one years of age, which is mature for marriage. Was

Under-Secretary for the colonies in a late administration. The

Duke, his father, was at one time Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

They inherit Plantagenet blood by direct descent, and Tudor on

the distaff side. Ha! Well, there is nothing very instructive in

all this. I think that I must turn to you Watson, for something

more solid."

"I have very little difficulty in finding what I want," said I,

"for the facts are quite recent, and the matter struck me as

remarkable. I feared to refer them to you, however, as I knew

that you had an inquiry on hand and that you disliked the

intrusion of other matters."

"Oh, you mean the little problem of the Grosvenor Square

furniture van. That is quite cleared up now--though, indeed, it

was obvious from the first. Pray give me the results of your

newspaper selections."

"Here is the first notice which I can find. It is in the personal

column of the Morning Post, and dates, as you see, some weeks

back: 'A marriage has been arranged,' it says, 'and will, if

rumour is correct, very shortly take place, between Lord Robert

St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral, and Miss Hatty

Doran, the only daughter of Aloysius Doran. Esq., of San

Francisco, Cal., U.S.A.' That is all."

"Terse and to the point," remarked Holmes, stretching his long,

thin legs towards the fire.

"There was a paragraph amplifying this in one of the society

papers of the same week. Ah, here it is: 'There will soon be a

call for protection in the marriage market, for the present

free-trade principle appears to tell heavily against our home

product. One by one the management of the noble houses of Great

Britain is passing into the hands of our fair cousins from across

the Atlantic. An important addition has been made during the last

week to the list of the prizes which have been borne away by

these charming invaders. Lord St. Simon, who has shown himself

for over twenty years proof against the little god's arrows, has

now definitely announced his approaching marriage with Miss Hatty

Doran, the fascinating daughter of a California millionaire. Miss

Doran, whose graceful figure and striking face attracted much

attention at the Westbury House festivities, is an only child,

and it is currently reported that her dowry will run to

considerably over the six figures, with expectancies for the

future. As it is an open secret that the Duke of Balmoral has

been compelled to sell his pictures within the last few years,

and as Lord St. Simon has no property of his own save the small

estate of Birchmoor, it is obvious that the Californian heiress

is not the only gainer by an alliance which will enable her to

make the easy and common transition from a Republican lady to a

British peeress.'"

"Anything else?" asked Holmes, yawning.

"Oh, yes; plenty. Then there is another note in the Morning Post

to say that the marriage would be an absolutely quiet one, that it

would be at St. George's, Hanover Square, that only half a dozen

intimate friends would be invited, and that the party would

return to the furnished house at Lancaster Gate which has been

taken by Mr. Aloysius Doran. Two days later--that is, on

Wednesday last--there is a curt announcement that the wedding had

taken place, and that the honeymoon would be passed at Lord

Backwater's place, near Petersfield. Those are all the notices

which appeared before the disappearance of the bride."

"Before the what?" asked Holmes with a start.

"The vanishing of the lady."

"When did she vanish, then?"

"At the wedding breakfast."

"Indeed. This is more interesting than it promised to be; quite

dramatic, in fact."

"Yes; it struck me as being a little out of the common."

"They often vanish before the ceremony, and occasionally during

the honeymoon; but I cannot call to mind anything quite so prompt

as this. Pray let me have the details."

"I warn you that they are very incomplete."

"Perhaps we may make them less so."

"Such as they are, they are set forth in a single article of a

morning paper of yesterday, which I will read to you. It is

headed, 'Singular Occurrence at a Fashionable Wedding':

"'The family of Lord Robert St. Simon has been thrown into the

greatest consternation by the strange and painful episodes which

have taken place in connection with his wedding. The ceremony, as

shortly announced in the papers of yesterday, occurred on the

previous morning; but it is only now that it has been possible to

confirm the strange rumours which have been so persistently

floating about. In spite of the attempts of the friends to hush

the matter up, so much public attention has now been drawn to it

that no good purpose can be served by affecting to disregard what

is a common subject for conversation.

"'The ceremony, which was performed at St. George's, Hanover

Square, was a very quiet one, no one being present save the

father of the bride, Mr. Aloysius Doran, the Duchess of Balmoral,

Lord Backwater, Lord Eustace and Lady Clara St. Simon (the

younger brother and sister of the bridegroom), and Lady Alicia

Whittington. The whole party proceeded afterwards to the house of

Mr. Aloysius Doran, at Lancaster Gate, where breakfast had been

prepared. It appears that some little trouble was caused by a

woman, whose name has not been ascertained, who endeavoured to

force her way into the house after the bridal party, alleging

that she had some claim upon Lord St. Simon. It was only after a

painful and prolonged scene that she was ejected by the butler

and the footman. The bride, who had fortunately entered the house

before this unpleasant interruption, had sat down to breakfast

with the rest, when she complained of a sudden indisposition and

retired to her room. Her prolonged absence having caused some

comment, her father followed her, but learned from her maid that

she had only come up to her chamber for an instant, caught up an

ulster and bonnet, and hurried down to the passage. One of the

footmen declared that he had seen a lady leave the house thus

apparelled, but had refused to credit that it was his mistress,

believing her to be with the company. On ascertaining that his

daughter had disappeared, Mr. Aloysius Doran, in conjunction with

the bridegroom, instantly put themselves in communication with

the police, and very energetic inquiries are being made, which

will probably result in a speedy clearing up of this very

singular business. Up to a late hour last night, however, nothing

had transpired as to the whereabouts of the missing lady. There

are rumours of foul play in the matter, and it is said that the

police have caused the arrest of the woman who had caused the

original disturbance, in the belief that, from jealousy or some

other motive, she may have been concerned in the strange

disappearance of the bride.'"

"And is that all?"

"Only one little item in another of the morning papers, but it is

a suggestive one."

"And it is--"

"That Miss Flora Millar, the lady who had caused the disturbance,

has actually been arrested. It appears that she was formerly a

danseuse at the Allegro, and that she has known the bridegroom

for some years. There are no further particulars, and the whole

case is in your hands now--so far as it has been set forth in the

public press."

"And an exceedingly interesting case it appears to be. I would

not have missed it for worlds. But there is a ring at the bell,

Watson, and as the clock makes it a few minutes after four, I

have no doubt that this will prove to be our noble client. Do not

dream of going, Watson, for I very much prefer having a witness,

if only as a check to my own memory."

"Lord Robert St. Simon," announced our page-boy, throwing open

the door. A gentleman entered, with a pleasant, cultured face,

high-nosed and pale, with something perhaps of petulance about

the mouth, and with the steady, well-opened eye of a man whose

pleasant lot it had ever been to command and to be obeyed. His

manner was brisk, and yet his general appearance gave an undue

impression of age, for he had a slight forward stoop and a little

bend of the knees as he walked. His hair, too, as he swept off

his very curly-brimmed hat, was grizzled round the edges and thin

upon the top. As to his dress, it was careful to the verge of

foppishness, with high collar, black frock-coat, white waistcoat,

yellow gloves, patent-leather shoes, and light-coloured gaiters.

He advanced slowly into the room, turning his head from left to

right, and swinging in his right hand the cord which held his

golden eyeglasses.

"Good-day, Lord St. Simon," said Holmes, rising and bowing. "Pray

take the basket-chair. This is my friend and colleague, Dr.

Watson. Draw up a little to the fire, and we will talk this

matter over."

"A most painful matter to me, as you can most readily imagine,

Mr. Holmes. I have been cut to the quick. I understand that you

have already managed several delicate cases of this sort, sir,

though I presume that they were hardly from the same class of

society."

"No, I am descending."

"I beg pardon."

"My last client of the sort was a king."

"Oh, really! I had no idea. And which king?"

"The King of Scandinavia."

"What! Had he lost his wife?"

"You can understand," said Holmes suavely, "that I extend to the

affairs of my other clients the same secrecy which I promise to

you in yours."

"Of course! Very right! very right! I'm sure I beg pardon. As to

my own case, I am ready to give you any information which may

assist you in forming an opinion."

"Thank you. I have already learned all that is in the public

prints, nothing more. I presume that I may take it as correct--this

article, for example, as to the disappearance of the bride."

Lord St. Simon glanced over it. "Yes, it is correct, as far as it

goes."

"But it needs a great deal of supplementing before anyone could

offer an opinion. I think that I may arrive at my facts most

directly by questioning you."

"Pray do so."

"When did you first meet Miss Hatty Doran?"

"In San Francisco, a year ago."

"You were travelling in the States?"

"Yes."

"Did you become engaged then?"

"No."

"But you were on a friendly footing?"

"I was amused by her society, and she could see that I was

amused."

"Her father is very rich?"

"He is said to be the richest man on the Pacific slope."

"And how did he make his money?"

"In mining. He had nothing a few years ago. Then he struck gold,

invested it, and came up by leaps and bounds."

"Now, what is your own impression as to the young lady's--your

wife's character?"

The nobleman swung his glasses a little faster and stared down

into the fire. "You see, Mr. Holmes," said he, "my wife was

twenty before her father became a rich man. During that time she

ran free in a mining camp and wandered through woods or

mountains, so that her education has come from Nature rather than

from the schoolmaster. She is what we call in England a tomboy,

with a strong nature, wild and free, unfettered by any sort of

traditions. She is impetuous--volcanic, I was about to say. She

is swift in making up her mind and fearless in carrying out her

resolutions. On the other hand, I would not have given her the

name which I have the honour to bear"--he gave a little stately

cough--"had not I thought her to be at bottom a noble woman. I

believe that she is capable of heroic self-sacrifice and that

anything dishonourable would be repugnant to her."

"Have you her photograph?"

"I brought this with me." He opened a locket and showed us the

full face of a very lovely woman. It was not a photograph but an

ivory miniature, and the artist had brought out the full effect

of the lustrous black hair, the large dark eyes, and the

exquisite mouth. Holmes gazed long and earnestly at it. Then he

closed the locket and handed it back to Lord St. Simon.

"The young lady came to London, then, and you renewed your

acquaintance?"

"Yes, her father brought her over for this last London season. I

met her several times, became engaged to her, and have now

married her."

"She brought, I understand, a considerable dowry?"

"A fair dowry. Not more than is usual in my family."

"And this, of course, remains to you, since the marriage is a

fait accompli?"

"I really have made no inquiries on the subject."

"Very naturally not. Did you see Miss Doran on the day before the

wedding?"

"Yes."

"Was she in good spirits?"

"Never better. She kept talking of what we should do in our

future lives."

"Indeed! That is very interesting. And on the morning of the

wedding?"

"She was as bright as possible--at least until after the

ceremony."

"And did you observe any change in her then?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I saw then the first signs that I had

ever seen that her temper was just a little sharp. The incident

however, was too trivial to relate and can have no possible

bearing upon the case."

"Pray let us have it, for all that."

"Oh, it is childish. She dropped her bouquet as we went towards

the vestry. She was passing the front pew at the time, and it

fell over into the pew. There was a moment's delay, but the

gentleman in the pew handed it up to her again, and it did not

appear to be the worse for the fall. Yet when I spoke to her of

the matter, she answered me abruptly; and in the carriage, on our

way home, she seemed absurdly agitated over this trifling cause."

"Indeed! You say that there was a gentleman in the pew. Some of

the general public were present, then?"

"Oh, yes. It is impossible to exclude them when the church is

open."

"This gentleman was not one of your wife's friends?"

"No, no; I call him a gentleman by courtesy, but he was quite a

common-looking person. I hardly noticed his appearance. But

really I think that we are wandering rather far from the point."

"Lady St. Simon, then, returned from the wedding in a less

cheerful frame of mind than she had gone to it. What did she do

on re-entering her father's house?"

"I saw her in conversation with her maid."

"And who is her maid?"

"Alice is her name. She is an American and came from California

with her."

"A confidential servant?"

"A little too much so. It seemed to me that her mistress allowed

her to take great liberties. Still, of course, in America they

look upon these things in a different way."

"How long did she speak to this Alice?"

"Oh, a few minutes. I had something else to think of."

"You did not overhear what they said?"

"Lady St. Simon said something about 'jumping a claim.' She was

accustomed to use slang of the kind. I have no idea what she

meant."

"American slang is very expressive sometimes. And what did your

wife do when she finished speaking to her maid?"

"She walked into the breakfast-room."

"On your arm?"

"No, alone. She was very independent in little matters like that.

Then, after we had sat down for ten minutes or so, she rose

hurriedly, muttered some words of apology, and left the room. She

never came back."

"But this maid, Alice, as I understand, deposes that she went to

her room, covered her bride's dress with a long ulster, put on a

bonnet, and went out."

"Quite so. And she was afterwards seen walking into Hyde Park in

company with Flora Millar, a woman who is now in custody, and who

had already made a disturbance at Mr. Doran's house that

morning."

"Ah, yes. I should like a few particulars as to this young lady,

and your relations to her."

Lord St. Simon shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows.

"We have been on a friendly footing for some years--I may say on

a very friendly footing. She used to be at the Allegro. I have

not treated her ungenerously, and she had no just cause of

complaint against me, but you know what women are, Mr. Holmes.

Flora was a dear little thing, but exceedingly hot-headed and

devotedly attached to me. She wrote me dreadful letters when she

heard that I was about to be married, and, to tell the truth, the

reason why I had the marriage celebrated so quietly was that I

feared lest there might be a scandal in the church. She came to

Mr. Doran's door just after we returned, and she endeavoured to

push her way in, uttering very abusive expressions towards my

wife, and even threatening her, but I had foreseen the

possibility of something of the sort, and I had two police

fellows there in private clothes, who soon pushed her out again.

She was quiet when she saw that there was no good in making a

row."

"Did your wife hear all this?"

"No, thank goodness, she did not."

"And she was seen walking with this very woman afterwards?"

"Yes. That is what Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, looks upon as

so serious. It is thought that Flora decoyed my wife out and laid

some terrible trap for her."

"Well, it is a possible supposition."

"You think so, too?"

"I did not say a probable one. But you do not yourself look upon

this as likely?"

"I do not think Flora would hurt a fly."

"Still, jealousy is a strange transformer of characters. Pray

what is your own theory as to what took place?"

"Well, really, I came to seek a theory, not to propound one. I

have given you all the facts. Since you ask me, however, I may

say that it has occurred to me as possible that the excitement of

this affair, the consciousness that she had made so immense a

social stride, had the effect of causing some little nervous

disturbance in my wife."

"In short, that she had become suddenly deranged?"

"Well, really, when I consider that she has turned her back--I

will not say upon me, but upon so much that many have aspired to

without success--I can hardly explain it in any other fashion."

"Well, certainly that is also a conceivable hypothesis," said

Holmes, smiling. "And now, Lord St. Simon, I think that I have

nearly all my data. May I ask whether you were seated at the

breakfast-table so that you could see out of the window?"

