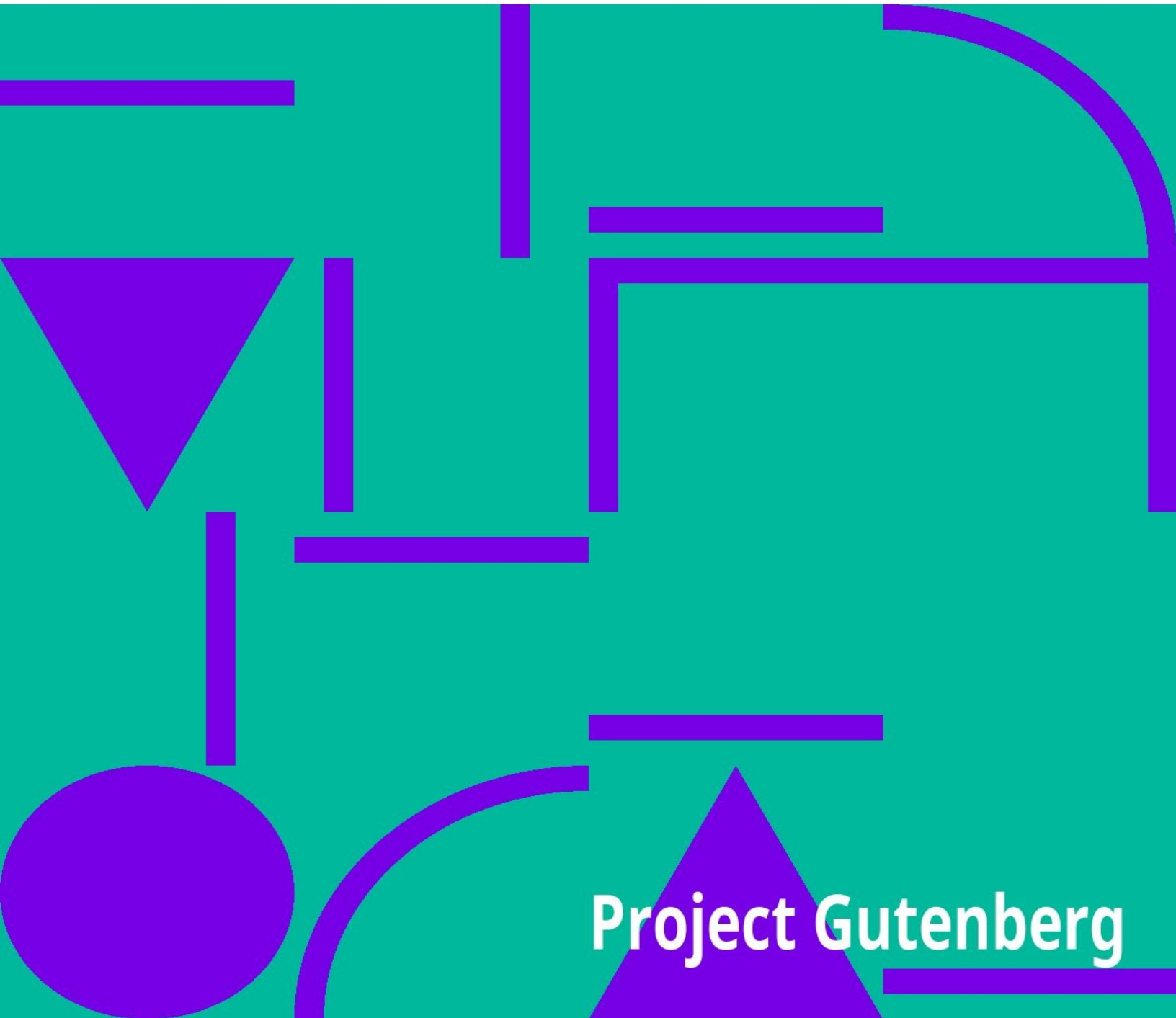
Christopher Quarles

College Professor and Master Detective

Percy James Brebner



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CHRISTOPHER QUARLES

College Professor and Master Detective

BY
PERCY JAMES BREBNER

AUTHOR OF "PRINCESS MARITZA," "THE LITTLE GREY SHOE," ETC., ETC.

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CHRISTOPHER QUARLES

CHAPTER I
THE AFFAIR OF THE IVORY BOXES

There was a substantial aspect about Blenheim Square, not of that monotonous type which characterizes so many London squares, but a certain grace and consciousness of well-being.

The houses, though maintaining some uniformity, possessed individuality, and in the season were gay with window-boxes and flowers; the garden in the center was not too stereotyped in its arrangement, and plenty of sunlight found its way into it. The inhabitants were people of ample means, and the address was undoubtedly a good one. There was no slum in close proximity, that seamy background which so constantly lies behind a fair exterior of life; it was seldom that any but respectable people were seen in the square, for hawkers and itinerant musicians were forbidden; and, beyond a wedding or a funeral at intervals, nothing exciting ever seemed to happen there.

It looked particularly attractive when I entered it one spring morning early and made my way to No. 12.

As I approached the house and noted that the square was still asleep, an old gentleman, clad in a long and rather rusty overcoat, shuffled toward me from the opposite direction. He wore round goggles behind which his eyes looked unusually large, and a wide-awake hat was drawn over his silver locks.

He stopped in front of me and, without a word, brought his hand from his pocket and gave me a card.

"Christopher Quarles," I said, reading from the bit of pasteboard.

"My name. What is yours?"

"Murray Wigan," I answered, and the next instant was wondering why I had told him.

"Ah, I do not fancy we have met before, Detective Wigan. Perhaps we may help each other."

"You knew Mr. Ratcliffe?" I asked.

"No, but I have heard of him."

"I am afraid that——"

He laid two fingers of a lean hand on my arm.

"You had better. It will be wise."

A sharp retort came to my tongue, but remained unspoken. I can hardly explain why, because in an ordinary way his manner would only have increased my resentment and obstinacy.

I was young, only just over thirty, but success had brought me some fame and unlimited self-confidence. I was an enthusiast, and have been spoken of as a born detective, but the line of life I had chosen had sadly disappointed my father. He had given me an excellent education, and had looked forward to his son making a name for himself, but certainly not as a mere policeman, which was his way of putting it.

Indeed, family relations were strained even at this time, a fact which may have accounted for that hardness of character which people, even my friends, seemed to find in me.

My nature and my pride in my profession were therefore assailed by the old man's manner, yet the sharp answer remained unspoken.

"You will find that I am known to your people," he added while I hesitated.

I did not believe him for a moment, but there was something so compelling in the steady gaze from the large eyes behind the goggles that I grudgingly allowed him to enter the house with me.

Early that morning, before the first milk-cart had rattled through Blenheim Square, Constable Plowman had been called to No. 12 by the cook-housekeeper, who had found her master, Mr. Ratcliffe, dead in his study. Plowman had at once sent for a doctor and communicated with Scotland Yard. The doctor had arrived before me, but nothing had been moved by the constable, and the housekeeper declared that the room was exactly as she had found it.

The study was at the back of the house, a small room lined with books. In the center was a writing table, an electric lamp on it was still burning, and, leaning back in his chair, his eyes fixed on vacancy, sat Mr. Ratcliffe. The doctor said he had been dead some hours.

On the blotting-pad immediately in front of him was a large blue stone—a sapphire—and arranged in a rough semicircle round the pad were the various boxes of one of those Chinese curiosities in which box is contained within box until the last is quite small.

They were of thin ivory, the largest being some three inches square, the smallest not an inch, and they were arranged in order of size. There was no confusion in the room, no sign of violence on the dead man. Curtains were drawn across the window, which was open a little at the top.

At first my attention was somewhat divided; the old man interested me as well as the case.

He looked closely into the face of the dead man, then glanced at the curtained window, and nodded his head in a sagacious way, as if he had already fathomed the mystery. He looked at the sapphire and at the semicircle of boxes, but he did not attempt to touch anything, nor did he say a word.

Well, it is easy enough to look wise; it is when a man opens his mouth that the test begins. I came to the conclusion that he was a venerable fraud, and that I had been a fool to let him come in. I dismissed him from my mind and commenced my own investigations.

On the window-sill there were marks which made it practically certain that someone had entered the room that way, but neither then nor later could I discover any footprints in the small garden which was some eight feet below the window.