"We could see the other side of the road and the Park."

"Quite so. Then I do not think that I need to detain you longer.

I shall communicate with you."

"Should you be fortunate enough to solve this problem," said our

client, rising.

"I have solved it."

"Eh? What was that?"

"I say that I have solved it."

"Where, then, is my wife?"

"That is a detail which I shall speedily supply."

Lord St. Simon shook his head. "I am afraid that it will take

wiser heads than yours or mine," he remarked, and bowing in a

stately, old-fashioned manner he departed.

"It is very good of Lord St. Simon to honour my head by putting

it on a level with his own," said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. "I

think that I shall have a whisky and soda and a cigar after all

this cross-questioning. I had formed my conclusions as to the

case before our client came into the room."

"My dear Holmes!"

"I have notes of several similar cases, though none, as I

remarked before, which were quite as prompt. My whole examination

served to turn my conjecture into a certainty. Circumstantial

evidence is occasionally very convincing, as when you find a

trout in the milk, to quote Thoreau's example."

"But I have heard all that you have heard."

"Without, however, the knowledge of pre-existing cases which

serves me so well. There was a parallel instance in Aberdeen some

years back, and something on very much the same lines at Munich

the year after the Franco-Prussian War. It is one of these

cases--but, hullo, here is Lestrade! Good-afternoon, Lestrade!

You will find an extra tumbler upon the sideboard, and there are

cigars in the box."

The official detective was attired in a pea-jacket and cravat,

which gave him a decidedly nautical appearance, and he carried a

black canvas bag in his hand. With a short greeting he seated

himself and lit the cigar which had been offered to him.

"What's up, then?" asked Holmes with a twinkle in his eye. "You

look dissatisfied."

"And I feel dissatisfied. It is this infernal St. Simon marriage

case. I can make neither head nor tail of the business."

"Really! You surprise me."

"Who ever heard of such a mixed affair? Every clue seems to slip

through my fingers. I have been at work upon it all day."

"And very wet it seems to have made you," said Holmes laying his

hand upon the arm of the pea-jacket.

"Yes, I have been dragging the Serpentine."

"In heaven's name, what for?"

"In search of the body of Lady St. Simon."

Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Have you dragged the basin of Trafalgar Square fountain?" he

asked.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Because you have just as good a chance of finding this lady in

the one as in the other."

Lestrade shot an angry glance at my companion. "I suppose you

know all about it," he snarled.

"Well, I have only just heard the facts, but my mind is made up."

"Oh, indeed! Then you think that the Serpentine plays no part in

the matter?"

"I think it very unlikely."

"Then perhaps you will kindly explain how it is that we found

this in it?" He opened his bag as he spoke, and tumbled onto the

floor a wedding-dress of watered silk, a pair of white satin

shoes and a bride's wreath and veil, all discoloured and soaked

in water. "There," said he, putting a new wedding-ring upon the

top of the pile. "There is a little nut for you to crack, Master

Holmes."

"Oh, indeed!" said my friend, blowing blue rings into the air.

"You dragged them from the Serpentine?"

"No. They were found floating near the margin by a park-keeper.

They have been identified as her clothes, and it seemed to me

that if the clothes were there the body would not be far off."

"By the same brilliant reasoning, every man's body is to be found

in the neighbourhood of his wardrobe. And pray what did you hope

to arrive at through this?"

"At some evidence implicating Flora Millar in the disappearance."

"I am afraid that you will find it difficult."

"Are you, indeed, now?" cried Lestrade with some bitterness. "I

am afraid, Holmes, that you are not very practical with your

deductions and your inferences. You have made two blunders in as

many minutes. This dress does implicate Miss Flora Millar."

"And how?"

"In the dress is a pocket. In the pocket is a card-case. In the

card-case is a note. And here is the very note." He slapped it

down upon the table in front of him. "Listen to this: 'You will

see me when all is ready. Come at once. F.H.M.' Now my theory all

along has been that Lady St. Simon was decoyed away by Flora

Millar, and that she, with confederates, no doubt, was

responsible for her disappearance. Here, signed with her

initials, is the very note which was no doubt quietly slipped

into her hand at the door and which lured her within their

reach."

"Very good, Lestrade," said Holmes, laughing. "You really are

very fine indeed. Let me see it." He took up the paper in a

listless way, but his attention instantly became riveted, and he

gave a little cry of satisfaction. "This is indeed important,"

said he.

"Ha! you find it so?"

"Extremely so. I congratulate you warmly."

Lestrade rose in his triumph and bent his head to look. "Why," he

shrieked, "you're looking at the wrong side!"

"On the contrary, this is the right side."

"The right side? You're mad! Here is the note written in pencil

over here."

"And over here is what appears to be the fragment of a hotel

bill, which interests me deeply."

"There's nothing in it. I looked at it before," said Lestrade.

"'Oct. 4th, rooms 8s., breakfast 2s. 6d., cocktail 1s., lunch 2s.

6d., glass sherry, 8d.' I see nothing in that."

"Very likely not. It is most important, all the same. As to the

note, it is important also, or at least the initials are, so I

congratulate you again."

"I've wasted time enough," said Lestrade, rising. "I believe in

hard work and not in sitting by the fire spinning fine theories.

Good-day, Mr. Holmes, and we shall see which gets to the bottom

of the matter first." He gathered up the garments, thrust them

into the bag, and made for the door.

"Just one hint to you, Lestrade," drawled Holmes before his rival

vanished; "I will tell you the true solution of the matter. Lady

St. Simon is a myth. There is not, and there never has been, any

such person."

Lestrade looked sadly at my companion. Then he turned to me,

tapped his forehead three times, shook his head solemnly, and

hurried away.

He had hardly shut the door behind him when Holmes rose to put on

his overcoat. "There is something in what the fellow says about

outdoor work," he remarked, "so I think, Watson, that I must

leave you to your papers for a little."

It was after five o'clock when Sherlock Holmes left me, but I had

no time to be lonely, for within an hour there arrived a

confectioner's man with a very large flat box. This he unpacked

with the help of a youth whom he had brought with him, and

presently, to my very great astonishment, a quite epicurean

little cold supper began to be laid out upon our humble

lodging-house mahogany. There were a couple of brace of cold

woodcock, a pheasant, a pâté de foie gras pie with a group of

ancient and cobwebby bottles. Having laid out all these luxuries,

my two visitors vanished away, like the genii of the Arabian

Nights, with no explanation save that the things had been paid

for and were ordered to this address.

Just before nine o'clock Sherlock Holmes stepped briskly into the

room. His features were gravely set, but there was a light in his

eye which made me think that he had not been disappointed in his

conclusions.

"They have laid the supper, then," he said, rubbing his hands.

"You seem to expect company. They have laid for five."

"Yes, I fancy we may have some company dropping in," said he. "I

am surprised that Lord St. Simon has not already arrived. Ha! I

fancy that I hear his step now upon the stairs."

It was indeed our visitor of the afternoon who came bustling in,

dangling his glasses more vigorously than ever, and with a very

perturbed expression upon his aristocratic features.

"My messenger reached you, then?" asked Holmes.

"Yes, and I confess that the contents startled me beyond measure.

Have you good authority for what you say?"

"The best possible."

Lord St. Simon sank into a chair and passed his hand over his

forehead.

"What will the Duke say," he murmured, "when he hears that one of

the family has been subjected to such humiliation?"

"It is the purest accident. I cannot allow that there is any

humiliation."

"Ah, you look on these things from another standpoint."

"I fail to see that anyone is to blame. I can hardly see how the

lady could have acted otherwise, though her abrupt method of

doing it was undoubtedly to be regretted. Having no mother, she

had no one to advise her at such a crisis."

"It was a slight, sir, a public slight," said Lord St. Simon,

tapping his fingers upon the table.

"You must make allowance for this poor girl, placed in so

unprecedented a position."

"I will make no allowance. I am very angry indeed, and I have

been shamefully used."

"I think that I heard a ring," said Holmes. "Yes, there are steps

on the landing. If I cannot persuade you to take a lenient view

of the matter, Lord St. Simon, I have brought an advocate here

who may be more successful." He opened the door and ushered in a

lady and gentleman. "Lord St. Simon," said he "allow me to

introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Francis Hay Moulton. The lady, I

think, you have already met."

At the sight of these newcomers our client had sprung from his

seat and stood very erect, with his eyes cast down and his hand

thrust into the breast of his frock-coat, a picture of offended

dignity. The lady had taken a quick step forward and had held out

her hand to him, but he still refused to raise his eyes. It was

as well for his resolution, perhaps, for her pleading face was

one which it was hard to resist.

"You're angry, Robert," said she. "Well, I guess you have every

cause to be."

"Pray make no apology to me," said Lord St. Simon bitterly.

"Oh, yes, I know that I have treated you real bad and that I

should have spoken to you before I went; but I was kind of

rattled, and from the time when I saw Frank here again I just

didn't know what I was doing or saying. I only wonder I didn't

fall down and do a faint right there before the altar."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Moulton, you would like my friend and me to leave

the room while you explain this matter?"

"If I may give an opinion," remarked the strange gentleman,

"we've had just a little too much secrecy over this business

already. For my part, I should like all Europe and America to

hear the rights of it." He was a small, wiry, sunburnt man,

clean-shaven, with a sharp face and alert manner.

"Then I'll tell our story right away," said the lady. "Frank here

and I met in '84, in McQuire's camp, near the Rockies, where pa

was working a claim. We were engaged to each other, Frank and I;

but then one day father struck a rich pocket and made a pile,

while poor Frank here had a claim that petered out and came to

nothing. The richer pa grew the poorer was Frank; so at last pa

wouldn't hear of our engagement lasting any longer, and he took

me away to 'Frisco. Frank wouldn't throw up his hand, though; so

he followed me there, and he saw me without pa knowing anything

about it. It would only have made him mad to know, so we just

fixed it all up for ourselves. Frank said that he would go and

make his pile, too, and never come back to claim me until he had

as much as pa. So then I promised to wait for him to the end of

time and pledged myself not to marry anyone else while he lived.

'Why shouldn't we be married right away, then,' said he, 'and

then I will feel sure of you; and I won't claim to be your

husband until I come back?' Well, we talked it over, and he had

fixed it all up so nicely, with a clergyman all ready in waiting,

that we just did it right there; and then Frank went off to seek

his fortune, and I went back to pa.

"The next I heard of Frank was that he was in Montana, and then

he went prospecting in Arizona, and then I heard of him from New

Mexico. After that came a long newspaper story about how a

miners' camp had been attacked by Apache Indians, and there was

my Frank's name among the killed. I fainted dead away, and I was

very sick for months after. Pa thought I had a decline and took

me to half the doctors in 'Frisco. Not a word of news came for a

year and more, so that I never doubted that Frank was really

dead. Then Lord St. Simon came to 'Frisco, and we came to London,

and a marriage was arranged, and pa was very pleased, but I felt

all the time that no man on this earth would ever take the place

in my heart that had been given to my poor Frank.

"Still, if I had married Lord St. Simon, of course I'd have done

my duty by him. We can't command our love, but we can our

actions. I went to the altar with him with the intention to make

him just as good a wife as it was in me to be. But you may

imagine what I felt when, just as I came to the altar rails, I

glanced back and saw Frank standing and looking at me out of the

first pew. I thought it was his ghost at first; but when I looked

again there he was still, with a kind of question in his eyes, as

if to ask me whether I were glad or sorry to see him. I wonder I

didn't drop. I know that everything was turning round, and the

words of the clergyman were just like the buzz of a bee in my

ear. I didn't know what to do. Should I stop the service and make

a scene in the church? I glanced at him again, and he seemed to

know what I was thinking, for he raised his finger to his lips to

tell me to be still. Then I saw him scribble on a piece of paper,

and I knew that he was writing me a note. As I passed his pew on

the way out I dropped my bouquet over to him, and he slipped the

note into my hand when he returned me the flowers. It was only a

line asking me to join him when he made the sign to me to do so.

Of course I never doubted for a moment that my first duty was now

to him, and I determined to do just whatever he might direct.

"When I got back I told my maid, who had known him in California,

and had always been his friend. I ordered her to say nothing, but

to get a few things packed and my ulster ready. I know I ought to

have spoken to Lord St. Simon, but it was dreadful hard before

his mother and all those great people. I just made up my mind to

run away and explain afterwards. I hadn't been at the table ten

minutes before I saw Frank out of the window at the other side of

the road. He beckoned to me and then began walking into the Park.

I slipped out, put on my things, and followed him. Some woman

came talking something or other about Lord St. Simon to

me--seemed to me from the little I heard as if he had a little

secret of his own before marriage also--but I managed to get away

from her and soon overtook Frank. We got into a cab together, and

away we drove to some lodgings he had taken in Gordon Square, and

that was my true wedding after all those years of waiting. Frank

had been a prisoner among the Apaches, had escaped, came on to

'Frisco, found that I had given him up for dead and had gone to

England, followed me there, and had come upon me at last on the

very morning of my second wedding."

"I saw it in a paper," explained the American. "It gave the name

and the church but not where the lady lived."

"Then we had a talk as to what we should do, and Frank was all

for openness, but I was so ashamed of it all that I felt as if I

should like to vanish away and never see any of them again--just

sending a line to pa, perhaps, to show him that I was alive. It

was awful to me to think of all those lords and ladies sitting

round that breakfast-table and waiting for me to come back. So

Frank took my wedding-clothes and things and made a bundle of

them, so that I should not be traced, and dropped them away

somewhere where no one could find them. It is likely that we

should have gone on to Paris to-morrow, only that this good

gentleman, Mr. Holmes, came round to us this evening, though how

he found us is more than I can think, and he showed us very

clearly and kindly that I was wrong and that Frank was right, and

that we should be putting ourselves in the wrong if we were so

secret. Then he offered to give us a chance of talking to Lord

St. Simon alone, and so we came right away round to his rooms at

once. Now, Robert, you have heard it all, and I am very sorry if

I have given you pain, and I hope that you do not think very

meanly of me."

Lord St. Simon had by no means relaxed his rigid attitude, but

had listened with a frowning brow and a compressed lip to this

long narrative.

"Excuse me," he said, "but it is not my custom to discuss my most

intimate personal affairs in this public manner."

"Then you won't forgive me? You won't shake hands before I go?"

"Oh, certainly, if it would give you any pleasure." He put out

his hand and coldly grasped that which she extended to him.

"I had hoped," suggested Holmes, "that you would have joined us

in a friendly supper."

"I think that there you ask a little too much," responded his

Lordship. "I may be forced to acquiesce in these recent

developments, but I can hardly be expected to make merry over

them. I think that with your permission I will now wish you all a

very good-night." He included us all in a sweeping bow and

stalked out of the room.

"Then I trust that you at least will honour me with your

company," said Sherlock Holmes. "It is always a joy to meet an

American, Mr. Moulton, for I am one of those who believe that the

folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in far-gone

years will not prevent our children from being some day citizens

of the same world-wide country under a flag which shall be a

quartering of the Union Jack with the Stars and Stripes."

"The case has been an interesting one," remarked Holmes when our

visitors had left us, "because it serves to show very clearly how

simple the explanation may be of an affair which at first sight

seems to be almost inexplicable. Nothing could be more natural

than the sequence of events as narrated by this lady, and nothing

stranger than the result when viewed, for instance, by Mr.

Lestrade of Scotland Yard."

"You were not yourself at fault at all, then?"

"From the first, two facts were very obvious to me, the one that

the lady had been quite willing to undergo the wedding ceremony,

the other that she had repented of it within a few minutes of

returning home. Obviously something had occurred during the

morning, then, to cause her to change her mind. What could that

something be? She could not have spoken to anyone when she was

out, for she had been in the company of the bridegroom. Had she

seen someone, then? If she had, it must be someone from America

because she had spent so short a time in this country that she

could hardly have allowed anyone to acquire so deep an influence

over her that the mere sight of him would induce her to change

her plans so completely. You see we have already arrived, by a

process of exclusion, at the idea that she might have seen an

American. Then who could this American be, and why should he

possess so much influence over her? It might be a lover; it might

be a husband. Her young womanhood had, I knew, been spent in

rough scenes and under strange conditions. So far I had got

before I ever heard Lord St. Simon's narrative. When he told us

of a man in a pew, of the change in the bride's manner, of so

transparent a device for obtaining a note as the dropping of a

bouquet, of her resort to her confidential maid, and of her very

significant allusion to claim-jumping--which in miners' parlance

means taking possession of that which another person has a prior

claim to--the whole situation became absolutely clear. She had

gone off with a man, and the man was either a lover or was a

previous husband--the chances being in favour of the latter."

"And how in the world did you find them?"

"It might have been difficult, but friend Lestrade held

information in his hands the value of which he did not himself

know. The initials were, of course, of the highest importance,

but more valuable still was it to know that within a week he had

settled his bill at one of the most select London hotels."

"How did you deduce the select?"

"By the select prices. Eight shillings for a bed and eightpence

for a glass of sherry pointed to one of the most expensive

hotels. There are not many in London which charge at that rate.

In the second one which I visited in Northumberland Avenue, I

learned by an inspection of the book that Francis H. Moulton, an

American gentleman, had left only the day before, and on looking

over the entries against him, I came upon the very items which I

had seen in the duplicate bill. His letters were to be forwarded

to 226 Gordon Square; so thither I travelled, and being fortunate

enough to find the loving couple at home, I ventured to give them

some paternal advice and to point out to them that it would be

better in every way that they should make their position a little

clearer both to the general public and to Lord St. Simon in

particular. I invited them to meet him here, and, as you see, I

made him keep the appointment."

"But with no very good result," I remarked. "His conduct was

certainly not very gracious."

"Ah, Watson," said Holmes, smiling, "perhaps you would not be

very gracious either, if, after all the trouble of wooing and

wedding, you found yourself deprived in an instant of wife and of

fortune. I think that we may judge Lord St. Simon very mercifully

and thank our stars that we are never likely to find ourselves in

the same position. Draw your chair up and hand me my violin, for

the only problem we have still to solve is how to while away

these bleak autumnal evenings."

XI. THE ADVENTURE OF THE BERYL CORONET

"Holmes," said I as I stood one morning in our bow-window looking

down the street, "here is a madman coming along. It seems rather

sad that his relatives should allow him to come out alone."

My friend rose lazily from his armchair and stood with his hands

in the pockets of his dressing-gown, looking over my shoulder. It

was a bright, crisp February morning, and the snow of the day

before still lay deep upon the ground, shimmering brightly in the

wintry sun. Down the centre of Baker Street it had been ploughed

into a brown crumbly band by the traffic, but at either side and

on the heaped-up edges of the foot-paths it still lay as white as

when it fell. The grey pavement had been cleaned and scraped, but

was still dangerously slippery, so that there were fewer

passengers than usual. Indeed, from the direction of the

Metropolitan Station no one was coming save the single gentleman

whose eccentric conduct had drawn my attention.

He was a man of about fifty, tall, portly, and imposing, with a

massive, strongly marked face and a commanding figure. He was

dressed in a sombre yet rich style, in black frock-coat, shining

hat, neat brown gaiters, and well-cut pearl-grey trousers. Yet

his actions were in absurd contrast to the dignity of his dress

and features, for he was running hard, with occasional little

springs, such as a weary man gives who is little accustomed to

set any tax upon his legs. As he ran he jerked his hands up and

down, waggled his head, and writhed his face into the most

extraordinary contortions.

"What on earth can be the matter with him?" I asked. "He is

looking up at the numbers of the houses."

"I believe that he is coming here," said Holmes, rubbing his

hands.

"Here?"

"Yes; I rather think he is coming to consult me professionally. I

think that I recognise the symptoms. Ha! did I not tell you?" As

he spoke, the man, puffing and blowing, rushed at our door and

pulled at our bell until the whole house resounded with the

clanging.

A few moments later he was in our room, still puffing, still

gesticulating, but with so fixed a look of grief and despair in

his eyes that our smiles were turned in an instant to horror and

pity. For a while he could not get his words out, but swayed his

body and plucked at his hair like one who has been driven to the

extreme limits of his reason. Then, suddenly springing to his

feet, he beat his head against the wall with such force that we

both rushed upon him and tore him away to the centre of the room.

Sherlock Holmes pushed him down into the easy-chair and, sitting

beside him, patted his hand and chatted with him in the easy,

soothing tones which he knew so well how to employ.

"You have come to me to tell your story, have you not?" said he.

"You are fatigued with your haste. Pray wait until you have

recovered yourself, and then I shall be most happy to look into

any little problem which you may submit to me."

The man sat for a minute or more with a heaving chest, fighting

against his emotion. Then he passed his handkerchief over his

brow, set his lips tight, and turned his face towards us.

"No doubt you think me mad?" said he.

"I see that you have had some great trouble," responded Holmes.

"God knows I have!--a trouble which is enough to unseat my

reason, so sudden and so terrible is it. Public disgrace I might

have faced, although I am a man whose character has never yet

borne a stain. Private affliction also is the lot of every man;

but the two coming together, and in so frightful a form, have

been enough to shake my very soul. Besides, it is not I alone.

The very noblest in the land may suffer unless some way be found

out of this horrible affair."

"Pray compose yourself, sir," said Holmes, "and let me have a

clear account of who you are and what it is that has befallen

you."

"My name," answered our visitor, "is probably familiar to your

ears. I am Alexander Holder, of the banking firm of Holder &

Stevenson, of Threadneedle Street."

The name was indeed well known to us as belonging to the senior

partner in the second largest private banking concern in the City

of London. What could have happened, then, to bring one of the

foremost citizens of London to this most pitiable pass? We

waited, all curiosity, until with another effort he braced

himself to tell his story.

"I feel that time is of value," said he; "that is why I hastened

here when the police inspector suggested that I should secure

your co-operation. I came to Baker Street by the Underground and

hurried from there on foot, for the cabs go slowly through this

snow. That is why I was so out of breath, for I am a man who

takes very little exercise. I feel better now, and I will put the

facts before you as shortly and yet as clearly as I can.

"It is, of course, well known to you that in a successful banking

business as much depends upon our being able to find remunerative

investments for our funds as upon our increasing our connection

and the number of our depositors. One of our most lucrative means

of laying out money is in the shape of loans, where the security

is unimpeachable. We have done a good deal in this direction

during the last few years, and there are many noble families to

whom we have advanced large sums upon the security of their

pictures, libraries, or plate.

"Yesterday morning I was seated in my office at the bank when a

card was brought in to me by one of the clerks. I started when I

saw the name, for it was that of none other than--well, perhaps

even to you I had better say no more than that it was a name

which is a household word all over the earth--one of the highest,

noblest, most exalted names in England. I was overwhelmed by the

honour and attempted, when he entered, to say so, but he plunged

at once into business with the air of a man who wishes to hurry

quickly through a disagreeable task.

"'Mr. Holder,' said he, 'I have been informed that you are in the

habit of advancing money.'

"'The firm does so when the security is good.' I answered.

"'It is absolutely essential to me,' said he, 'that I should have

50,000 pounds at once. I could, of course, borrow so trifling a

sum ten times over from my friends, but I much prefer to make it

a matter of business and to carry out that business myself. In my

position you can readily understand that it is unwise to place

one's self under obligations.'

"'For how long, may I ask, do you want this sum?' I asked.

"'Next Monday I have a large sum due to me, and I shall then most

certainly repay what you advance, with whatever interest you

think it right to charge. But it is very essential to me that the

money should be paid at once.'

"'I should be happy to advance it without further parley from my

own private purse,' said I, 'were it not that the strain would be

rather more than it could bear. If, on the other hand, I am to do

it in the name of the firm, then in justice to my partner I must

insist that, even in your case, every businesslike precaution

should be taken.'

"'I should much prefer to have it so,' said he, raising up a

square, black morocco case which he had laid beside his chair.

'You have doubtless heard of the Beryl Coronet?'

"'One of the most precious public possessions of the empire,'

said I.

"'Precisely.' He opened the case, and there, imbedded in soft,

flesh-coloured velvet, lay the magnificent piece of jewellery

which he had named. 'There are thirty-nine enormous beryls,' said

he, 'and the price of the gold chasing is incalculable. The

lowest estimate would put the worth of the coronet at double the

sum which I have asked. I am prepared to leave it with you as my

security.'

"I took the precious case into my hands and looked in some

perplexity from it to my illustrious client.

"'You doubt its value?' he asked.

"'Not at all. I only doubt--'

"'The propriety of my leaving it. You may set your mind at rest

about that. I should not dream of doing so were it not absolutely

certain that I should be able in four days to reclaim it. It is a

pure matter of form. Is the security sufficient?'

"'Ample.'

"'You understand, Mr. Holder, that I am giving you a strong proof

of the confidence which I have in you, founded upon all that I

have heard of you. I rely upon you not only to be discreet and to

refrain from all gossip upon the matter but, above all, to

preserve this coronet with every possible precaution because I

need not say that a great public scandal would be caused if any

harm were to befall it. Any injury to it would be almost as

serious as its complete loss, for there are no beryls in the

world to match these, and it would be impossible to replace them.

I leave it with you, however, with every confidence, and I shall

call for it in person on Monday morning.'

"Seeing that my client was anxious to leave, I said no more but,

calling for my cashier, I ordered him to pay over fifty 1000

pound notes. When I was alone once more, however, with the

precious case lying upon the table in front of me, I could not

but think with some misgivings of the immense responsibility

which it entailed upon me. There could be no doubt that, as it

was a national possession, a horrible scandal would ensue if any

misfortune should occur to it. I already regretted having ever

consented to take charge of it. However, it was too late to alter

the matter now, so I locked it up in my private safe and turned

once more to my work.

"When evening came I felt that it would be an imprudence to leave

so precious a thing in the office behind me. Bankers' safes had

been forced before now, and why should not mine be? If so, how

terrible would be the position in which I should find myself! I

determined, therefore, that for the next few days I would always

carry the case backward and forward with me, so that it might

never be really out of my reach. With this intention, I called a

cab and drove out to my house at Streatham, carrying the jewel

with me. I did not breathe freely until I had taken it upstairs

and locked it in the bureau of my dressing-room.

"And now a word as to my household, Mr. Holmes, for I wish you to

thoroughly understand the situation. My groom and my page sleep

out of the house, and may be set aside altogether. I have three

maid-servants who have been with me a number of years and whose

absolute reliability is quite above suspicion. Another, Lucy

Parr, the second waiting-maid, has only been in my service a few

months. She came with an excellent character, however, and has

always given me satisfaction. She is a very pretty girl and has

attracted admirers who have occasionally hung about the place.

That is the only drawback which we have found to her, but we

believe her to be a thoroughly good girl in every way.

"So much for the servants. My family itself is so small that it

will not take me long to describe it. I am a widower and have an

only son, Arthur. He has been a disappointment to me, Mr.

Holmes--a grievous disappointment. I have no doubt that I am

myself to blame. People tell me that I have spoiled him. Very

likely I have. When my dear wife died I felt that he was all I

had to love. I could not bear to see the smile fade even for a

moment from his face. I have never denied him a wish. Perhaps it

would have been better for both of us had I been sterner, but I

meant it for the best.

"It was naturally my intention that he should succeed me in my

business, but he was not of a business turn. He was wild,

wayward, and, to speak the truth, I could not trust him in the

handling of large sums of money. When he was young he became a

member of an aristocratic club, and there, having charming

manners, he was soon the intimate of a number of men with long

purses and expensive habits. He learned to play heavily at cards

and to squander money on the turf, until he had again and again

to come to me and implore me to give him an advance upon his

allowance, that he might settle his debts of honour. He tried

more than once to break away from the dangerous company which he

was keeping, but each time the influence of his friend, Sir

George Burnwell, was enough to draw him back again.

"And, indeed, I could not wonder that such a man as Sir George

Burnwell should gain an influence over him, for he has frequently

brought him to my house, and I have found myself that I could

hardly resist the fascination of his manner. He is older than

Arthur, a man of the world to his finger-tips, one who had been

everywhere, seen everything, a brilliant talker, and a man of

great personal beauty. Yet when I think of him in cold blood, far

away from the glamour of his presence, I am convinced from his

cynical speech and the look which I have caught in his eyes that

he is one who should be deeply distrusted. So I think, and so,

too, thinks my little Mary, who has a woman's quick insight into

character.

"And now there is only she to be described. She is my niece; but

when my brother died five years ago and left her alone in the

world I adopted her, and have looked upon her ever since as my

daughter. She is a sunbeam in my house--sweet, loving, beautiful,

a wonderful manager and housekeeper, yet as tender and quiet and

gentle as a woman could be. She is my right hand. I do not know

what I could do without her. In only one matter has she ever gone

against my wishes. Twice my boy has asked her to marry him, for

he loves her devotedly, but each time she has refused him. I

think that if anyone could have drawn him into the right path it

would have been she, and that his marriage might have changed his

whole life; but now, alas! it is too late--forever too late!

"Now, Mr. Holmes, you know the people who live under my roof, and

I shall continue with my miserable story.

"When we were taking coffee in the drawing-room that night after

dinner, I told Arthur and Mary my experience, and of the precious

treasure which we had under our roof, suppressing only the name

of my client. Lucy Parr, who had brought in the coffee, had, I am

sure, left the room; but I cannot swear that the door was closed.

Mary and Arthur were much interested and wished to see the famous

coronet, but I thought it better not to disturb it.