The housekeeper, who had been with Mr. Ratcliffe a dozen years, explained that, on coming down that morning, she had gone into the study to draw the curtains as usual. The room was exactly as we saw it. Her master spent most of his time in his study when he was at home, and seemed to enjoy his own company. He went little into society, but a friend sometimes dined with him; indeed, his nephew, Captain Ratcliffe, had dined with him last night.

She had gone to bed before the captain left, and did not hear him go. She would

not admit that her master was peculiar or eccentric in any way, but said he had seemed worried and rather depressed lately. The slightest noise in the house disturbed him, and she fancied he had got into the habit of listening for noises, for once or twice she had come upon him in a listening attitude. She knew nothing about the sapphire, and had never seen the ivory boxes before.

The old man never asked a question; I do not think he said a single word until we were leaving the house, and then he remarked in a casual manner:

"A curious case, Detective Wigan."

"Some curious points in it," I said.

I was glad when the old fellow had shuffled off. He was a disturbing influence. His eyes behind those goggles seemed to have a paralyzing effect upon me. I could not think clearly.

Certainly there were many curious points in the case, and my inquiries quickly added to the number.

Mr. Ratcliffe had traveled extensively, was a linguist, and a far richer man than his neighbors had supposed. Collecting precious stones had been his hobby, and in a case deposited with his bankers there were many valuable, and some unique, gems. Probably he had others with him in the house, but none were found except the sapphire lying on the blotting-pad. Robbers might have taken them, the marks on the window-sill were suggestive, but I was doubtful on this point. Even if robbers had entered the room, how was Mr. Ratcliffe's death to be accounted for? There was no mark upon the body, there was no trace of poison. The doctors declared he was in a perfectly healthy condition. There was no apparent reason for his death. Besides, if he had been robbed of his jewels, why should the sapphire have been left?

It was only natural, perhaps, that suspicion should fall upon the dead man's nephew. Might he not have left the house by the window? it was asked. I had put the same question to myself.

Captain Ratcliffe's behavior, however, was not that of a guilty man, although there were certain things which told against him.

He answered questions frankly and without hesitation. He was in a line regiment, and was somewhat heavily in debt. It was close upon midnight when he left his uncle, he said, and they had not gone into the study at all. They had sat smoking

and talking in the dining room, and just before he left they had both had a little whisky. The empty glasses and the cigar ends in the dining room went to confirm this statement.

He knew about his uncle's hobby for stones, was surprised to find that he was such a rich man, and declared that he had no idea he was his heir. Mr. Ratcliffe had never helped him in any way; in fact, that very night he had refused, not unkindly but quite frankly, to lend him a sum of money he had asked for.

There had been no quarrel, and they had parted excellent friends.

I am convinced that a large section of the public wondered why Captain Ratcliffe was not arrested, and possibly some detectives would have considered there was sufficient evidence against him to take this course. I did not, although I had him watched.

The fact was that Christopher Quarles lurked at the back of my mind. I found that he had spoken the truth when he said that he was known at Scotland Yard. He was a professor of philosophy, and some two years ago had made what seemed a perfectly preposterous suggestion in a case which had puzzled the police, with the result that he had been instrumental in saving an innocent man from the gallows. A chance success was the comment of the authorities; my own idea was that he must have had knowledge which he ought not to possess. Now it might prove useful to cultivate the acquaintance of this mysterious professor, so I called upon him one morning in his house at West Street, Chelsea, as keen upon a difficult trail as I had ever been in my life.

The servant said the professor was at home and requested me to follow her.

Through open doors I had a glimpse of taste and luxury—softly carpeted rooms, old furniture, good pictures—and then the servant opened a door at the extreme end of the hall and announced me.

Astonishment riveted me to the threshold for the moment. Except for a cheap writing-table in the window, a big arm-chair by the fireplace, and two or three common chairs against the wall, this room was empty. There was no carpet on the floor, not a picture on the whitewashed walls. The window had a blind, but no curtains; there were no books, and the appointments of the writing-table were of the simplest kind possible.

"Ah, I have been expecting you," said Quarles, crossing from the window to

welcome me.

A skull-cap covered his silver locks, but he wore no glasses, and to-day there were few signs of age or deterioration of physical or mental force about him. His shuffling gait when he had met me in Blenheim Square that morning had evidently been assumed, and probably he had worn glasses to conceal some of the expression of his face.

"You had been expecting me?" I said.

"Two days ago I gave the servant instructions to bring you in whenever you came. Zena, my dear, this is Detective Wigan—my granddaughter who often assists me in my work."

I bowed to the girl who had risen from the chair at the writing-table, and for a moment forgot the professor—and, indeed, everything else in the world. Since no woman had ever yet succeeded in touching any sympathetic chord in me, it may be assumed that she was remarkable. In that bare room she looked altogether out of place, and yet her presence transformed it into a desirable spot.

"You are full of surprises, professor," I said, with a keen desire to make myself agreeable. "I enter your house and have a glimpse of luxury through open doors, yet I find you in—in an empty room; you tell me I am expected, when until a few hours ago I had not determined to call upon you; and now you further mystify me by saying this lady is your helper."

"Philosophy is mysterious," he answered, "and I am interested in all the ramifications of my profession. To understand one science perfectly means having a considerable knowledge of all other sciences."

"My grandfather exaggerates my usefulness," said the girl.

"I do not," he returned. "Your questions have constantly shown me the right road to travel, and to have the right road pointed out is half the battle. Sit down, Mr. Wigan—in the arm-chair—no, I prefer sitting here myself. Zena and I were talking of Blenheim Square when you came in. A coincidence? Perhaps, but it may be something more. In these days we are loath to admit there are things we do not understand. This case puzzles you?"

The detective in me was coming slowly uppermost again, and I remembered the line I had decided to take with this curious old gentleman.

"It does. From first to last I am puzzled. To begin with, how came you to hear of the tragedy that you were able to be upon the scene so promptly?"

"Are you here as a spy or to ask for help? Come, a plain answer," said Quarles hotly, as though he were resenting an insult.

"Dear!" said the girl soothingly.

"Zena considers you honest," said the old man, suddenly calm again. "My helper, as I told you, and not always of my opinion. Let that pass. You are a young man with much to learn. I am not a detective, but a philosopher, and sometimes an investigator of human motives. If a mystery interests me I endeavor to solve it for my own satisfaction, but there it ends. I never give my opinion unless it is asked for, nor should I interfere except to prevent a miscarriage of justice. If this is clear to you, you may proceed and tell me what you have done, how far you have gone in the unraveling of this case; if you are not satisfied, I have nothing more to say to you except 'Good morning!'"

For a moment I hesitated, then shortly I told him what I had done, and he listened attentively.

"I have always worked alone," I went on, "not without success, as you may know. In this case I am beaten so far, and I come to you."

"Why?"

"For two reasons. First—you will forgive my mentioning it again—your prompt arrival puzzled me; secondly, I believe in Captain Ratcliffe, and am anxious to relieve him of the suspicion which undoubtedly rests upon him."

The old man rubbed his head through his skull-cap.

"You would like to find some reason to be suspicious of me?"

"Mr. Wigan does not mean that, dear," said Zena.

The professor shook his head doubtfully.

"Crime as crime does not interest me. It is only when I am impelled to study a case, against my will sometimes, that I become keen; and, whenever this happens, the solution of the mystery is likely to be unusual. My methods are not those of a detective. You argue from facts; I am more inclined to form a theory, and then look for facts to fit it. Not a scientific way, you may say, but a great

many scientists do it, although they would strenuously deny the fact. I can show you how the facts support my theory, but I cannot always produce the actual proof. In many cases I should be a hindrance rather than a help to you."

"It is courteous of you to say so," I returned, wishing to be pleasant.

"It is quite true, not a compliment," said the girl.

"First, the dead man," Quarles went on. "Quite a healthy man was the medical opinion—but his eyes. Did you particularly notice his eyes? You look into the brain through the eyes, see into it with great penetration if you have accustomed yourself to such scrutiny as I have done. Mr. Ratcliffe had not been dead long enough for his eyes to lose that last impression received from the brain. They were still looking at something, as it were, and they still had terror in them. Now he was a traveler, one who must have faced danger scores of times; it would take something very unusual to frighten him."

I acquiesced with a nod.

"We may take it, I think, that such a man would not be terrified by burglars."

I admitted this assumption.

"He was looking at the curtains which were drawn across the window—that is a point to remember," said the professor, marking off this fact by holding up a finger. "Then the little boxes; did you count them?"

"Yes, there were twenty-five."

"And the last one was unopened; did you open it?"

"Yes; it contained a minute head in ivory, wonderfully carved."

"I did not touch the box," said Quarles, "but if the toy was complete it would naturally contain such a head. Did you notice the nineteenth box?"

"Not particularly."

"Had you done so you would have noticed that it was discolored like the first and largest one, not clean and white like the others—and more, beginning from the nineteenth box the semi-circular arrangement was broken, as though it had been completed in a hurry, and possibly by different hands."

I did not make any comment.

"The largest box had become discolored because it was the outside one, always exposed; I judged therefore that the nineteenth box was discolored for the same reason. For some time it had been the outside box of the last few boxes. In other words, the toy in Mr. Ratcliffe's possession had not been a complete one. This led me to look at box eighteen, the last in Mr. Ratcliffe's series; it was just the size to contain the sapphire. This suggested that the sapphire was the central point of the mystery."

"You think the thieves were disturbed?"

"No."

"Then why didn't they take the sapphire?"

"Exactly. By the way, is the stone still at Scotland Yard?"

"Yes."

"Has it been tested?"

"No."

"Have it examined by the most expert man you can find. I think you will find it is paste, a wonderful imitation, capable of standing some tests—but still paste."

"Then why did Mr. Ratcliffe—an expert in gems, remember—treasure it so carefully?" I asked.

"He didn't," Quarles answered shortly. "It is obvious that a man who possessed such stones as were found in that packet at the bank would certainly not make such a mistake; yet he was apparently playing with his treasure when he met his death. My theory had three points, you see. First, the sapphire was the sole object of the robbery; secondly, the thieves had substituted an exact duplicate for the real stone; thirdly, the stone must have some special fascination for Mr. Ratcliffe, or he would have put it in the bank for safety as he had done with others."

"An interesting theory, I admit, but——"

"Wait, Mr. Wigan. I have said something about my methods. I began to look for facts to support my theory. You remember the cook-housekeeper?"

"Perfectly."

"She spoke of her uncle's sensitiveness to noises; she had on one or two occasions surprised him in a listening attitude. That gave me a clew. What was he listening for? Mr. Ratcliffe had only given way to this listening attitude recently; in fact, only since his return from his last voyage. It would seem that since his return his mental balance had become unstable. There was some constant irritation in his brain which brought fear, and in his dead eyes there was terror. My theory was complete; I had only to fit the facts into it. I suppose, Mr. Wigan, you have found out all about the people living on either side of Ratcliffe's house?"

"Both are families above suspicion," I answered. "I also tried Ossery Road, the gardens of which run down to those on that side of Blenheim Square. The house immediately behind No. 12 is occupied by a doctor."

"I know. I called upon him recently to put some scientific point to him," said Quarles with a smile. "I came to the conclusion that he could give me no information about Mr. Ratcliffe. Rather curiously, he did not like Mr. Ratcliffe."

"So I discovered," I answered, and I was conscious of resenting the professor's active interference in the case. There is no telling what damage an amateur may do.

"His dislike was a solid fact," said Quarles. "I congratulate you on not being put on a false scent by it. Many detectives would have been. The gardens end on to each other—a doctor, a knowledge of subtle poisons—oh, there were materials for an excellent case ready to hand."

"We are getting away from the point, professor," I said, somewhat tartly.

"No, I am coming to it. I concentrated my attention on the house two doors further down the road. It would not be difficult to creep along the garden wall even in the dark. Two Chinese gentlemen boarded there, I was told. No one had noticed them very particularly in the neighborhood. There are several boarding-houses in Ossery Road, and many foreigners over here for study or upon business go to live in them. I called, but the Chinese gentlemen were visiting in the country, and were not expected back for another fortnight. As a fact, they were not Chinamen at all, but Tibetans, and I do not fancy they will come back."

"Tibetans. How do you know? You did not see them?"

"No, it is a guess; because on his last journey Mr. Ratcliffe wandered in Tibet. I

have correspondents in Northern India, and it was not very difficult to get this information by cable. You do not know Tibet, Mr. Wigan?"

"No."

"Nor I, except from travelers' tales and through my correspondents. A curious people, given to fetish worship in peculiar forms. I can tell you of one strange place, strange as Lhasa. Were you to go there presently—it might be too soon yet, I cannot say for certain—but presently, I am convinced you would witness a scene of rejoicing, religious processions in the streets, men wearing hideous masks; and in a temple there you would find an idol with two blue eyes—eyes of sapphire."

"Two?"

"For some time there has been only one," said Quarles; "the other was stolen. You would find also in this temple talismans, ivory boxes fitting into each other, the smallest containing a little carved head representing the head of the idol. Further, you would be told some strange tales of this idol, of the psychic influence it possesses, and how those who offend it remain always under that influence which brings terror. Were you present at a festival in this temple, you would hear the idol speak. First you would find the great assembly in the attitude of listening, and then from the idol you would hear a sound, half sigh, half groan. I suppose the priests produce it mechanically—I do not know. It may be that——"

"If this be true the mystery is solved," I said.

"I think so," said Quarles. "The Tibetans followed Mr. Ratcliffe to recover the lost eye, I have no doubt of that, and to be ready for any emergency had supplied themselves with a paste duplicate of the stone. Exactly how Mr. Ratcliffe died I can only conjecture. I remember that his eyes evidently saw something, and I fancy terror killed him. The Tibetans had undoubtedly watched him constantly, and had found out that he had the stone hidden in the boxes. Probably they expected to find it so hidden, having discovered that Mr. Ratcliffe had discarded the inner boxes of the talisman at the time of the robbery. Having made certain of this, I think that on the fatal night they made the curious sound that the idol makes when speaking, expecting that he would be listening for it, as their priests declared those who offended the god always did, and as a curious fact Mr. Ratcliffe actually was, remember; then possibly they thrust between the curtains one of those hideous masks which figure in so many religious ceremonies in

Tibet. Mr. Ratcliffe was in a state of mind to give any sudden terror an enormous power over him, and I think he died without any violence being offered him. So the gem was recovered, the paste sapphire and the remaining boxes being left as a sign that the god had been avenged, a sign which I believe I have been able to read. There are the theory and some facts; you must make further inquiries yourself."

The professor rose abruptly from his chair. Evidently he had no intention of answering questions, and he meant the interview to come to an end.

"Thank you," I said. "I shall take steps at once to find out if you are correct."

"For your own satisfaction, not mine," said Quarles; "I am certain. You asked how it was I came to Blenheim Square that morning. Chance! It is called that. I do not believe in chance. When I am impelled to do a thing, I do it because I recognize a directing will I am forced to obey. We live in a world girt with miracles, in an atmosphere of mystery which is beyond our comprehension. We find names for what we do not understand, psychic force, mind waves, telepathy, and the like, but they are only names and do not help us much. Keep an open mind, Mr. Wigan; you will be astonished what strange imaginings will enter it—imaginings which you will discover are real truths. An empty mind in an empty room, there you have the best receptacle for that great will which guides and governs all thought and action. I speak as a philosopher, and as an old man to a young one. Come to me if you like when you are in a difficulty, and I will help you if I am allowed to. Do you understand? Good-bye."

Subsequent inquiries made by Scotland Yard through the authorities in India established the fact that the sapphire eye of the image in Tibet had been stolen; that Mr. Ratcliffe was in Tibet at the time; and that not long after the tragedy in Blenheim Square the jewel was restored to its place with much rejoicing and religious enthusiasm.

I was not disposed to like Professor Quarles nor to believe in him altogether. I found it easy to see the charlatan in him, yet the fact remained that he had solved the problem.

Certainly he was interesting, and, besides, there was his granddaughter, Zena. If only for the sake of seeing her, I felt sure I should have occasion to consult

Christopher Quarles again.

CHAPTER II
THE IDENTITY OF THE FINAL VICTIM

I soon fell into the habit of going to see Professor Quarles. As an excuse I talked over cases with him, but he seldom volunteered an opinion, often was obviously uninterested. Truth to tell, I was not there for his opinion, but to see his granddaughter. A detective in love sounds something like an absurdity, but such was my case, and, since Zena's manner did not suggest that she was particularly interested in me, my love affair seemed rather a hopeless one.