"'Where have you put it?' asked Arthur.

"'In my own bureau.'

"'Well, I hope to goodness the house won't be burgled during the

night.' said he.

"'It is locked up,' I answered.

"'Oh, any old key will fit that bureau. When I was a youngster I

have opened it myself with the key of the box-room cupboard.'

"He often had a wild way of talking, so that I thought little of

what he said. He followed me to my room, however, that night with

a very grave face.

"'Look here, dad,' said he with his eyes cast down, 'can you let

me have 200 pounds?'

"'No, I cannot!' I answered sharply. 'I have been far too

generous with you in money matters.'

"'You have been very kind,' said he, 'but I must have this money,

or else I can never show my face inside the club again.'

"'And a very good thing, too!' I cried.

"'Yes, but you would not have me leave it a dishonoured man,'

said he. 'I could not bear the disgrace. I must raise the money

in some way, and if you will not let me have it, then I must try

other means.'

"I was very angry, for this was the third demand during the

month. 'You shall not have a farthing from me,' I cried, on which

he bowed and left the room without another word.

"When he was gone I unlocked my bureau, made sure that my

treasure was safe, and locked it again. Then I started to go

round the house to see that all was secure--a duty which I

usually leave to Mary but which I thought it well to perform

myself that night. As I came down the stairs I saw Mary herself

at the side window of the hall, which she closed and fastened as

I approached.

"'Tell me, dad,' said she, looking, I thought, a little

disturbed, 'did you give Lucy, the maid, leave to go out

to-night?'

"'Certainly not.'

"'She came in just now by the back door. I have no doubt that she

has only been to the side gate to see someone, but I think that

it is hardly safe and should be stopped.'

"'You must speak to her in the morning, or I will if you prefer

it. Are you sure that everything is fastened?'

"'Quite sure, dad.'

"'Then, good-night.' I kissed her and went up to my bedroom

again, where I was soon asleep.

"I am endeavouring to tell you everything, Mr. Holmes, which may

have any bearing upon the case, but I beg that you will question

me upon any point which I do not make clear."

"On the contrary, your statement is singularly lucid."

"I come to a part of my story now in which I should wish to be

particularly so. I am not a very heavy sleeper, and the anxiety

in my mind tended, no doubt, to make me even less so than usual.

About two in the morning, then, I was awakened by some sound in

the house. It had ceased ere I was wide awake, but it had left an

impression behind it as though a window had gently closed

somewhere. I lay listening with all my ears. Suddenly, to my

horror, there was a distinct sound of footsteps moving softly in

the next room. I slipped out of bed, all palpitating with fear,

and peeped round the corner of my dressing-room door.

"'Arthur!' I screamed, 'you villain! you thief! How dare you

touch that coronet?'

"The gas was half up, as I had left it, and my unhappy boy,

dressed only in his shirt and trousers, was standing beside the

light, holding the coronet in his hands. He appeared to be

wrenching at it, or bending it with all his strength. At my cry

he dropped it from his grasp and turned as pale as death. I

snatched it up and examined it. One of the gold corners, with

three of the beryls in it, was missing.

"'You blackguard!' I shouted, beside myself with rage. 'You have

destroyed it! You have dishonoured me forever! Where are the

jewels which you have stolen?'

"'Stolen!' he cried.

"'Yes, thief!' I roared, shaking him by the shoulder.

"'There are none missing. There cannot be any missing,' said he.

"'There are three missing. And you know where they are. Must I

call you a liar as well as a thief? Did I not see you trying to

tear off another piece?'

"'You have called me names enough,' said he, 'I will not stand it

any longer. I shall not say another word about this business,

since you have chosen to insult me. I will leave your house in

the morning and make my own way in the world.'

"'You shall leave it in the hands of the police!' I cried

half-mad with grief and rage. 'I shall have this matter probed to

the bottom.'

"'You shall learn nothing from me,' said he with a passion such

as I should not have thought was in his nature. 'If you choose to

call the police, let the police find what they can.'

"By this time the whole house was astir, for I had raised my

voice in my anger. Mary was the first to rush into my room, and,

at the sight of the coronet and of Arthur's face, she read the

whole story and, with a scream, fell down senseless on the

ground. I sent the house-maid for the police and put the

investigation into their hands at once. When the inspector and a

constable entered the house, Arthur, who had stood sullenly with

his arms folded, asked me whether it was my intention to charge

him with theft. I answered that it had ceased to be a private

matter, but had become a public one, since the ruined coronet was

national property. I was determined that the law should have its

way in everything.

"'At least,' said he, 'you will not have me arrested at once. It

would be to your advantage as well as mine if I might leave the

house for five minutes.'

"'That you may get away, or perhaps that you may conceal what you

have stolen,' said I. And then, realising the dreadful position

in which I was placed, I implored him to remember that not only

my honour but that of one who was far greater than I was at

stake; and that he threatened to raise a scandal which would

convulse the nation. He might avert it all if he would but tell

me what he had done with the three missing stones.

"'You may as well face the matter,' said I; 'you have been caught

in the act, and no confession could make your guilt more heinous.

If you but make such reparation as is in your power, by telling

us where the beryls are, all shall be forgiven and forgotten.'

"'Keep your forgiveness for those who ask for it,' he answered,

turning away from me with a sneer. I saw that he was too hardened

for any words of mine to influence him. There was but one way for

it. I called in the inspector and gave him into custody. A search

was made at once not only of his person but of his room and of

every portion of the house where he could possibly have concealed

the gems; but no trace of them could be found, nor would the

wretched boy open his mouth for all our persuasions and our

threats. This morning he was removed to a cell, and I, after

going through all the police formalities, have hurried round to

you to implore you to use your skill in unravelling the matter.

The police have openly confessed that they can at present make

nothing of it. You may go to any expense which you think

necessary. I have already offered a reward of 1000 pounds. My

God, what shall I do! I have lost my honour, my gems, and my son

in one night. Oh, what shall I do!"

He put a hand on either side of his head and rocked himself to

and fro, droning to himself like a child whose grief has got

beyond words.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for some few minutes, with his brows

knitted and his eyes fixed upon the fire.

"Do you receive much company?" he asked.

"None save my partner with his family and an occasional friend of

Arthur's. Sir George Burnwell has been several times lately. No

one else, I think."

"Do you go out much in society?"

"Arthur does. Mary and I stay at home. We neither of us care for

it."

"That is unusual in a young girl."

"She is of a quiet nature. Besides, she is not so very young. She

is four-and-twenty."

"This matter, from what you say, seems to have been a shock to

her also."

"Terrible! She is even more affected than I."

"You have neither of you any doubt as to your son's guilt?"

"How can we have when I saw him with my own eyes with the coronet

in his hands."

"I hardly consider that a conclusive proof. Was the remainder of

the coronet at all injured?"

"Yes, it was twisted."

"Do you not think, then, that he might have been trying to

straighten it?"

"God bless you! You are doing what you can for him and for me.

But it is too heavy a task. What was he doing there at all? If

his purpose were innocent, why did he not say so?"

"Precisely. And if it were guilty, why did he not invent a lie?

His silence appears to me to cut both ways. There are several

singular points about the case. What did the police think of the

noise which awoke you from your sleep?"

"They considered that it might be caused by Arthur's closing his

bedroom door."

"A likely story! As if a man bent on felony would slam his door

so as to wake a household. What did they say, then, of the

disappearance of these gems?"

"They are still sounding the planking and probing the furniture

in the hope of finding them."

"Have they thought of looking outside the house?"

"Yes, they have shown extraordinary energy. The whole garden has

already been minutely examined."

"Now, my dear sir," said Holmes, "is it not obvious to you now

that this matter really strikes very much deeper than either you

or the police were at first inclined to think? It appeared to you

to be a simple case; to me it seems exceedingly complex. Consider

what is involved by your theory. You suppose that your son came

down from his bed, went, at great risk, to your dressing-room,

opened your bureau, took out your coronet, broke off by main

force a small portion of it, went off to some other place,

concealed three gems out of the thirty-nine, with such skill that

nobody can find them, and then returned with the other thirty-six

into the room in which he exposed himself to the greatest danger

of being discovered. I ask you now, is such a theory tenable?"

"But what other is there?" cried the banker with a gesture of

despair. "If his motives were innocent, why does he not explain

them?"

"It is our task to find that out," replied Holmes; "so now, if

you please, Mr. Holder, we will set off for Streatham together,

and devote an hour to glancing a little more closely into

details."

My friend insisted upon my accompanying them in their expedition,

which I was eager enough to do, for my curiosity and sympathy

were deeply stirred by the story to which we had listened. I

confess that the guilt of the banker's son appeared to me to be

as obvious as it did to his unhappy father, but still I had such

faith in Holmes' judgment that I felt that there must be some

grounds for hope as long as he was dissatisfied with the accepted

explanation. He hardly spoke a word the whole way out to the

southern suburb, but sat with his chin upon his breast and his

hat drawn over his eyes, sunk in the deepest thought. Our client

appeared to have taken fresh heart at the little glimpse of hope

which had been presented to him, and he even broke into a

desultory chat with me over his business affairs. A short railway

journey and a shorter walk brought us to Fairbank, the modest

residence of the great financier.

Fairbank was a good-sized square house of white stone, standing

back a little from the road. A double carriage-sweep, with a

snow-clad lawn, stretched down in front to two large iron gates

which closed the entrance. On the right side was a small wooden

thicket, which led into a narrow path between two neat hedges

stretching from the road to the kitchen door, and forming the

tradesmen's entrance. On the left ran a lane which led to the

stables, and was not itself within the grounds at all, being a

public, though little used, thoroughfare. Holmes left us standing

at the door and walked slowly all round the house, across the

front, down the tradesmen's path, and so round by the garden

behind into the stable lane. So long was he that Mr. Holder and I

went into the dining-room and waited by the fire until he should

return. We were sitting there in silence when the door opened and

a young lady came in. She was rather above the middle height,

slim, with dark hair and eyes, which seemed the darker against

the absolute pallor of her skin. I do not think that I have ever

seen such deadly paleness in a woman's face. Her lips, too, were

bloodless, but her eyes were flushed with crying. As she swept

silently into the room she impressed me with a greater sense of

grief than the banker had done in the morning, and it was the

more striking in her as she was evidently a woman of strong

character, with immense capacity for self-restraint. Disregarding

my presence, she went straight to her uncle and passed her hand

over his head with a sweet womanly caress.

"You have given orders that Arthur should be liberated, have you

not, dad?" she asked.

"No, no, my girl, the matter must be probed to the bottom."

"But I am so sure that he is innocent. You know what woman's

instincts are. I know that he has done no harm and that you will

be sorry for having acted so harshly."

"Why is he silent, then, if he is innocent?"

"Who knows? Perhaps because he was so angry that you should

suspect him."

"How could I help suspecting him, when I actually saw him with

the coronet in his hand?"

"Oh, but he had only picked it up to look at it. Oh, do, do take

my word for it that he is innocent. Let the matter drop and say

no more. It is so dreadful to think of our dear Arthur in

prison!"

"I shall never let it drop until the gems are found--never, Mary!

Your affection for Arthur blinds you as to the awful consequences

to me. Far from hushing the thing up, I have brought a gentleman

down from London to inquire more deeply into it."

"This gentleman?" she asked, facing round to me.

"No, his friend. He wished us to leave him alone. He is round in

the stable lane now."

"The stable lane?" She raised her dark eyebrows. "What can he

hope to find there? Ah! this, I suppose, is he. I trust, sir,

that you will succeed in proving, what I feel sure is the truth,

that my cousin Arthur is innocent of this crime."

"I fully share your opinion, and I trust, with you, that we may

prove it," returned Holmes, going back to the mat to knock the

snow from his shoes. "I believe I have the honour of addressing

Miss Mary Holder. Might I ask you a question or two?"

"Pray do, sir, if it may help to clear this horrible affair up."

"You heard nothing yourself last night?"

"Nothing, until my uncle here began to speak loudly. I heard

that, and I came down."

"You shut up the windows and doors the night before. Did you

fasten all the windows?"

"Yes."

"Were they all fastened this morning?"

"Yes."

"You have a maid who has a sweetheart? I think that you remarked

to your uncle last night that she had been out to see him?"

"Yes, and she was the girl who waited in the drawing-room, and

who may have heard uncle's remarks about the coronet."

"I see. You infer that she may have gone out to tell her

sweetheart, and that the two may have planned the robbery."

"But what is the good of all these vague theories," cried the

banker impatiently, "when I have told you that I saw Arthur with

the coronet in his hands?"

"Wait a little, Mr. Holder. We must come back to that. About this

girl, Miss Holder. You saw her return by the kitchen door, I

presume?"

"Yes; when I went to see if the door was fastened for the night I

met her slipping in. I saw the man, too, in the gloom."

"Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes! he is the green-grocer who brings our vegetables round.

His name is Francis Prosper."

"He stood," said Holmes, "to the left of the door--that is to

say, farther up the path than is necessary to reach the door?"

"Yes, he did."

"And he is a man with a wooden leg?"

Something like fear sprang up in the young lady's expressive

black eyes. "Why, you are like a magician," said she. "How do you

know that?" She smiled, but there was no answering smile in

Holmes' thin, eager face.

"I should be very glad now to go upstairs," said he. "I shall

probably wish to go over the outside of the house again. Perhaps

I had better take a look at the lower windows before I go up."

He walked swiftly round from one to the other, pausing only at

the large one which looked from the hall onto the stable lane.

This he opened and made a very careful examination of the sill

with his powerful magnifying lens. "Now we shall go upstairs,"

said he at last.

The banker's dressing-room was a plainly furnished little

chamber, with a grey carpet, a large bureau, and a long mirror.

Holmes went to the bureau first and looked hard at the lock.

"Which key was used to open it?" he asked.

"That which my son himself indicated--that of the cupboard of the

lumber-room."

"Have you it here?"

"That is it on the dressing-table."

Sherlock Holmes took it up and opened the bureau.

"It is a noiseless lock," said he. "It is no wonder that it did

not wake you. This case, I presume, contains the coronet. We must

have a look at it." He opened the case, and taking out the diadem

he laid it upon the table. It was a magnificent specimen of the

jeweller's art, and the thirty-six stones were the finest that I

have ever seen. At one side of the coronet was a cracked edge,

where a corner holding three gems had been torn away.

"Now, Mr. Holder," said Holmes, "here is the corner which

corresponds to that which has been so unfortunately lost. Might I

beg that you will break it off."

The banker recoiled in horror. "I should not dream of trying,"

said he.

"Then I will." Holmes suddenly bent his strength upon it, but

without result. "I feel it give a little," said he; "but, though

I am exceptionally strong in the fingers, it would take me all my

time to break it. An ordinary man could not do it. Now, what do

you think would happen if I did break it, Mr. Holder? There would

be a noise like a pistol shot. Do you tell me that all this

happened within a few yards of your bed and that you heard

nothing of it?"