My association with Christopher Quarles has, however, led to the solution of some strange mysteries, and, since my own achievements are sufficiently well known, I may confine myself to those cases which, single-handed, I should have failed to solve. I know that in many of them I was credited with having unraveled the mystery, but this was only because Professor Quarles persisted in remaining in the background. If I did the spade work, the deductions were his.

They were all cases with peculiar features in them, and it was never as a detective that Quarles approached them. He was often as astonished at my acumen in following a clew as I was at his marvelous theories, which seemed so absurd to begin with yet proved correct in the end.

Perhaps his curious power was never more noticeable than in the case of the Withan murder.

A farmer returning from Medworth, the neighboring market town, one night in January, was within a quarter of a mile of Withan village when his horse suddenly shied and turned into the ditch.

During the afternoon there had been a fall of snow, sufficient to cover the ground to a depth of an inch or so, and in places it had drifted to a depth of two feet or more. By evening the clouds had gone, the moon sailed in a clear sky, and, looking round to find the cause of his horse's unusual behavior, the farmer saw a man lying on a heap of snow under the opposite hedge.

He was dead—more, he was headless.

It was not until some days later that the case came into my hands, and in the interval the local authorities had not been idle. It was noted that the man was poorly dressed, that his hands proved he was used to manual labor, but there was no mark either on his body or on his clothing, nor any papers in his pockets to lead to his identification. So far as could be ascertained, nobody was missing in Withan or Medworth. It seemed probable that the murderer had come upon his victim secretly, that the foul deed had been committed with horrible expedition, otherwise the victim, although not a strong man, would have made some struggle for his life, and apparently no struggle had taken place.

Footprints, nearly obliterated, were traceable to a wood on the opposite side of the road, but no one seemed to have left the wood in any direction. From this fact it was argued that the murder had been committed early in the afternoon, soon after the storm began, and that snow had hidden the murderer's tracks from the wood. That snow had drifted on to the dead body seemed to establish this theory.

Why had the murderer taken the head with him? There were many fantastic answers to the question. Some of the country folk, easily superstitious, suggested that it must be the work of the devil, others put it down to an escaped lunatic, while others again thought it might be the work of some doctor who wanted to study the brain.

The authorities believed that it had been removed to prevent identification, and would be found buried in the wood. It was not found, however, and the countryside was in a state bordering on panic.

For a few days the Withan murder seemed unique in atrocities, and then came a communication from the French police. Some two years ago an almost identical murder had been committed outside a village in Normandy. In this case also the head was missing, and nothing had been found upon the body to identify the victim. He was well dressed, and a man who would be likely to carry papers with him, but nothing was found, and the murder had remained a mystery.

These were the points known and conjectured when the case came into my hands, and my investigations added little to them.

One point, however, impressed me. I felt convinced that the man's clothes, which were shown to me, had not been made in England. They were poor, worn almost

threadbare, but they had once been fairly good, and the cut was not English. That it was French I could not possibly affirm, but it might be, and so I fashioned a fragile link with the Normandy crime.

On this occasion I went to Quarles with the object of interesting him in the Withan case, and he forestalled me by beginning to talk about it the moment I entered the room.

Here I may mention a fact which I had not discovered at first. Whenever he was interested in a case I was always taken into his empty room; at other times we were in the dining-room or the drawing-room. It was the empty room on this occasion, and Zena remained with us.

I went carefully through the case point by point, and he made no comment until I had finished.

"The foreign cut of the clothes may be of importance," he said. "I am not sure. Is this wood you mention of any great extent?"

"No, it runs beside the road for two or three hundred yards."

"Toward Withan?"

"No; it was near the Withan end of it that the dead man was found."

"Any traces that the head was carried to the wood?"

"The local authorities say, 'Yes,' and not a trace afterward. The ground in the wood was searched at the time, and I have been over it carefully since. Through one part of the wood there runs a ditch, which is continued as a division between two fields which form part of the farm land behind the wood. By walking along this the murderer might have left the wood without leaving tracks behind him."

"A good point, Wigan. And where would that ditch lead him?"

"Eventually to the high road, which runs almost at right angles to the Withan road."

"Much water in the ditch?" asked Quarles.

"Half a foot when I went there. It may have been less at the time of the murder. The early part of January was dry, you will remember."

"There was a moon that night, wasn't there?"

"Full, or near it," I returned.

"And how soon was the alarm raised along the countryside?"

"That night. It was about eight o'clock when the body was found, and after going to the village the farmer returned to Medworth for the police."

"A man who had walked a considerable distance in a ditch would be wet and muddy," said Zena, "and if he were met on the road carrying a bag he would arrest attention."

"Why carrying a bag?" asked Quarles.

"With the head in it," she answered.

"That's another good point, Wigan," chuckled Quarles.

"Of course, the head may be buried in the wood," said Zena.

Quarles looked at me inquiringly.

"I searched the wood with that idea in my mind," I said. "One or two doubtful places I had dug up. I think the murderer must have taken the head with him."

"To bury somewhere else?" asked Quarles.

"Perhaps not," I answered.

"A mad doctor bent on brain experiments—is that your theory, Wigan?"

"Not necessarily a doctor, but some homicidal maniac who is also responsible for the Normandy murder. The likeness between the two crimes can hardly be a coincidence."

"What was the date of the French murder?"

"January the seventeenth."

"Nearly the same date as the English one," said Zena.

"Two years intervening," I returned.

"Wigan, it would be interesting to know if a similar murder occurred anywhere in the intervening year at that date," said Quarles.

"You have a theory, professor?"

"An outlandish one which would make you laugh. No, no; I do not like being laughed at. I never mention my theories until I have some facts to support them. I am interested in this case. Perhaps I shall go to Withan."

There was nothing more to be got out of the professor just then, and I departed.

I took the trouble to make inquiry whether any similar crime had happened in England in the January of the preceding year, and had the same inquiry made in France. There was no record of any murder bearing the slightest resemblance to the Withan tragedy.

A few days later Quarles telegraphed me to meet him at Kings Cross, and we traveled North together.

"Wait," he said when I began to question him. "I am not sure yet. My theory seems absurd. We are going to find out if it is."

We took rooms at a hotel in Medworth, Quarles explaining that our investigations might take some days.

Next morning, instead of going to Withan as I had expected, he took me to the police court, and seemed to find much amusement in listening to some commonplace cases, and was not very complimentary in his remarks about the bench of magistrates. The next afternoon he arranged a drive. I thought we were going to Withan, but we turned away from the village, and presently Quarles stopped the carriage.

"How far are we from Withan?" he asked the driver.

"Five or six miles. The road winds a lot. It's a deal nearer as the crow flies."

"You need not wait for us, driver. My friend and I are going to walk back."

The coachman pocketed his money and drove away.

"Couldn't keep him waiting all night, as we may have to do," said Quarles. "Mind you, Wigan, I'm very doubtful about my theory; at least, I am not certain that I shall find the facts I want. A few hours will settle it one way or the other."

After walking along the road for about a mile Quarles scrambled through a hedge into a wood by the roadside.

"We're trespassers, but we must take our chance. Should we meet anyone, blame me. Say I am a doddering old fool who would walk under the trees and you were obliged to come to see that I didn't get into any mischief. Do you go armed?"

"Always," I answered.

"I do sometimes," he said, tapping his pocket. "We might come up against danger if my theory is correct. If I tell you to shoot—shoot, and quickly. Your life is likely to depend upon it. And keep your ears open to make sure no one is following us."

He had become keen, like a dog on the trail, and, old as he was, seemed incapable of fatigue. Whether he had studied the topography of the neighborhood I cannot say, but he did not hesitate in his direction until he reached a high knoll which was clear of the wood and commanded a considerable view.

We were trespassers in a private park. To our right was a large house, only partially seen through its screen of trees, but it was evidently mellow with age. To our left, toward what was evidently the extremity of the park, was hilly ground, which had been allowed to run wild.

To this Quarles pointed.

"That is our way," he said. "We'll use what cover we can."

We plunged into the wood again, and were soon in the wilderness, forcing our way, sometimes with considerable difficulty, through the undergrowth. Once or twice the professor gave me a warning gesture, but he did not speak. He had evidently some definite goal, and I was conscious of excitement as I followed him.

For an hour or more he turned this way and that, exploring every little ravine he could discover, grunting his disappointment each time he failed to find what he was looking for.

"I said I wasn't certain," he whispered when our path had led us into a damp hollow which looked as if it had not been visited by man for centuries. "My theory seems—and yet this is such a likely place. There must be a way."

He was going forward again. The hollow was surrounded by perpendicular walls of sand and chalk; it was a pit, in fact, which Nature had filled with vegetation.

The way we had come seemed the only way into it.

"Ah! this looks promising," Quarles said suddenly.

In a corner of the wall, or, to be more precise, filling up a rent in it, was a shed, roughly built, but with a door secured by a very business-like lock.

"I think the shed is climbable," said Quarles. "Let's get on the roof. I am not so young as I was, so help me up."

It was not much help he wanted. In a few moments we were on the roof.

"As I thought," he said. "Do you see?"

The shed, with its slanting roof, served to block a narrow, overgrown path between two precipitous chalk walls.

"We'll go carefully," said Quarles. "There may be worse than poachers' traps here."

Without help from me he dropped from the roof, and I followed him.

The natural passage was winding, and about fifty yards long, and opened into another pit of some size. A pit I call it, but it was as much a cave as a pit, part of it running deeply into the earth, and only about a third of it being open to the sky. The cave part had a rough, sandy floor, and here was a long shed of peculiar construction. It was raised on piles, about eight feet high; the front part formed a kind of open veranda, the back part being closed in. The roof was thatched with bark and dried bracken, and against one end of the veranda was a notched tree trunk, serving as a ladder.

"As I expected," said Quarles, with some excitement. "We must get onto the veranda for a moment. I think we are alone here, but keep your ears open."

The shed was evidently used sometimes. There was a stone slab which had served as a fireplace, and from a beam above hung a short chain, on which a pot could easily be fixed.

"We'll get away quickly," said Quarles. "Patience, Wigan. I believe we are going to witness a wonderful thing."

"When?"

"In about thirty hours' time."

The professor's sense of direction was marvelous. Having reclimbed the shed which blocked the entrance to this concealed pit, he made practically a straight line for the place at which we had entered the wood from the road.

"I daresay one would be allowed to see over the house, but perhaps it is as well not to ask," he said. "We can do that later. I'm tired, Wigan; but it was safer not to keep the carriage."

Try as I would, I could get no explanation out of him either that night or next day. He was always as secret as the grave until he had proved his theory, and then he seemed anxious to forget the whole affair, and shrank from publicity. That is how it came about that I obtained credit which I did not deserve.

"We go there again this evening," he said after lunch next day; "so a restful afternoon will suit us."

It was getting dark when we set out, and again Quarles's unerring sense of locality astonished me. He led the way without hesitation. This time he took more precaution not to make a sound when climbing over the shed into the narrow path.

"I think we are first, but great care is necessary," he whispered.

We crept forward and concealed ourselves among the scrub vegetation which grew in that part of the pit which was open to the sky. It was dark, the long shed barely discernible, but the professor was particular about our position.

"We may have to creep a little nearer presently," he whispered. "From here we can do so. Silence, Wigan, and don't be astonished at anything."

The waiting seemed long. Moonlight was presently above us, throwing the cave part of the pit into greater shadow than ever.

I cannot attempt to say how long we had waited in utter silence when Quarles touched my arm. Someone was coming, and with no particular stealth. Whoever it was seemed quite satisfied that the night was empty of danger. I heard footsteps on the raised floor of the shed—a man's step, and only one man's. I heard him moving about for some time. I think he came down the ladder once and went up again. Then there was a light and sudden tiny flames. In the dark he had evidently got fuel, and had started a fire on the stone slab.

As the flames brightened I watched his restless figure. He was not a young man. I caught a glimpse of white hair, but he took no position in which I could see his face clearly. He was short, thick-set, and quick in his movements.

From somewhere at the back of the shed he pushed forward a block of wood, and, standing on this, he fixed something to the short chain I had noted yesterday. When he got down again I saw that a bundle was suspended over the fire, not a pot, and it was too high for the flames or much of the heat to reach it, only the smoke curled about it.

Then the man moved the wooden block to the side of the fire and sat down facing us, the flickering flames throwing a red glow over him.

"Wigan, do you see?" whispered Quarles.

"Not clearly."

"We'll go nearer. Carefully."

From our new point of view I looked again. The man's face was familiar, but just then I could not remember who he was. It was the bundle hanging over the fire which fascinated me.

Tied together, and secured in a network of string, were five or six human heads, blackened, shriveled faces, which seemed to grin horribly as they swung deeply from side to side, lit up by the flicker of the flames.

"Do you see, Wigan?" Quarles asked again.

"Yes."

"And the man?"

"Who is he?"

"On the bench yesterday. Sir Henry Buckingham. Don't you remember?"

For an hour—two, three, I don't know how long—that horrible bundle swung over the fire, and the man sat on his block of wood, staring straight before him. I had a great desire to rush from my hiding-place and seize him, and I waited, expecting some further revelation, listening for other footsteps. None came. The fire flickered lower and went out. The moon had set, and the cold of the early morning got into my bones.

In the darkness before the dawn the man moved about the shed again, and presently I heard him go.

"Patience!" whispered Quarles, as I started up to go after him. "He will not run away."

His calmness almost exasperated me, but he would answer no questions until we had returned to our hotel and had breakfast.

"My dear Wigan," he said, when at last he condescended to talk, "it was Zena who first set me on the right road, when she remarked that a man who had walked in a ditch carrying a bag would arrest attention. Two points were suggested—first, that the man might not have far to go to reach a place of safety; secondly, that he had come prepared to take a head away with him. A mere speculation, you may say, but it set me putting questions to myself. Why should a head be required? What kind of man would be likely to want a head? A theory took shape in my brain, and I hunted up the history of the well-to-do people who lived in the neighborhood of Withan. My theory required a man who had traveled, who was elderly, who could be connected with the case in France two years ago. I found such a man in Sir Henry Buckingham. I told you I was not certain of my theory. I was doubtful about it after I had watched Sir Henry for a whole morning on the bench. I sought for some peculiarity in his manner, and found none. Yet his history coincided with my theory. You know nothing about him, I suppose?"

"Nothing."

"Rather an interesting career, but with an hereditary taint in it," Quarles went on. "His mother was eccentric. Her husband was rich enough to have her looked after at home; had she been a poorer person she would have died in a madhouse. Religious mania hers was, and her son has inherited it in a curious fashion. In the year intervening between the Normandy crime and this one Sir Henry was in Rome, where he was very ill, delirious, and not expected to live, so there was no similar crime that year. But he was in Normandy at the time of the murder there, motoring, and usually alone."

"How have you learnt all this?"

"He is important enough to have some of his doings chronicled, and he wrote some interesting articles for a country gentlemen's newspaper about his Normandy tour—nature studies, and such like. Another point, both these

murders happened at the time of the full moon. I am not absolutely sure, but I think you will find that for the last half-dozen years Sir Henry has not been in England in January."

"You think——"

"I think there would have been other heads missing if he had been," Quarles answered. "He was sane enough to be somewhere where he was not known when this time of the year came round. At the full moon he is always queer—witness last night; but he is only dangerous in January—dangerous, I mean, without provocation. To preserve his secret, I have little doubt he would go to any length; that is why I warned you to be ready to shoot when we went upon our journey of discovery. Now this year he was in England; illness had kept him to his house yonder, but he was well enough to get out at the fatal time, and the insane desire proved irresistible. He was cunning too. He must know everybody in the neighborhood, yet the man he killed was unknown. We shall find presently, I have no doubt, that the victim was some wanderer returning unexpectedly to friends in Withan. That would account for the foreign cut of his clothes. Sir Henry, waiting in the wood, perhaps for hours, may have allowed others to pass before this man came. He realized that he was a stranger, and attacked him."

"But the head?"

"Was among those hanging over the fire. Sir Henry was for many years in Borneo, Wigan, and for a large part of the time was up-country helping to put down the head-hunting which still existed there, and still does exist, according to all accounts, when the natives think they can escape detection. The horrible custom proved too much for his diseased brain, and fascinated him. You see how my theory grew. Then I looked for the actual proof, which we found last night. The long shed in that pit is built exactly as the Dyaks of Borneo build theirs—a whole village living on communal terms under one roof. The stone slab for the fire is the same, and over it the Dyaks hang the treasured heads, just as we saw them last night. Now you had better go and see the police, Wigan. Don't drag me into it. I am going back to London by the midday train."