"I do not know what to think. It is all dark to me."

"But perhaps it may grow lighter as we go. What do you think,

Miss Holder?"

"I confess that I still share my uncle's perplexity."

"Your son had no shoes or slippers on when you saw him?"

"He had nothing on save only his trousers and shirt."

"Thank you. We have certainly been favoured with extraordinary

luck during this inquiry, and it will be entirely our own fault

if we do not succeed in clearing the matter up. With your

permission, Mr. Holder, I shall now continue my investigations

outside."

He went alone, at his own request, for he explained that any

unnecessary footmarks might make his task more difficult. For an

hour or more he was at work, returning at last with his feet

heavy with snow and his features as inscrutable as ever.

"I think that I have seen now all that there is to see, Mr.

Holder," said he; "I can serve you best by returning to my

rooms."

"But the gems, Mr. Holmes. Where are they?"

"I cannot tell."

The banker wrung his hands. "I shall never see them again!" he

cried. "And my son? You give me hopes?"

"My opinion is in no way altered."

"Then, for God's sake, what was this dark business which was

acted in my house last night?"

"If you can call upon me at my Baker Street rooms to-morrow

morning between nine and ten I shall be happy to do what I can to

make it clearer. I understand that you give me carte blanche to

act for you, provided only that I get back the gems, and that you

place no limit on the sum I may draw."

"I would give my fortune to have them back."

"Very good. I shall look into the matter between this and then.

Good-bye; it is just possible that I may have to come over here

again before evening."

It was obvious to me that my companion's mind was now made up

about the case, although what his conclusions were was more than

I could even dimly imagine. Several times during our homeward

journey I endeavoured to sound him upon the point, but he always

glided away to some other topic, until at last I gave it over in

despair. It was not yet three when we found ourselves in our

rooms once more. He hurried to his chamber and was down again in

a few minutes dressed as a common loafer. With his collar turned

up, his shiny, seedy coat, his red cravat, and his worn boots, he

was a perfect sample of the class.

"I think that this should do," said he, glancing into the glass

above the fireplace. "I only wish that you could come with me,

Watson, but I fear that it won't do. I may be on the trail in

this matter, or I may be following a will-o'-the-wisp, but I

shall soon know which it is. I hope that I may be back in a few

hours." He cut a slice of beef from the joint upon the sideboard,

sandwiched it between two rounds of bread, and thrusting this

rude meal into his pocket he started off upon his expedition.

I had just finished my tea when he returned, evidently in

excellent spirits, swinging an old elastic-sided boot in his

hand. He chucked it down into a corner and helped himself to a

cup of tea.

"I only looked in as I passed," said he. "I am going right on."

"Where to?"

"Oh, to the other side of the West End. It may be some time

before I get back. Don't wait up for me in case I should be

late."

"How are you getting on?"

"Oh, so so. Nothing to complain of. I have been out to Streatham

since I saw you last, but I did not call at the house. It is a

very sweet little problem, and I would not have missed it for a

good deal. However, I must not sit gossiping here, but must get

these disreputable clothes off and return to my highly

respectable self."

I could see by his manner that he had stronger reasons for

satisfaction than his words alone would imply. His eyes twinkled,

and there was even a touch of colour upon his sallow cheeks. He

hastened upstairs, and a few minutes later I heard the slam of

the hall door, which told me that he was off once more upon his

congenial hunt.

I waited until midnight, but there was no sign of his return, so

I retired to my room. It was no uncommon thing for him to be away

for days and nights on end when he was hot upon a scent, so that

his lateness caused me no surprise. I do not know at what hour he

came in, but when I came down to breakfast in the morning there

he was with a cup of coffee in one hand and the paper in the

other, as fresh and trim as possible.

"You will excuse my beginning without you, Watson," said he, "but

you remember that our client has rather an early appointment this

morning."

"Why, it is after nine now," I answered. "I should not be

surprised if that were he. I thought I heard a ring."

It was, indeed, our friend the financier. I was shocked by the

change which had come over him, for his face which was naturally

of a broad and massive mould, was now pinched and fallen in,

while his hair seemed to me at least a shade whiter. He entered

with a weariness and lethargy which was even more painful than

his violence of the morning before, and he dropped heavily into

the armchair which I pushed forward for him.

"I do not know what I have done to be so severely tried," said

he. "Only two days ago I was a happy and prosperous man, without

a care in the world. Now I am left to a lonely and dishonoured

age. One sorrow comes close upon the heels of another. My niece,

Mary, has deserted me."

"Deserted you?"

"Yes. Her bed this morning had not been slept in, her room was

empty, and a note for me lay upon the hall table. I had said to

her last night, in sorrow and not in anger, that if she had

married my boy all might have been well with him. Perhaps it was

thoughtless of me to say so. It is to that remark that she refers

in this note:

"'MY DEAREST UNCLE:--I feel that I have brought trouble upon you,

and that if I had acted differently this terrible misfortune

might never have occurred. I cannot, with this thought in my

mind, ever again be happy under your roof, and I feel that I must

leave you forever. Do not worry about my future, for that is

provided for; and, above all, do not search for me, for it will

be fruitless labour and an ill-service to me. In life or in

death, I am ever your loving,--MARY.'

"What could she mean by that note, Mr. Holmes? Do you think it

points to suicide?"

"No, no, nothing of the kind. It is perhaps the best possible

solution. I trust, Mr. Holder, that you are nearing the end of

your troubles."

"Ha! You say so! You have heard something, Mr. Holmes; you have

learned something! Where are the gems?"

"You would not think 1000 pounds apiece an excessive sum for

them?"

"I would pay ten."

"That would be unnecessary. Three thousand will cover the matter.

And there is a little reward, I fancy. Have you your check-book?

Here is a pen. Better make it out for 4000 pounds."

With a dazed face the banker made out the required check. Holmes

walked over to his desk, took out a little triangular piece of

gold with three gems in it, and threw it down upon the table.

With a shriek of joy our client clutched it up.

"You have it!" he gasped. "I am saved! I am saved!"

The reaction of joy was as passionate as his grief had been, and

he hugged his recovered gems to his bosom.

"There is one other thing you owe, Mr. Holder," said Sherlock

Holmes rather sternly.

"Owe!" He caught up a pen. "Name the sum, and I will pay it."

"No, the debt is not to me. You owe a very humble apology to that

noble lad, your son, who has carried himself in this matter as I

should be proud to see my own son do, should I ever chance to

have one."

"Then it was not Arthur who took them?"

"I told you yesterday, and I repeat to-day, that it was not."

"You are sure of it! Then let us hurry to him at once to let him

know that the truth is known."

"He knows it already. When I had cleared it all up I had an

interview with him, and finding that he would not tell me the

story, I told it to him, on which he had to confess that I was

right and to add the very few details which were not yet quite

clear to me. Your news of this morning, however, may open his

lips."

"For heaven's sake, tell me, then, what is this extraordinary

mystery!"

"I will do so, and I will show you the steps by which I reached

it. And let me say to you, first, that which it is hardest for me

to say and for you to hear: there has been an understanding

between Sir George Burnwell and your niece Mary. They have now

fled together."

"My Mary? Impossible!"

"It is unfortunately more than possible; it is certain. Neither

you nor your son knew the true character of this man when you

admitted him into your family circle. He is one of the most

dangerous men in England--a ruined gambler, an absolutely

desperate villain, a man without heart or conscience. Your niece

knew nothing of such men. When he breathed his vows to her, as he

had done to a hundred before her, she flattered herself that she

alone had touched his heart. The devil knows best what he said,

but at least she became his tool and was in the habit of seeing

him nearly every evening."

"I cannot, and I will not, believe it!" cried the banker with an

ashen face.

"I will tell you, then, what occurred in your house last night.

Your niece, when you had, as she thought, gone to your room,

slipped down and talked to her lover through the window which

leads into the stable lane. His footmarks had pressed right

through the snow, so long had he stood there. She told him of the

coronet. His wicked lust for gold kindled at the news, and he

bent her to his will. I have no doubt that she loved you, but

there are women in whom the love of a lover extinguishes all

other loves, and I think that she must have been one. She had

hardly listened to his instructions when she saw you coming

downstairs, on which she closed the window rapidly and told you

about one of the servants' escapade with her wooden-legged lover,

which was all perfectly true.

"Your boy, Arthur, went to bed after his interview with you but

he slept badly on account of his uneasiness about his club debts.

In the middle of the night he heard a soft tread pass his door,

so he rose and, looking out, was surprised to see his cousin

walking very stealthily along the passage until she disappeared

into your dressing-room. Petrified with astonishment, the lad

slipped on some clothes and waited there in the dark to see what

would come of this strange affair. Presently she emerged from the

room again, and in the light of the passage-lamp your son saw

that she carried the precious coronet in her hands. She passed

down the stairs, and he, thrilling with horror, ran along and

slipped behind the curtain near your door, whence he could see

what passed in the hall beneath. He saw her stealthily open the

window, hand out the coronet to someone in the gloom, and then

closing it once more hurry back to her room, passing quite close

to where he stood hid behind the curtain.

"As long as she was on the scene he could not take any action

without a horrible exposure of the woman whom he loved. But the

instant that she was gone he realised how crushing a misfortune

this would be for you, and how all-important it was to set it

right. He rushed down, just as he was, in his bare feet, opened

the window, sprang out into the snow, and ran down the lane,

where he could see a dark figure in the moonlight. Sir George

Burnwell tried to get away, but Arthur caught him, and there was

a struggle between them, your lad tugging at one side of the

coronet, and his opponent at the other. In the scuffle, your son

struck Sir George and cut him over the eye. Then something

suddenly snapped, and your son, finding that he had the coronet

in his hands, rushed back, closed the window, ascended to your

room, and had just observed that the coronet had been twisted in

the struggle and was endeavouring to straighten it when you

appeared upon the scene."

"Is it possible?" gasped the banker.

"You then roused his anger by calling him names at a moment when

he felt that he had deserved your warmest thanks. He could not

explain the true state of affairs without betraying one who

certainly deserved little enough consideration at his hands. He

took the more chivalrous view, however, and preserved her

secret."

"And that was why she shrieked and fainted when she saw the

coronet," cried Mr. Holder. "Oh, my God! what a blind fool I have

been! And his asking to be allowed to go out for five minutes!

The dear fellow wanted to see if the missing piece were at the

scene of the struggle. How cruelly I have misjudged him!"

"When I arrived at the house," continued Holmes, "I at once went

very carefully round it to observe if there were any traces in

the snow which might help me. I knew that none had fallen since

the evening before, and also that there had been a strong frost

to preserve impressions. I passed along the tradesmen's path, but

found it all trampled down and indistinguishable. Just beyond it,

however, at the far side of the kitchen door, a woman had stood

and talked with a man, whose round impressions on one side showed

that he had a wooden leg. I could even tell that they had been

disturbed, for the woman had run back swiftly to the door, as was

shown by the deep toe and light heel marks, while Wooden-leg had

waited a little, and then had gone away. I thought at the time

that this might be the maid and her sweetheart, of whom you had

already spoken to me, and inquiry showed it was so. I passed

round the garden without seeing anything more than random tracks,

which I took to be the police; but when I got into the stable

lane a very long and complex story was written in the snow in

front of me.

"There was a double line of tracks of a booted man, and a second

double line which I saw with delight belonged to a man with naked

feet. I was at once convinced from what you had told me that the

latter was your son. The first had walked both ways, but the

other had run swiftly, and as his tread was marked in places over

the depression of the boot, it was obvious that he had passed

after the other. I followed them up and found they led to the

hall window, where Boots had worn all the snow away while

waiting. Then I walked to the other end, which was a hundred

yards or more down the lane. I saw where Boots had faced round,

where the snow was cut up as though there had been a struggle,

and, finally, where a few drops of blood had fallen, to show me

that I was not mistaken. Boots had then run down the lane, and

another little smudge of blood showed that it was he who had been

hurt. When he came to the highroad at the other end, I found that

the pavement had been cleared, so there was an end to that clue.

"On entering the house, however, I examined, as you remember, the

sill and framework of the hall window with my lens, and I could

at once see that someone had passed out. I could distinguish the

outline of an instep where the wet foot had been placed in coming

in. I was then beginning to be able to form an opinion as to what

had occurred. A man had waited outside the window; someone had

brought the gems; the deed had been overseen by your son; he had

pursued the thief; had struggled with him; they had each tugged

at the coronet, their united strength causing injuries which

neither alone could have effected. He had returned with the

prize, but had left a fragment in the grasp of his opponent. So

far I was clear. The question now was, who was the man and who

was it brought him the coronet?

"It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the

impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the

truth. Now, I knew that it was not you who had brought it down,

so there only remained your niece and the maids. But if it were

the maids, why should your son allow himself to be accused in

their place? There could be no possible reason. As he loved his

cousin, however, there was an excellent explanation why he should

retain her secret--the more so as the secret was a disgraceful

one. When I remembered that you had seen her at that window, and

how she had fainted on seeing the coronet again, my conjecture

became a certainty.

"And who could it be who was her confederate? A lover evidently,

for who else could outweigh the love and gratitude which she must

feel to you? I knew that you went out little, and that your

circle of friends was a very limited one. But among them was Sir

George Burnwell. I had heard of him before as being a man of evil

reputation among women. It must have been he who wore those boots

and retained the missing gems. Even though he knew that Arthur

had discovered him, he might still flatter himself that he was

safe, for the lad could not say a word without compromising his

own family.

"Well, your own good sense will suggest what measures I took

next. I went in the shape of a loafer to Sir George's house,

managed to pick up an acquaintance with his valet, learned that

his master had cut his head the night before, and, finally, at

the expense of six shillings, made all sure by buying a pair of

his cast-off shoes. With these I journeyed down to Streatham and

saw that they exactly fitted the tracks."

"I saw an ill-dressed vagabond in the lane yesterday evening,"

said Mr. Holder.

"Precisely. It was I. I found that I had my man, so I came home

and changed my clothes. It was a delicate part which I had to

play then, for I saw that a prosecution must be avoided to avert

scandal, and I knew that so astute a villain would see that our

hands were tied in the matter. I went and saw him. At first, of

course, he denied everything. But when I gave him every

particular that had occurred, he tried to bluster and took down a

life-preserver from the wall. I knew my man, however, and I

clapped a pistol to his head before he could strike. Then he

became a little more reasonable. I told him that we would give

him a price for the stones he held--1000 pounds apiece. That

brought out the first signs of grief that he had shown. 'Why,

dash it all!' said he, 'I've let them go at six hundred for the

three!' I soon managed to get the address of the receiver who had

them, on promising him that there would be no prosecution. Off I

set to him, and after much chaffering I got our stones at 1000

pounds apiece. Then I looked in upon your son, told him that all

was right, and eventually got to my bed about two o'clock, after

what I may call a really hard day's work."