The arrest of Sir Henry Buckingham caused an enormous sensation.

He was subsequently put into a lunatic asylum, where he died not many months afterward. Fortunately he had no children to run the risk of madness in their turn, and neither his wife nor any of the servants knew anything of the concealed pit where he went to revel in his insane delight.

Hidden under the long shed the heads were found—six of them, five so hideously shriveled that identification was altogether impossible.

The sixth was less shriveled, was the only English one, and, perhaps, had we shown it in Withan, some old person might have recognized a lost son believed to be still wandering the world.

It was thought better not to do so, and the identity of Sir Henry's last victim remains a mystery.

CHAPTER III
THE MYSTERY OF THE CIRCULAR COUNTERS

However obscure a mystery may be, there is always some point or circumstance which, if rightly interpreted, will lead to its solution. Even in those crimes which have never been elucidated this point exists, only it has never been duly appreciated. It is this key-clew, as I may call it, for which the detective first looks, and, since few crimes, if any, are committed without some definite reason, it is most frequently found in the motive.

His almost superhuman power of recognizing this key-clew was the foundation of Christopher Quarles's success, and his solution of the mysterious burglaries which caused such speculation for a time was not the least of his achievements.

Sir Joseph Maynard, the eminent physician of Harley Street, had given a small dinner party one evening. The guests left early, and soon after midnight the household had retired.

Neither Sir Joseph nor Lady Maynard nor any of the servants were disturbed during the night, but next morning it was found that burglars had entered. They had got in by a passage window at the back—not a very difficult matter—and had evidently gone to the dining room and helped themselves to spirits from a tantalus which was on the sideboard. Three glasses, with a little of the liquor left in them, were on the table, and near them were some biscuit crumbs. There were several silver articles on the sideboard, but these had not been touched.

The burglars appeared to have given all their attention to Sir Joseph's room, which was in a state of confusion. Two cupboards and every drawer had been turned out and the contents thrown about in all directions. A safe which stood in a corner had been broken open. It was a large safe, but of an old-fashioned type, presenting little difficulty to experts. In it, besides papers and about seventy pounds in gold in a canvas bag, Sir Joseph had a considerable amount of silver, presentations which had been made to him, and some unique specimens of the

Queen Anne period. All this silver was upon the floor, also the bag of money intact.

So far as Sir Joseph could tell, not a thing had been taken. Half a dozen cigarette-ends had been thrown down upon the carpet, and a small box containing some round counters lay broken by the writing-table. It looked as if the box had been knocked down and trodden on by mistake, for the counters were in a little heap close to the broken fragments. It appeared that the burglars must have been disturbed and had made off without securing their booty.

This was the obvious explanation, but it did not satisfy me. I questioned Sir Joseph about his papers. Had he any document which, for private or public reasons, someone might be anxious to obtain? He said he had not, was inclined to laugh at my question, and proceeded to inform me that he had no family skeleton, had no part in any Government secret, had never been in touch with any mysterious society, and had no papers giving any valuable details of scientific experiments upon which he was engaged.

Of course the thieves might have been disturbed, but there were certain points against this idea. No one had moved about the house during the night, so apparently there had been nothing to disturb them. The silver on the floor was scattered, not gathered together ready to take away as I should have expected to find it, and it looked as if it had been thrown aside carelessly, as though it were not what the thieves were in search of; and surely, had they left in a hurry, the bag of money would have been taken. Moreover, the cigarette-ends and the dirty glasses suggested a certain leisurely method of going to work, and men of this kind would not be easily frightened.

The cigarette-ends puzzled me. They were of a cheap American brand, had not been taken from Sir Joseph's box, which contained only Turkish ones, and, although they had apparently been thrown down carelessly, there was no ash upon the carpet nor anywhere else. They looked like old ends rather than the remains of cigarettes smoked last night. If my idea were correct, it would mean that they had been put there on purpose to mislead.

I examined the three glasses on the dining-room table; there was the stain of lips at the rim of one, but not of the other two. Only one had been drunk out of, and probably a little of the liquid had been emptied out of this into the other two. On inquiry, one of the servants told me that only a very little of the spirit had been taken. She also said there was only one biscuit left in the box last night, and it

was there now; therefore a few crumbs from the box must have been purposely scattered on the tablecloth.

This was the story I told to Professor Quarles and his granddaughter. I went to him at once, feeling that the case was just one of those in which his theoretical method was likely to be useful. By doing so I certainly saved one valuable life, possibly more than one.

That he was interested was shown by our adjournment to the empty room, and he did not ask a question until I had finished my story.

"What is the opinion you have formed about it, Wigan?" he said.

"I think there was only one burglar, but for some reason he thought it important that it should be believed there were more."

"A very important point, and a reasonable conclusion, I fancy," said Quarles. "If you are right, it narrows the sphere of inquiry—narrows it very much, taken with the other facts of the case."

"Exactly," I answered. "There is a suggestion to my mind of amateurishness in the affair. I grant the safe was not a difficult one to break open, but it had not been done in a very expert manner. The cigarette-ends, the dirty glasses, and the biscuit crumbs seem to me rather gratuitous deceptions, and——"

"Wait," said Quarles. "You assume a little too much. They would have deceived nine men out of ten—you happen to be the tenth man. Amateur or not, we have to deal with a very smart man, so don't underestimate the enemy, Wigan. Assuming this to be the work of an amateur, to what definite point does it lead you?"

"To this question," I replied. "Did Sir Joseph Maynard burgle his own house?"

"Why should you think so?"

"His manner was curious. Then there is only his own statement that nothing has been taken. But supposing he wished to get rid of papers, or of something else which was in his possession and for which he was responsible to others, a burglary would be an easy way out of the difficulty."

"Would he not have robbed himself of something to make the affair more plausible?" said Quarles.

"The amateur constantly overlooks the obvious," I answered.

The professor shook his head.

"Besides, Wigan, if he wanted to suggest that some important document had been stolen, that is just the one thing he would mention."

"I think that would entirely depend on the man's temperament, professor."

"That may be true, but we have also got to consider the man's character. Sir Joseph's standing is very high."

"Sudden temptation or necessity may subvert the highest character," I answered. "You know that as well as I do. When I questioned Sir Joseph about his papers his manner seemed curious, as I have said. He at once declared that he had no part in any Government secret or mysterious society, gratuitous information, you understand, not in answer to any direct question of mine, showing that the ideas were in his mind. Why? The explanation would be simple if he were the burglar of his own papers."

"I admit the argument is sound, Wigan, but it does not creep into my brain with any compelling influence. There is a link missing in the chain somewhere," and he looked at Zena.

His often-repeated statement that she helped him by her questions had never impressed me very greatly. When a mystery was cleared up, it was easy to say that Zena had put him on the right road, and I considered it a whim of his more than anything else. Still I am bound to say that her seemingly irrelevant questions often had a curious bearing on the problem. It was so now.

"You do not seem interested in the broken box of counters?" she said, turning toward her grandfather.

"I wonder, Wigan—is that the clew?" Quarles said quickly. "It creeps into my brain."

"The counters were in a heap," I said.

"As if they had fallen out of the box when it was broken?" asked Quarles.

"No, that would have scattered them more. They were round, and might have fallen over after having been put one upon another as one gathers coppers together when counting a number of them. Sir Joseph picked them up and put

them on the writing-table while he was talking to me."

"Did that strike you as significant?" asked Quarles.

"I cannot say it did. The floor was covered with things, and I fancy they happened to be in his way, that was all."

"They are significant, Wigan, but I cannot see yet in which direction they lead us. We must wait; for the moment there is nothing to be done."

I had become so accustomed to Quarles jumping to some sudden conclusion that I was disappointed. I think I was prepared to find him a failure in this case. Naturally I was not idle during the next few days, but at the end of them I had learnt nothing.

Then the unexpected happened. On consecutive nights two doctors' houses were burgled. The first was in Kensington. Dr. Wheatley had taken some part in local politics which had made him unpopular with certain people, and he was inclined to consider the burglary one of revenge rather than intended robbery. Nothing had been stolen, but everything in his room was in disorder, and a small and unique inlaid cabinet with a secret spring lock had been smashed to pieces. Several cigarette-ends were on the floor.

The second was at Dr. Wood's in Ebury Street, an eminent surgeon, and the author of one or two textbooks. He had several cabinets in his room containing specimens, and everything had been turned on to the floor and damaged more or less. In fact, although nothing had been taken, the damage was considerable. On the night of the burglary Dr. Wood was away from home, only servants being in the house. The cook, suffering from faceache, had been restless all night, but had heard nothing. It seemed, however, that the burglar must have heard her moving about and had been prepared to defend himself, for a revolver, loaded in every chamber, was found on one of the cabinets. Apparently, having put it ready for use, he had forgotten to take it away.

The doctor was furious at the wanton destruction of his specimens, and, being irascible and suspicious, fancied the revolver was merely a blind and that the culprit was some jealous medical man. Again there were cigarette-ends among the débris.

As soon as possible I went to Quarles and was shown into the empty room.

"The unexpected has happened," I said.

"No, no; the expected," he said impatiently, and he pointed to a heap of newspapers. "I've read every report, but tell me yourself—every detail."

I did so.

"The same brand of cigarettes?" he asked.

"No, but all cheap American ones."

"One man trying to give the impression that he is several. You still think that? Nothing has happened to make you change that opinion?"

"No, I hold to the one man theory."

"And you are right," he snapped. "I admit I might not have got upon the right track had you not made that discovery. It was clever, Wigan."

"It did not seem to help you to a theory," I answered.

"True. But it made me ask myself a question. Had the thief found what he was looking for? Much depended upon the answer. If he had, I saw small chance of elucidating the mystery. I might have propounded a theory, but I should have had no facts to support it.

"Indeed, had I theorized, then my theory would have been wrong. If the thief had not found what he wanted, he would continue his search, I argued. For some reason he connected Sir Joseph Maynard with the object of his search, and, when he tried again, we stood a chance of finding the link in the chain we wanted. It might implicate Sir Joseph, it might not. That is why I said we must wait. The thief has tried again—twice. Now, what is he looking for?"

"Presumably something a doctor is likely to have," I said.

"And not silver, nor money, nor papers, nor——"

"Nor counters, I suppose," I interrupted.

"Not precisely," said Quarles. "But those counters have inspired me. They crept into my brain, Wigan, and remained there. Whatever it is the thief is seeking for, he is desperately anxious to obtain it—witness his two attempts on consecutive nights."

"You forget that days have elapsed since Sir Joseph's was broken into."

"Forget? Nonsense!" said the professor sharply. "Should I be likely to forget so important a point? It means that opportunity has been lacking. More, it means that any doctor would not do, only certain medical practitioners. And that is where the counters help me—or I think they do."

"How?"

"Call for me to-morrow morning; we are going to pay a visit together. We may be too late, but I hope not. That revolver left in Dr. Wood's house rather frightens me."

"Why, particularly?"

"It proves that the thief will use violence if he is disturbed, and that he is a desperate man. I should say he will grow more dangerous with every failure."

It was like Christopher Quarles to raise my curiosity, and then to leave it unsatisfied. It was his way of showing that he was my superior—at least, it always impressed me like this. No man has ever made me more angry than he has done. Yet I owe him much, and there is no gainsaying his marvelous deductions.

He made me angry now, first by his refusal to tell me more, and then by his patronizing air when I left the house.

"You are clever, Wigan, very clever. You have shown it in this case. But you lack imagination to step out as far as you ought to do. Cultivate imagination, and don't be too bound up by common sense. Common sense is merely the knowledge with which fools on the dead level are content. Imagination carries one to the hills, and shows something of that truth which lies behind what we call truth."

I found him ready and waiting for me next morning, as eager to be on the trail as a dog in leash.

"We are going to call on Dr. Tresman, in Montagu Street," he said, stopping a taxi. "You will tell him that you have reason to believe that his house is being watched, and will be burgled on the first opportunity. If the opportunity is given, it may happen to-night, which will suit us admirably, because we have got to keep watch every night in his room until it is burgled. Of course, you will tell him who you are, and get his permission. We don't want to have to commit burglary ourselves in order to catch the thief."

"Why do you expect this particular doctor will be visited?" I asked.

"It is part of my theory," was all the explanation I could get out of him.

Dr. Tresman was a man in the prime of life, and evidently believed himself capable of dealing with any thieves who visited him. I told him that the man we expected was no ordinary thief.

"A gang at work, eh? I have been out of town for a little while holiday-making, and part of my holiday consists in not reading the papers. Of course you may keep watch, and I shall be within call should you want help."

"You had better leave it to us, doctor," said Quarles, who, for the purpose of this interview, posed as my assistant.

"Come, now, if it means a rough-and-tumble, I should back myself against you," laughed Tresman, drawing himself up to his full inches.

"No lack of muscle, I can see, doctor, but then there is my experience."

"For all that, you may be glad of my muscle when it comes to the point," was the answer.

At nine o'clock that night Quarles and I were concealed in the doctor's room, Quarles behind a chesterfield sofa in a corner, while I crouched close to the wall behind one of the window curtains.

We had decided that the most likely means of entry was by a window at the end of the hall, and we expected our prey to enter the room by the door. We had got the doctor to put a spirit tantalus on the sideboard, also some biscuits and a box of cigarettes. We were anxious to reproduce the circumstances of the burglary at Sir Joseph Maynard's as nearly as possible, for Quarles declared it was impossible to say what significance there might be in the man's every action.

So we waited—waited all night, in fact. Nothing happened.

"Something alarmed him," was all Quarles said when we left the house in the morning.

He showed no disappointment, nor any sign that his theory had received a shock.

The next night we were on the watch again, concealed as before.

By arrangement, the house retired to rest early. So slowly did time go that half the night seemed to have passed when I heard a neighboring church clock strike one, and almost directly afterward the door of the room was opened stealthily and was shut again.

Until that moment I had not heard a sound in the house, and I was not certain that anyone had entered the room even now, until I saw a tiny disk, the end of a ray of light, on the wall. The disk moved, so the man holding the lantern was moving. The next moment he almost trod upon me. His first care was to see that the curtains covered the windows securely, and it evidently never occurred to him that there might be watchers in the room. It was discovery from without that he was afraid of. The ray from his lantern swung about the room for a moment, then he switched on the electric light.

As he had drawn the curtain closer across the window, I had arranged the folds so that no scrap of my clothing should show beneath them. Now I made a slit in the fabric with my penknife so that I could watch him through it. He was middle-aged, well groomed, decently dressed. Having glanced round the room, he placed a bag and the lantern on the floor and went to the sideboard. He put a little spirit into one of the tumblers and added a little water—a very modest dose, indeed—and, having just sipped it, he poured some of the contents into two other glasses, and placed the three glasses on a small table near the door, so that no one could fail to see them on entering. Then he broke off a piece of biscuit, crumbled it in his hands, and scattered the crumbs beside the glasses. The cigarette box he did not touch, but he took some cigarette-ends from his pocket and threw them on the floor. These preliminaries seemed stereotyped ones, and he appeared glad to be done with them.

There was a curious eagerness in his face as he bent down and opened his bag, taking a thin chisel from it, and from his hip pocket he took a revolver. His method was systematic. He began at one corner of the room, and opened every drawer and box he could find. If a drawer were locked, he pried it open. He laid the revolver ready to his hand upon the piece of furniture he was examining. Every drawer he emptied on to the floor. Some of the contents he hardly looked at. Indeed, most of the contents did not interest him. But now and then his attention was closer, and at intervals he seemed puzzled, standing quite still, his hands raised, a finger touching his head, almost as a low comedian does when he wishes the audience to realize that he is in deep thought.

For some time I could not make out what kind of article it was to which he gave special attention, but presently noticed that anything in ivory or bone interested him, especially if it were circular. I remembered the counters in Sir Joseph's room, and wished we had thought to place some in here to see what he would have done with them.

Watching him closely, I was aware that he became more irritable as he proceeded. One small cabinet, which might possess a secret hiding-place, he broke with the chisel, and I noticed that whenever a drawer was locked his scrutiny of the contents was more careful. He evidently expected that the man he was robbing would value the thing he was looking for, and would be likely to hide it securely.