"A day which has saved England from a great public scandal," said

the banker, rising. "Sir, I cannot find words to thank you, but

you shall not find me ungrateful for what you have done. Your

skill has indeed exceeded all that I have heard of it. And now I

must fly to my dear boy to apologise to him for the wrong which I

have done him. As to what you tell me of poor Mary, it goes to my

very heart. Not even your skill can inform me where she is now."

"I think that we may safely say," returned Holmes, "that she is

wherever Sir George Burnwell is. It is equally certain, too, that

whatever her sins are, they will soon receive a more than

sufficient punishment."

XII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE COPPER BEECHES

"To the man who loves art for its own sake," remarked Sherlock

Holmes, tossing aside the advertisement sheet of the Daily

Telegraph, "it is frequently in its least important and lowliest

manifestations that the keenest pleasure is to be derived. It is

pleasant to me to observe, Watson, that you have so far grasped

this truth that in these little records of our cases which you

have been good enough to draw up, and, I am bound to say,

occasionally to embellish, you have given prominence not so much

to the many causes célèbres and sensational trials in which I

have figured but rather to those incidents which may have been

trivial in themselves, but which have given room for those

faculties of deduction and of logical synthesis which I have made

my special province."

"And yet," said I, smiling, "I cannot quite hold myself absolved

from the charge of sensationalism which has been urged against my

records."

"You have erred, perhaps," he observed, taking up a glowing

cinder with the tongs and lighting with it the long cherry-wood

pipe which was wont to replace his clay when he was in a

disputatious rather than a meditative mood--"you have erred

perhaps in attempting to put colour and life into each of your

statements instead of confining yourself to the task of placing

upon record that severe reasoning from cause to effect which is

really the only notable feature about the thing."

"It seems to me that I have done you full justice in the matter,"

I remarked with some coldness, for I was repelled by the egotism

which I had more than once observed to be a strong factor in my

friend's singular character.

"No, it is not selfishness or conceit," said he, answering, as

was his wont, my thoughts rather than my words. "If I claim full

justice for my art, it is because it is an impersonal thing--a

thing beyond myself. Crime is common. Logic is rare. Therefore it

is upon the logic rather than upon the crime that you should

dwell. You have degraded what should have been a course of

lectures into a series of tales."

It was a cold morning of the early spring, and we sat after

breakfast on either side of a cheery fire in the old room at

Baker Street. A thick fog rolled down between the lines of

dun-coloured houses, and the opposing windows loomed like dark,

shapeless blurs through the heavy yellow wreaths. Our gas was lit

and shone on the white cloth and glimmer of china and metal, for

the table had not been cleared yet. Sherlock Holmes had been

silent all the morning, dipping continuously into the

advertisement columns of a succession of papers until at last,

having apparently given up his search, he had emerged in no very

sweet temper to lecture me upon my literary shortcomings.

"At the same time," he remarked after a pause, during which he

had sat puffing at his long pipe and gazing down into the fire,

"you can hardly be open to a charge of sensationalism, for out of

these cases which you have been so kind as to interest yourself

in, a fair proportion do not treat of crime, in its legal sense,

at all. The small matter in which I endeavoured to help the King

of Bohemia, the singular experience of Miss Mary Sutherland, the

problem connected with the man with the twisted lip, and the

incident of the noble bachelor, were all matters which are

outside the pale of the law. But in avoiding the sensational, I

fear that you may have bordered on the trivial."

"The end may have been so," I answered, "but the methods I hold

to have been novel and of interest."

"Pshaw, my dear fellow, what do the public, the great unobservant

public, who could hardly tell a weaver by his tooth or a

compositor by his left thumb, care about the finer shades of

analysis and deduction! But, indeed, if you are trivial, I cannot

blame you, for the days of the great cases are past. Man, or at

least criminal man, has lost all enterprise and originality. As

to my own little practice, it seems to be degenerating into an

agency for recovering lost lead pencils and giving advice to

young ladies from boarding-schools. I think that I have touched

bottom at last, however. This note I had this morning marks my

zero-point, I fancy. Read it!" He tossed a crumpled letter across

to me.

It was dated from Montague Place upon the preceding evening, and

ran thus:

"DEAR MR. HOLMES:--I am very anxious to consult you as to whether

I should or should not accept a situation which has been offered

to me as governess. I shall call at half-past ten to-morrow if I

do not inconvenience you. Yours faithfully,

"VIOLET HUNTER."

"Do you know the young lady?" I asked.

"Not I."

"It is half-past ten now."

"Yes, and I have no doubt that is her ring."

"It may turn out to be of more interest than you think. You

remember that the affair of the blue carbuncle, which appeared to

be a mere whim at first, developed into a serious investigation.

It may be so in this case, also."

"Well, let us hope so. But our doubts will very soon be solved,

for here, unless I am much mistaken, is the person in question."

As he spoke the door opened and a young lady entered the room.

She was plainly but neatly dressed, with a bright, quick face,

freckled like a plover's egg, and with the brisk manner of a

woman who has had her own way to make in the world.

"You will excuse my troubling you, I am sure," said she, as my

companion rose to greet her, "but I have had a very strange

experience, and as I have no parents or relations of any sort

from whom I could ask advice, I thought that perhaps you would be

kind enough to tell me what I should do."

"Pray take a seat, Miss Hunter. I shall be happy to do anything

that I can to serve you."

I could see that Holmes was favourably impressed by the manner

and speech of his new client. He looked her over in his searching

fashion, and then composed himself, with his lids drooping and

his finger-tips together, to listen to her story.

"I have been a governess for five years," said she, "in the

family of Colonel Spence Munro, but two months ago the colonel

received an appointment at Halifax, in Nova Scotia, and took his

children over to America with him, so that I found myself without

a situation. I advertised, and I answered advertisements, but

without success. At last the little money which I had saved began

to run short, and I was at my wit's end as to what I should do.

"There is a well-known agency for governesses in the West End

called Westaway's, and there I used to call about once a week in

order to see whether anything had turned up which might suit me.

Westaway was the name of the founder of the business, but it is

really managed by Miss Stoper. She sits in her own little office,

and the ladies who are seeking employment wait in an anteroom,

and are then shown in one by one, when she consults her ledgers

and sees whether she has anything which would suit them.

"Well, when I called last week I was shown into the little office

as usual, but I found that Miss Stoper was not alone. A

prodigiously stout man with a very smiling face and a great heavy

chin which rolled down in fold upon fold over his throat sat at

her elbow with a pair of glasses on his nose, looking very

earnestly at the ladies who entered. As I came in he gave quite a

jump in his chair and turned quickly to Miss Stoper.

"'That will do,' said he; 'I could not ask for anything better.

Capital! capital!' He seemed quite enthusiastic and rubbed his

hands together in the most genial fashion. He was such a

comfortable-looking man that it was quite a pleasure to look at

him.

"'You are looking for a situation, miss?' he asked.

"'Yes, sir.'

"'As governess?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'And what salary do you ask?'

"'I had 4 pounds a month in my last place with Colonel Spence

Munro.'

"'Oh, tut, tut! sweating--rank sweating!' he cried, throwing his

fat hands out into the air like a man who is in a boiling

passion. 'How could anyone offer so pitiful a sum to a lady with

such attractions and accomplishments?'

"'My accomplishments, sir, may be less than you imagine,' said I.

'A little French, a little German, music, and drawing--'

"'Tut, tut!' he cried. 'This is all quite beside the question.

The point is, have you or have you not the bearing and deportment

of a lady? There it is in a nutshell. If you have not, you are

not fitted for the rearing of a child who may some day play a

considerable part in the history of the country. But if you have

why, then, how could any gentleman ask you to condescend to

accept anything under the three figures? Your salary with me,

madam, would commence at 100 pounds a year.'

"You may imagine, Mr. Holmes, that to me, destitute as I was,

such an offer seemed almost too good to be true. The gentleman,

however, seeing perhaps the look of incredulity upon my face,

opened a pocket-book and took out a note.

"'It is also my custom,' said he, smiling in the most pleasant

fashion until his eyes were just two little shining slits amid

the white creases of his face, 'to advance to my young ladies

half their salary beforehand, so that they may meet any little

expenses of their journey and their wardrobe.'

"It seemed to me that I had never met so fascinating and so

thoughtful a man. As I was already in debt to my tradesmen, the

advance was a great convenience, and yet there was something

unnatural about the whole transaction which made me wish to know

a little more before I quite committed myself.

"'May I ask where you live, sir?' said I.

"'Hampshire. Charming rural place. The Copper Beeches, five miles

on the far side of Winchester. It is the most lovely country, my

dear young lady, and the dearest old country-house.'

"'And my duties, sir? I should be glad to know what they would

be.'

"'One child--one dear little romper just six years old. Oh, if

you could see him killing cockroaches with a slipper! Smack!

smack! smack! Three gone before you could wink!' He leaned back

in his chair and laughed his eyes into his head again.

"I was a little startled at the nature of the child's amusement,

but the father's laughter made me think that perhaps he was

joking.

"'My sole duties, then,' I asked, 'are to take charge of a single

child?'

"'No, no, not the sole, not the sole, my dear young lady,' he

cried. 'Your duty would be, as I am sure your good sense would

suggest, to obey any little commands my wife might give, provided

always that they were such commands as a lady might with

propriety obey. You see no difficulty, heh?'

"'I should be happy to make myself useful.'

"'Quite so. In dress now, for example. We are faddy people, you

know--faddy but kind-hearted. If you were asked to wear any dress

which we might give you, you would not object to our little whim.

Heh?'

"'No,' said I, considerably astonished at his words.

"'Or to sit here, or sit there, that would not be offensive to

you?'

"'Oh, no.'

"'Or to cut your hair quite short before you come to us?'

"I could hardly believe my ears. As you may observe, Mr. Holmes,

my hair is somewhat luxuriant, and of a rather peculiar tint of

chestnut. It has been considered artistic. I could not dream of

sacrificing it in this offhand fashion.

"'I am afraid that that is quite impossible,' said I. He had been

watching me eagerly out of his small eyes, and I could see a

shadow pass over his face as I spoke.

"'I am afraid that it is quite essential,' said he. 'It is a

little fancy of my wife's, and ladies' fancies, you know, madam,

ladies' fancies must be consulted. And so you won't cut your

hair?'

"'No, sir, I really could not,' I answered firmly.

"'Ah, very well; then that quite settles the matter. It is a

pity, because in other respects you would really have done very

nicely. In that case, Miss Stoper, I had best inspect a few more

of your young ladies.'

"The manageress had sat all this while busy with her papers

without a word to either of us, but she glanced at me now with so

much annoyance upon her face that I could not help suspecting

that she had lost a handsome commission through my refusal.

"'Do you desire your name to be kept upon the books?' she asked.

"'If you please, Miss Stoper.'

"'Well, really, it seems rather useless, since you refuse the

most excellent offers in this fashion,' said she sharply. 'You

can hardly expect us to exert ourselves to find another such

opening for you. Good-day to you, Miss Hunter.' She struck a gong

upon the table, and I was shown out by the page.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, when I got back to my lodgings and found

little enough in the cupboard, and two or three bills upon the

table, I began to ask myself whether I had not done a very

foolish thing. After all, if these people had strange fads and

expected obedience on the most extraordinary matters, they were

at least ready to pay for their eccentricity. Very few

governesses in England are getting 100 pounds a year. Besides,

what use was my hair to me? Many people are improved by wearing

it short and perhaps I should be among the number. Next day I was

inclined to think that I had made a mistake, and by the day after

I was sure of it. I had almost overcome my pride so far as to go

back to the agency and inquire whether the place was still open

when I received this letter from the gentleman himself. I have it

here and I will read it to you:

"'The Copper Beeches, near Winchester.

"'DEAR MISS HUNTER:--Miss Stoper has very kindly given me your

address, and I write from here to ask you whether you have

reconsidered your decision. My wife is very anxious that you

should come, for she has been much attracted by my description of

you. We are willing to give 30 pounds a quarter, or 120 pounds a

year, so as to recompense you for any little inconvenience which

our fads may cause you. They are not very exacting, after all. My

wife is fond of a particular shade of electric blue and would

like you to wear such a dress indoors in the morning. You need

not, however, go to the expense of purchasing one, as we have one

belonging to my dear daughter Alice (now in Philadelphia), which

would, I should think, fit you very well. Then, as to sitting

here or there, or amusing yourself in any manner indicated, that

need cause you no inconvenience. As regards your hair, it is no

doubt a pity, especially as I could not help remarking its beauty

during our short interview, but I am afraid that I must remain

firm upon this point, and I only hope that the increased salary

may recompense you for the loss. Your duties, as far as the child

is concerned, are very light. Now do try to come, and I shall

meet you with the dog-cart at Winchester. Let me know your train.

Yours faithfully, JEPHRO RUCASTLE.'

"That is the letter which I have just received, Mr. Holmes, and

my mind is made up that I will accept it. I thought, however,

that before taking the final step I should like to submit the

whole matter to your consideration."

"Well, Miss Hunter, if your mind is made up, that settles the

question," said Holmes, smiling.

"But you would not advise me to refuse?"

"I confess that it is not the situation which I should like to

see a sister of mine apply for."

"What is the meaning of it all, Mr. Holmes?"

"Ah, I have no data. I cannot tell. Perhaps you have yourself

formed some opinion?"

"Well, there seems to me to be only one possible solution. Mr.

Rucastle seemed to be a very kind, good-natured man. Is it not

possible that his wife is a lunatic, that he desires to keep the

matter quiet for fear she should be taken to an asylum, and that

he humours her fancies in every way in order to prevent an

outbreak?"

"That is a possible solution--in fact, as matters stand, it is

the most probable one. But in any case it does not seem to be a

nice household for a young lady."

"But the money, Mr. Holmes, the money!"

"Well, yes, of course the pay is good--too good. That is what

makes me uneasy. Why should they give you 120 pounds a year, when

they could have their pick for 40 pounds? There must be some

strong reason behind."

"I thought that if I told you the circumstances you would

understand afterwards if I wanted your help. I should feel so

much stronger if I felt that you were at the back of me."

"Oh, you may carry that feeling away with you. I assure you that

your little problem promises to be the most interesting which has

come my way for some months. There is something distinctly novel

about some of the features. If you should find yourself in doubt

or in danger--"

"Danger! What danger do you foresee?"

Holmes shook his head gravely. "It would cease to be a danger if

we could define it," said he. "But at any time, day or night, a

telegram would bring me down to your help."

"That is enough." She rose briskly from her chair with the

anxiety all swept from her face. "I shall go down to Hampshire

quite easy in my mind now. I shall write to Mr. Rucastle at once,

sacrifice my poor hair to-night, and start for Winchester

to-morrow." With a few grateful words to Holmes she bade us both

good-night and bustled off upon her way.

"At least," said I as we heard her quick, firm steps descending

the stairs, "she seems to be a young lady who is very well able

to take care of herself."

"And she would need to be," said Holmes gravely. "I am much

mistaken if we do not hear from her before many days are past."

It was not very long before my friend's prediction was fulfilled.

A fortnight went by, during which I frequently found my thoughts

turning in her direction and wondering what strange side-alley of

human experience this lonely woman had strayed into. The unusual

salary, the curious conditions, the light duties, all pointed to

something abnormal, though whether a fad or a plot, or whether

the man were a philanthropist or a villain, it was quite beyond

my powers to determine. As to Holmes, I observed that he sat

frequently for half an hour on end, with knitted brows and an

abstracted air, but he swept the matter away with a wave of his

hand when I mentioned it. "Data! data! data!" he cried

impatiently. "I can't make bricks without clay." And yet he would

always wind up by muttering that no sister of his should ever

have accepted such a situation.

The telegram which we eventually received came late one night

just as I was thinking of turning in and Holmes was settling down

to one of those all-night chemical researches which he frequently

indulged in, when I would leave him stooping over a retort and a

test-tube at night and find him in the same position when I came

down to breakfast in the morning. He opened the yellow envelope,

and then, glancing at the message, threw it across to me.

"Just look up the trains in Bradshaw," said he, and turned back

to his chemical studies.

The summons was a brief and urgent one.

"Please be at the Black Swan Hotel at Winchester at midday

to-morrow," it said. "Do come! I am at my wit's end. HUNTER."

"Will you come with me?" asked Holmes, glancing up.

"I should wish to."

"Just look it up, then."

"There is a train at half-past nine," said I, glancing over my

Bradshaw. "It is due at Winchester at 11:30."

"That will do very nicely. Then perhaps I had better postpone my

analysis of the acetones, as we may need to be at our best in the

morning."

By eleven o'clock the next day we were well upon our way to the

old English capital. Holmes had been buried in the morning papers

all the way down, but after we had passed the Hampshire border he

threw them down and began to admire the scenery. It was an ideal

spring day, a light blue sky, flecked with little fleecy white

clouds drifting across from west to east. The sun was shining

very brightly, and yet there was an exhilarating nip in the air,

which set an edge to a man's energy. All over the countryside,

away to the rolling hills around Aldershot, the little red and

grey roofs of the farm-steadings peeped out from amid the light

green of the new foliage.

"Are they not fresh and beautiful?" I cried with all the

enthusiasm of a man fresh from the fogs of Baker Street.

But Holmes shook his head gravely.

"Do you know, Watson," said he, "that it is one of the curses of

a mind with a turn like mine that I must look at everything with

reference to my own special subject. You look at these scattered

houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them,

and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their

isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed

there."

"Good heavens!" I cried. "Who would associate crime with these

dear old homesteads?"

"They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief,

Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest

alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin

than does the smiling and beautiful countryside."

"You horrify me!"

"But the reason is very obvious. The pressure of public opinion

can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no

lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of

a drunkard's blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among

the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever

so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is

but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these

lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part

with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the

deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on,

year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser. Had this

lady who appeals to us for help gone to live in Winchester, I

should never have had a fear for her. It is the five miles of

country which makes the danger. Still, it is clear that she is

not personally threatened."

"No. If she can come to Winchester to meet us she can get away."

"Quite so. She has her freedom."

"What CAN be the matter, then? Can you suggest no explanation?"

"I have devised seven separate explanations, each of which would

cover the facts as far as we know them. But which of these is

correct can only be determined by the fresh information which we

shall no doubt find waiting for us. Well, there is the tower of

the cathedral, and we shall soon learn all that Miss Hunter has

to tell."

The Black Swan is an inn of repute in the High Street, at no

distance from the station, and there we found the young lady

waiting for us. She had engaged a sitting-room, and our lunch

awaited us upon the table.

"I am so delighted that you have come," she said earnestly. "It

is so very kind of you both; but indeed I do not know what I

should do. Your advice will be altogether invaluable to me."

"Pray tell us what has happened to you."

"I will do so, and I must be quick, for I have promised Mr.

Rucastle to be back before three. I got his leave to come into

town this morning, though he little knew for what purpose."

"Let us have everything in its due order." Holmes thrust his long

thin legs out towards the fire and composed himself to listen.

"In the first place, I may say that I have met, on the whole,

with no actual ill-treatment from Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle. It is

only fair to them to say that. But I cannot understand them, and

I am not easy in my mind about them."

"What can you not understand?"

"Their reasons for their conduct. But you shall have it all just

as it occurred. When I came down, Mr. Rucastle met me here and

drove me in his dog-cart to the Copper Beeches. It is, as he

said, beautifully situated, but it is not beautiful in itself,

for it is a large square block of a house, whitewashed, but all

stained and streaked with damp and bad weather. There are grounds

round it, woods on three sides, and on the fourth a field which

slopes down to the Southampton highroad, which curves past about

a hundred yards from the front door. This ground in front belongs

to the house, but the woods all round are part of Lord

Southerton's preserves. A clump of copper beeches immediately in

front of the hall door has given its name to the place.

"I was driven over by my employer, who was as amiable as ever,

and was introduced by him that evening to his wife and the child.

There was no truth, Mr. Holmes, in the conjecture which seemed to

us to be probable in your rooms at Baker Street. Mrs. Rucastle is

not mad. I found her to be a silent, pale-faced woman, much

younger than her husband, not more than thirty, I should think,

while he can hardly be less than forty-five. From their

conversation I have gathered that they have been married about

seven years, that he was a widower, and that his only child by

the first wife was the daughter who has gone to Philadelphia. Mr.

Rucastle told me in private that the reason why she had left them

was that she had an unreasoning aversion to her stepmother. As

the daughter could not have been less than twenty, I can quite

imagine that her position must have been uncomfortable with her

father's young wife.

"Mrs. Rucastle seemed to me to be colourless in mind as well as

in feature. She impressed me neither favourably nor the reverse.

She was a nonentity. It was easy to see that she was passionately

devoted both to her husband and to her little son. Her light grey

eyes wandered continually from one to the other, noting every

little want and forestalling it if possible. He was kind to her

also in his bluff, boisterous fashion, and on the whole they

seemed to be a happy couple. And yet she had some secret sorrow,

this woman. She would often be lost in deep thought, with the

saddest look upon her face. More than once I have surprised her

in tears. I have thought sometimes that it was the disposition of

her child which weighed upon her mind, for I have never met so

utterly spoiled and so ill-natured a little creature. He is small

for his age, with a head which is quite disproportionately large.

His whole life appears to be spent in an alternation between

savage fits of passion and gloomy intervals of sulking. Giving

pain to any creature weaker than himself seems to be his one idea

of amusement, and he shows quite remarkable talent in planning

the capture of mice, little birds, and insects. But I would

rather not talk about the creature, Mr. Holmes, and, indeed, he

has little to do with my story."

"I am glad of all details," remarked my friend, "whether they

seem to you to be relevant or not."

"I shall try not to miss anything of importance. The one

unpleasant thing about the house, which struck me at once, was

the appearance and conduct of the servants. There are only two, a

man and his wife. Toller, for that is his name, is a rough,

uncouth man, with grizzled hair and whiskers, and a perpetual

smell of drink. Twice since I have been with them he has been

quite drunk, and yet Mr. Rucastle seemed to take no notice of it.

His wife is a very tall and strong woman with a sour face, as

silent as Mrs. Rucastle and much less amiable. They are a most

unpleasant couple, but fortunately I spend most of my time in the

nursery and my own room, which are next to each other in one

corner of the building.

"For two days after my arrival at the Copper Beeches my life was

very quiet; on the third, Mrs. Rucastle came down just after

breakfast and whispered something to her husband.

"'Oh, yes,' said he, turning to me, 'we are very much obliged to

you, Miss Hunter, for falling in with our whims so far as to cut

your hair. I assure you that it has not detracted in the tiniest

iota from your appearance. We shall now see how the electric-blue

dress will become you. You will find it laid out upon the bed in

your room, and if you would be so good as to put it on we should

both be extremely obliged.'

"The dress which I found waiting for me was of a peculiar shade

of blue. It was of excellent material, a sort of beige, but it

bore unmistakable signs of having been worn before. It could not

have been a better fit if I had been measured for it. Both Mr.

and Mrs. Rucastle expressed a delight at the look of it, which

seemed quite exaggerated in its vehemence. They were waiting for

me in the drawing-room, which is a very large room, stretching

along the entire front of the house, with three long windows

reaching down to the floor. A chair had been placed close to the

central window, with its back turned towards it. In this I was

asked to sit, and then Mr. Rucastle, walking up and down on the

other side of the room, began to tell me a series of the funniest

stories that I have ever listened to. You cannot imagine how

comical he was, and I laughed until I was quite weary. Mrs.

Rucastle, however, who has evidently no sense of humour, never so

much as smiled, but sat with her hands in her lap, and a sad,

anxious look upon her face. After an hour or so, Mr. Rucastle

suddenly remarked that it was time to commence the duties of the

day, and that I might change my dress and go to little Edward in

the nursery.

"Two days later this same performance was gone through under

exactly similar circumstances. Again I changed my dress, again I

sat in the window, and again I laughed very heartily at the funny

stories of which my employer had an immense répertoire, and which

he told inimitably. Then he handed me a yellow-backed novel, and

moving my chair a little sideways, that my own shadow might not

fall upon the page, he begged me to read aloud to him. I read for

about ten minutes, beginning in the heart of a chapter, and then

suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, he ordered me to cease and

to change my dress.

"You can easily imagine, Mr. Holmes, how curious I became as to

what the meaning of this extraordinary performance could possibly

be. They were always very careful, I observed, to turn my face

away from the window, so that I became consumed with the desire

to see what was going on behind my back. At first it seemed to be

impossible, but I soon devised a means. My hand-mirror had been

broken, so a happy thought seized me, and I concealed a piece of

the glass in my handkerchief. On the next occasion, in the midst

of my laughter, I put my handkerchief up to my eyes, and was able

with a little management to see all that there was behind me. I

confess that I was disappointed. There was nothing. At least that

was my first impression. At the second glance, however, I

perceived that there was a man standing in the Southampton Road,

a small bearded man in a grey suit, who seemed to be looking in

my direction. The road is an important highway, and there are

usually people there. This man, however, was leaning against the

railings which bordered our field and was looking earnestly up. I

lowered my handkerchief and glanced at Mrs. Rucastle to find her

eyes fixed upon me with a most searching gaze. She said nothing,

but I am convinced that she had divined that I had a mirror in my

hand and had seen what was behind me. She rose at once.

"'Jephro,' said she, 'there is an impertinent fellow upon the

road there who stares up at Miss Hunter.'

"'No friend of yours, Miss Hunter?' he asked.

"'No, I know no one in these parts.'

"'Dear me! How very impertinent! Kindly turn round and motion to

him to go away.'

"'Surely it would be better to take no notice.'

"'No, no, we should have him loitering here always. Kindly turn

round and wave him away like that.'

"I did as I was told, and at the same instant Mrs. Rucastle drew

down the blind. That was a week ago, and from that time I have

not sat again in the window, nor have I worn the blue dress, nor

seen the man in the road."

"Pray continue," said Holmes. "Your narrative promises to be a

most interesting one."

"You will find it rather disconnected, I fear, and there may

prove to be little relation between the different incidents of

which I speak. On the very first day that I was at the Copper

Beeches, Mr. Rucastle took me to a small outhouse which stands

near the kitchen door. As we approached it I heard the sharp

rattling of a chain, and the sound as of a large animal moving

about.

"'Look in here!' said Mr. Rucastle, showing me a slit between two

planks. 'Is he not a beauty?'

"I looked through and was conscious of two glowing eyes, and of a

vague figure huddled up in the darkness.

"'Don't be frightened,' said my employer, laughing at the start

which I had given. 'It's only Carlo, my mastiff. I call him mine,

but really old Toller, my groom, is the only man who can do

anything with him. We feed him once a day, and not too much then,

so that he is always as keen as mustard. Toller lets him loose

every night, and God help the trespasser whom he lays his fangs

upon. For goodness' sake don't you ever on any pretext set your

foot over the threshold at night, for it's as much as your life

is worth.'

"The warning was no idle one, for two nights later I happened to

look out of my bedroom window about two o'clock in the morning.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the lawn in front of the

house was silvered over and almost as bright as day. I was

standing, rapt in the peaceful beauty of the scene, when I was

aware that something was moving under the shadow of the copper

beeches. As it emerged into the moonshine I saw what it was. It

was a giant dog, as large as a calf, tawny tinted, with hanging

jowl, black muzzle, and huge projecting bones. It walked slowly

across the lawn and vanished into the shadow upon the other side.

That dreadful sentinel sent a chill to my heart which I do not

think that any burglar could have done.

"And now I have a very strange experience to tell you. I had, as

you know, cut off my hair in London, and I had placed it in a

great coil at the bottom of my trunk. One evening, after the

child was in bed, I began to amuse myself by examining the

furniture of my room and by rearranging my own little things.

There was an old chest of drawers in the room, the two upper ones

empty and open, the lower one locked. I had filled the first two

with my linen, and as I had still much to pack away I was

naturally annoyed at not having the use of the third drawer. It

struck me that it might have been fastened by a mere oversight,

so I took out my bunch of keys and tried to open it. The very

first key fitted to perfection, and I drew the drawer open. There

was only one thing in it, but I am sure that you would never

guess what it was. It was my coil of hair.

"I took it up and examined it. It was of the same peculiar tint,

and the same thickness. But then the impossibility of the thing

obtruded itself upon me. How could my hair have been locked in

the drawer? With trembling hands I undid my trunk, turned out the

contents, and drew from the bottom my own hair. I laid the two

tresses together, and I assure you that they were identical. Was

it not extraordinary? Puzzle as I would, I could make nothing at

all of what it meant. I returned the strange hair to the drawer,

and I said nothing of the matter to the Rucastles as I felt that

I had put myself in the wrong by opening a drawer which they had

locked.

"I am naturally observant, as you may have remarked, Mr. Holmes,

and I soon had a pretty good plan of the whole house in my head.

There was one wing, however, which appeared not to be inhabited

at all. A door which faced that which led into the quarters of

the Tollers opened into this suite, but it was invariably locked.

One day, however, as I ascended the stair, I met Mr. Rucastle

coming out through this door, his keys in his hand, and a look on

his face which made him a very different person to the round,

jovial man to whom I was accustomed. His cheeks were red, his

brow was all crinkled with anger, and the veins stood out at his

temples with passion. He locked the door and hurried past me

without a word or a look.

"This aroused my curiosity, so when I went out for a walk in the

grounds with my charge, I strolled round to the side from which I

could see the windows of this part of the house. There were four

of them in a row, three of which were simply dirty, while the

fourth was shuttered up. They were evidently all deserted. As I

strolled up and down, glancing at them occasionally, Mr. Rucastle

came out to me, looking as merry and jovial as ever.

"'Ah!' said he, 'you must not think me rude if I passed you

without a word, my dear young lady. I was preoccupied with

business matters.'

"I assured him that I was not offended. 'By the way,' said I,

'you seem to have quite a suite of spare rooms up there, and one

of them has the shutters up.'

"He looked surprised and, as it seemed to me, a little startled

at my remark.

"'Photography is one of my hobbies,' said he. 'I have made my

dark room up there. But, dear me! what an observant young lady we

have come upon. Who would have believed it? Who would have ever

believed it?' He spoke in a jesting tone, but there was no jest

in his eyes as he looked at me. I read suspicion there and

annoyance, but no jest.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, from the moment that I understood that there

was something about that suite of rooms which I was not to know,

I was all on fire to go over them. It was not mere curiosity,

though I have my share of that. It was more a feeling of duty--a

feeling that some good might come from my penetrating to this

place. They talk of woman's instinct; perhaps it was woman's

instinct which gave me that feeling. At any rate, it was there,

and I was keenly on the lookout for any chance to pass the

forbidden door.

"It was only yesterday that the chance came. I may tell you that,

besides Mr. Rucastle, both Toller and his wife find something to

do in these deserted rooms, and I once saw him carrying a large

black linen bag with him through the door. Recently he has been

drinking hard, and yesterday evening he was very drunk; and when

I came upstairs there was the key in the door. I have no doubt at

all that he had left it there. Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle were both

downstairs, and the child was with them, so that I had an

admirable opportunity. I turned the key gently in the lock,

opened the door, and slipped through.

"There was a little passage in front of me, unpapered and

uncarpeted, which turned at a right angle at the farther end.

Round this corner were three doors in a line, the first and third

of which were open. They each led into an empty room, dusty and

cheerless, with two windows in the one and one in the other, so

thick with dirt that the evening light glimmered dimly through

them. The centre door was closed, and across the outside of it

had been fastened one of the broad bars of an iron bed, padlocked

at one end to a ring in the wall, and fastened at the other with

stout cord. The door itself was locked as well, and the key was

not there. This barricaded door corresponded clearly with the

shuttered window outside, and yet I could see by the glimmer from

beneath it that the room was not in darkness. Evidently there was

a skylight which let in light from above. As I stood in the

passage gazing at the sinister door and wondering what secret it

might veil, I suddenly heard the sound of steps within the room

and saw a shadow pass backward and forward against the little

slit of dim light which shone out from under the door. A mad,

unreasoning terror rose up in me at the sight, Mr. Holmes. My

overstrung nerves failed me suddenly, and I turned and ran--ran

as though some dreadful hand were behind me clutching at the

skirt of my dress. I rushed down the passage, through the door,

and straight into the arms of Mr. Rucastle, who was waiting

outside.

"'So,' said he, smiling, 'it was you, then. I thought that it

must be when I saw the door open.'

"'Oh, I am so frightened!' I panted.

"'My dear young lady! my dear young lady!'--you cannot think how

caressing and soothing his manner was--'and what has frightened

you, my dear young lady?'

"But his voice was just a little too coaxing. He overdid it. I

was keenly on my guard against him.

"'I was foolish enough to go into the empty wing,' I answered.

'But it is so lonely and eerie in this dim light that I was

frightened and ran out again. Oh, it is so dreadfully still in

there!'

"'Only that?' said he, looking at me keenly.

"'Why, what did you think?' I asked.

"'Why do you think that I lock this door?'

"'I am sure that I do not know.'

"'It is to keep people out who have no business there. Do you

see?' He was still smiling in the most amiable manner.

"'I am sure if I had known--'

"'Well, then, you know now. And if you ever put your foot over

that threshold again'--here in an instant the smile hardened into

a grin of rage, and he glared down at me with the face of a

demon--'I'll throw you to the mastiff.'

"I was so terrified that I do not know what I did. I suppose that

I must have rushed past him into my room. I remember nothing

until I found myself lying on my bed trembling all over. Then I

thought of you, Mr. Holmes. I could not live there longer without

some advice. I was frightened of the house, of the man, of the

woman, of the servants, even of the child. They were all horrible

to me. If I could only bring you down all would be well. Of

course I might have fled from the house, but my curiosity was

almost as strong as my fears. My mind was soon made up. I would

send you a wire. I put on my hat and cloak, went down to the

office, which is about half a mile from the house, and then

returned, feeling very much easier. A horrible doubt came into my

mind as I approached the door lest the dog might be loose, but I

remembered that Toller had drunk himself into a state of

insensibility that evening, and I knew that he was the only one

in the household who had any influence with the savage creature,

or who would venture to set him free. I slipped in in safety and

lay awake half the night in my joy at the thought of seeing you.

I had no difficulty in getting leave to come into Winchester this

morning, but I must be back before three o'clock, for Mr. and

Mrs. Rucastle are going on a visit, and will be away all the

evening, so that I must look after the child. Now I have told you

all my adventures, Mr. Holmes, and I should be very glad if you

could tell me what it all means, and, above all, what I should

do."

Holmes and I had listened spellbound to this extraordinary story.

My friend rose now and paced up and down the room, his hands in

his pockets, and an expression of the most profound gravity upon

his face.

"Is Toller still drunk?" he asked.

"Yes. I heard his wife tell Mrs. Rucastle that she could do

nothing with him."

"That is well. And the Rucastles go out to-night?"

"Yes."

"Is there a cellar with a good strong lock?"

"Yes, the wine-cellar."

"You seem to me to have acted all through this matter like a very

brave and sensible girl, Miss Hunter. Do you think that you could

perform one more feat? I should not ask it of you if I did not

think you a quite exceptional woman."

"I will try. What is it?"

"We shall be at the Copper Beeches by seven o'clock, my friend

and I. The Rucastles will be gone by that time, and Toller will,

we hope, be incapable. There only remains Mrs. Toller, who might

give the alarm. If you could send her into the cellar on some

errand, and then turn the key upon her, you would facilitate

matters immensely."

"I will do it."

"Excellent! We shall then look thoroughly into the affair. Of

course there is only one feasible explanation. You have been

brought there to personate someone, and the real person is

imprisoned in this chamber. That is obvious. As to who this

prisoner is, I have no doubt that it is the daughter, Miss Alice

Rucastle, if I remember right, who was said to have gone to

America. You were chosen, doubtless, as resembling her in height,

figure, and the colour of your hair. Hers had been cut off, very

possibly in some illness through which she has passed, and so, of

course, yours had to be sacrificed also. By a curious chance you

came upon her tresses. The man in the road was undoubtedly some

friend of hers--possibly her fiancé--and no doubt, as you wore

the girl's dress and were so like her, he was convinced from your

laughter, whenever he saw you, and afterwards from your gesture,

that Miss Rucastle was perfectly happy, and that she no longer

desired his attentions. The dog is let loose at night to prevent

him from endeavouring to communicate with her. So much is fairly

clear. The most serious point in the case is the disposition of

the child."

"What on earth has that to do with it?" I ejaculated.

"My dear Watson, you as a medical man are continually gaining

light as to the tendencies of a child by the study of the

parents. Don't you see that the converse is equally valid. I have

frequently gained my first real insight into the character of

parents by studying their children. This child's disposition is

abnormally cruel, merely for cruelty's sake, and whether he

derives this from his smiling father, as I should suspect, or

from his mother, it bodes evil for the poor girl who is in their

power."

"I am sure that you are right, Mr. Holmes," cried our client. "A

thousand things come back to me which make me certain that you

have hit it. Oh, let us lose not an instant in bringing help to

this poor creature."

"We must be circumspect, for we are dealing with a very cunning

man. We can do nothing until seven o'clock. At that hour we shall

be with you, and it will not be long before we solve the

mystery."

We were as good as our word, for it was just seven when we

reached the Copper Beeches, having put up our trap at a wayside

public-house. The group of trees, with their dark leaves shining

like burnished metal in the light of the setting sun, were

sufficient to mark the house even had Miss Hunter not been

standing smiling on the door-step.

"Have you managed it?" asked Holmes.

A loud thudding noise came from somewhere downstairs. "That is

Mrs. Toller in the cellar," said she. "Her husband lies snoring

on the kitchen rug. Here are his keys, which are the duplicates

of Mr. Rucastle's."

"You have done well indeed!" cried Holmes with enthusiasm. "Now

lead the way, and we shall soon see the end of this black

business."

We passed up the stair, unlocked the door, followed on down a

passage, and found ourselves in front of the barricade which Miss

Hunter had described. Holmes cut the cord and removed the

transverse bar. Then he tried the various keys in the lock, but

without success. No sound came from within, and at the silence

Holmes' face clouded over.

"I trust that we are not too late," said he. "I think, Miss

Hunter, that we had better go in without you. Now, Watson, put

your shoulder to it, and we shall see whether we cannot make our

way in."

It was an old rickety door and gave at once before our united

strength. Together we rushed into the room. It was empty. There

was no furniture save a little pallet bed, a small table, and a

basketful of linen. The skylight above was open, and the prisoner

gone.

"There has been some villainy here," said Holmes; "this beauty

has guessed Miss Hunter's intentions and has carried his victim

off."

"But how?"

"Through the skylight. We shall soon see how he managed it." He

swung himself up onto the roof. "Ah, yes," he cried, "here's the

end of a long light ladder against the eaves. That is how he did

it."

"But it is impossible," said Miss Hunter; "the ladder was not

there when the Rucastles went away."

"He has come back and done it. I tell you that he is a clever and

dangerous man. I should not be very much surprised if this were

he whose step I hear now upon the stair. I think, Watson, that it

would be as well for you to have your pistol ready."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a man appeared at

the door of the room, a very fat and burly man, with a heavy

stick in his hand. Miss Hunter screamed and shrunk against the

wall at the sight of him, but Sherlock Holmes sprang forward and

confronted him.

"You villain!" said he, "where's your daughter?"

The fat man cast his eyes round, and then up at the open

skylight.

"It is for me to ask you that," he shrieked, "you thieves! Spies

and thieves! I have caught you, have I? You are in my power. I'll

serve you!" He turned and clattered down the stairs as hard as he

could go.

"He's gone for the dog!" cried Miss Hunter.

"I have my revolver," said I.

"Better close the front door," cried Holmes, and we all rushed

down the stairs together. We had hardly reached the hall when we

heard the baying of a hound, and then a scream of agony, with a

horrible worrying sound which it was dreadful to listen to. An

elderly man with a red face and shaking limbs came staggering out

at a side door.

"My God!" he cried. "Someone has loosed the dog. It's not been

fed for two days. Quick, quick, or it'll be too late!"

Holmes and I rushed out and round the angle of the house, with

Toller hurrying behind us. There was the huge famished brute, its

black muzzle buried in Rucastle's throat, while he writhed and

screamed upon the ground. Running up, I blew its brains out, and

it fell over with its keen white teeth still meeting in the great

creases of his neck. With much labour we separated them and

carried him, living but horribly mangled, into the house. We laid

him upon the drawing-room sofa, and having dispatched the sobered

Toller to bear the news to his wife, I did what I could to

relieve his pain. We were all assembled round him when the door

opened, and a tall, gaunt woman entered the room.

"Mrs. Toller!" cried Miss Hunter.

"Yes, miss. Mr. Rucastle let me out when he came back before he

went up to you. Ah, miss, it is a pity you didn't let me know

what you were planning, for I would have told you that your pains

were wasted."

"Ha!" said Holmes, looking keenly at her. "It is clear that Mrs.

Toller knows more about this matter than anyone else."

"Yes, sir, I do, and I am ready enough to tell what I know."

"Then, pray, sit down, and let us hear it for there are several

points on which I must confess that I am still in the dark."

"I will soon make it clear to you," said she; "and I'd have done

so before now if I could ha' got out from the cellar. If there's

police-court business over this, you'll remember that I was the

one that stood your friend, and that I was Miss Alice's friend

too.

"She was never happy at home, Miss Alice wasn't, from the time

that her father married again. She was slighted like and had no

say in anything, but it never really became bad for her until

after she met Mr. Fowler at a friend's house. As well as I could

learn, Miss Alice had rights of her own by will, but she was so

quiet and patient, she was, that she never said a word about them

but just left everything in Mr. Rucastle's hands. He knew he was

safe with her; but when there was a chance of a husband coming

forward, who would ask for all that the law would give him, then

her father thought it time to put a stop on it. He wanted her to

sign a paper, so that whether she married or not, he could use

her money. When she wouldn't do it, he kept on worrying her until

she got brain-fever, and for six weeks was at death's door. Then

she got better at last, all worn to a shadow, and with her

beautiful hair cut off; but that didn't make no change in her

young man, and he stuck to her as true as man could be."

"Ah," said Holmes, "I think that what you have been good enough

to tell us makes the matter fairly clear, and that I can deduce

all that remains. Mr. Rucastle then, I presume, took to this

system of imprisonment?"

"Yes, sir."

"And brought Miss Hunter down from London in order to get rid of

the disagreeable persistence of Mr. Fowler."

"That was it, sir."

"But Mr. Fowler being a persevering man, as a good seaman should

be, blockaded the house, and having met you succeeded by certain

arguments, metallic or otherwise, in convincing you that your

interests were the same as his."

"Mr. Fowler was a very kind-spoken, free-handed gentleman," said

Mrs. Toller serenely.

"And in this way he managed that your good man should have no

want of drink, and that a ladder should be ready at the moment

when your master had gone out."

"You have it, sir, just as it happened."

"I am sure we owe you an apology, Mrs. Toller," said Holmes, "for

you have certainly cleared up everything which puzzled us. And

here comes the country surgeon and Mrs. Rucastle, so I think,

Watson, that we had best escort Miss Hunter back to Winchester,

as it seems to me that our locus standi now is rather a

questionable one."

And thus was solved the mystery of the sinister house with the

copper beeches in front of the door. Mr. Rucastle survived, but

was always a broken man, kept alive solely through the care of

his devoted wife. They still live with their old servants, who

probably know so much of Rucastle's past life that he finds it

difficult to part from them. Mr. Fowler and Miss Rucastle were

married, by special license, in Southampton the day after their

flight, and he is now the holder of a government appointment in

the island of Mauritius. As to Miss Violet Hunter, my friend

Holmes, rather to my disappointment, manifested no further

interest in her when once she had ceased to be the centre of one

of his problems, and she is now the head of a private school at

Walsall, where I believe that she has met with considerable success.

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