He had worked round half the room when he suddenly stopped, and, with a quick movement, took up the revolver. I had not heard a sound in the house, but

he had. There was no sign of doubt in his attitude, which was of a most uncompromising character. He did not make any movement to switch off the light, he did not attempt to conceal himself. He just raised his arm and pointed the revolver toward the door, on a level at which the bullet would strike the head of a man of average height.

The handle was turned, and the door began to open. The next five seconds were full of happenings. For just a fraction of time I realized that the burglar meant to shoot the intruder without a word of warning, and for a moment I seemed unable to utter a sound. Then I shouted:

"Back for your life!"

Immediately there was a sharp report. Quarles had fired from behind the Chesterfield, and the burglar's arm dropped like a dead thing to his side, his revolver falling to the floor.

"Quickly, Wigan!" Quarles cried.

I had dashed aside the curtain, and I threw myself upon the burglar just in time to prevent his picking up his weapon with his left hand. He struggled fiercely, and I was glad of Tresman's help in securing him, although the doctor had come perilously near to losing his life by his unexpected intrusion. But for Christopher Quarles he would have been a dead man.

We called in the police, and, when our prisoner had been conveyed to the station, the professor and I went back to Chelsea.

"Do you know what he was looking for, Wigan?" Quarles asked.

"Something in bone or ivory."

"Bone," answered Quarles. "Thank heaven that fool Tresman didn't come sooner! We might have missed much that was interesting. You noted how keen he was with every piece of bone he could find, how irritable he was growing. The counters, Wigan, they were the clew. But I did not understand their significance at first."

"I do not understand the case now," I confessed, "except that we have caught a mad burglar."

"Yes, it's an asylum case, not a prison one," said Quarles. "What was the man

looking for? That was my first question, as I told you. If he had not found it at Sir Joseph's he would look again. He did, and visited two other doctors. Round counters—doctors. There was the link. I daresay you know, Wigan, there is an annual published giving particulars of all the hospitals, with the names of the medical staff, consulting surgeons and physicians, and so forth. In the paragraph concerning St. James's Hospital you will find that the first three names mentioned are Sir Joseph Maynard, Dr. Wheatley, and Dr. Wood. The fourth is Dr. Tresman. It could not be chance that the burglar had visited these men in exact order, so I argued that he would next go to Dr. Tresman. The man had had something to do with St. James's Hospital, and, since he was acting like a madman, yet with method, I judged he had been a patient who had undergone an operation, outwardly successful, really a failure. He was looking for something of which a doctor at this hospital had robbed him, as he imagined, and, not knowing which doctor, looked at this annual and began at the first name. I have no doubt he was conscious of the loss of some sense or faculty, and believed that if he could get back the something that was missing he would recover this sense. Moreover, he was exceedingly anxious that no one should guess what he was looking for, so he attempted to suggest that a gang was at work—the glasses, the crumbs, the cigarette-ends, all placed where they would be certain to attract notice. Did you see how he touched his head several times to-night?"

"Yes."

"That gives the explanation, I think," said Quarles. "To relieve some injury to his head, he was trepanned at St. James's Hospital, and he was looking for the bone which the little circular trephine had cut from his head. I have no doubt he examined Sir Joseph's round counters very carefully to make sure that what he wanted was not among them, and he would naturally damage Dr. Wood's specimens. Probably the original pressure was relieved by the operation, but in some other way the brain was injured. We have seen the result."

Subsequent inquiry at St. James's Hospital proved that Quarles was right. The man was a gentleman of small independent means, a bachelor, and practically alone in the world. There was no one to watch his goings and comings, no one to take note of his growing peculiarities. His madness was intermittent, but the doctors said he would probably become worse, as, indeed, he did, poor fellow!

"Ah, it is wonderful what surgery can do," said Quarles afterward. "But there are limitations, Wigan, great limitations. And when we come to the brain, great heavens! We are mere babies playing with a mechanism of which we know

practically nothing. No wonder we so often make a mess of it."

CHAPTER IV
THE STRANGE CASE OF MICHAEL HALL

Quarles was professedly a theorist, and I admit that he often outraged my practical mind. I believe the practical people govern the affairs of the world, but occasionally one is brought face to face with such strange occurrences that it is impossible not to speculate what would happen had not the world its theorists and dreamers too.

Early one morning about a week after the mad burglar's case, I received a wire from Zena Quarles, asking me to go to Chelsea as soon as possible. A request from her was a command to me, and, dispensing with breakfast, except for a hasty cup of coffee, I started at once. She came to the door herself.

"Come in here for a minute," she said, leading the way into the dining-room and closing the door. "Grandfather does not know I have sent for you. I am troubled about him. For the last three days he has not left his room. He will not let me go to him. His door is not locked, but he commanded me, quite irritably, not to come until he called for me. For three days he has not wanted my companionship, and never before do I remember so long an isolation."

"What is he doing?" I asked.

She did not answer at once, and when she did the words came with some hesitation.

"Of course, he is an extraordinary man, with powers which one cannot exactly define, powers which—don't think me foolish—powers which might prove dangerous. In a way, you and I understand him, but I think there is a region beyond into which we are not able to follow him. I admit there have been times when I have been tempted to think that some of his philosophical reasonings and fantastic statements were merely the eccentricities of a clever man—intentional mystifications, a kind of deceptive paraphernalia."

"I have thought so too," I said.

"We are wrong," she said decisively. "He wanders into regions into which we cannot follow—where he touches something which is outside ordinary understanding, and when he is only dimly conscious of the actualities about him. Don't you remember his saying once that we ought to strive toward the heights, and see the truth which lies behind what we call truth? He does climb there, I believe, and, in order that he may do so, his empty room and isolation are necessary. I wonder whether there is any peril in such a journey?"

I did not venture to answer. Being a practical man, a discussion on these lines was beyond me.

As I went to the professor's room I framed a knotty, if unnecessary, problem out of a case upon which I was engaged; but I was not to propound it.

I was suddenly plunged into a mystery which led to one of the most curious investigations I have ever undertaken, and showed a new phase of the professor's powers.

Christopher Quarles was sitting limply in the arm-chair, but he started as I entered, and looked at me with blinking eyes, as though he did not recognize me.

Energy returned to him suddenly, and he sat up.

"Paper and pencil," he said, pointing to the writing-table. I handed him a pencil and a writing-block.

By a gesture he intimated that he wanted me to watch him.

Quarles was no draughtsman. He had told me so—quite unnecessarily, because I had often seen him make a rough sketch to illustrate some argument, and he always had to explain what the various parts of the drawing stood for. Yet, as I watched him now, he began to draw with firm, determined fingers—a definite line here, another there, sometimes pausing for a moment as if to remember the relative position of a line or the exact curve in it.

For a time there seemed no connection between the lines, no meaning in the design.

I have seen trick artists at a music-hall draw in this way, beginning with what appeared to be the least essential parts, and then, with two or three touches,

causing all the rest to fall into proper perspective and a complete picture. So it was with Quarles. Two or three quick lines, and the puzzle became a man's head and shoulders. No one could doubt that it was a portrait with certain characteristics exaggerated, not into caricature, but enough to make it impossible not to recognize the original from the picture. It was an attractive face, but set and rather tragic in expression.

Quarles did not speak. He surveyed his work for a few moments, slightly corrected the curve of the nostril, and then very swiftly drew a rope round the neck, continuing it in an uncertain line almost to the top of the paper. The sudden stoppage of the pencil give a jagged end to the line. The rope looked as if it had been broken. The effect was startling.

"Three times he has visited me," said Quarles. "First, just as the dusk was falling he stood in the window there, little more than a dark shadow against the light outside. The second time was when the lamp was lighted. I looked up suddenly, and he was standing there by the fireplace gazing at me intently. He was flesh and blood, real, not a ghost, no shape of mist trailing into my vision. An hour ago, at least it seems only an hour ago, he came again. The door opened, and he entered. He stood there just in front of me, as clearly visible in the daylight as you are, and as real. When you opened the door, I thought my visitor had come a fourth time."

"And what is the meaning of this—this broken rope?" I said, pointing to the drawing.

"Broken?" and he looked at the paper closely. "My hand stopped involuntarily. It is a good sign—encouraging—but the rope is not really broken yet. That is for us to accomplish."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that in one of His Majesty's prisons this man lies under sentence of death, that he is innocent of the crime, that he has been permitted to come to me for help."

"But——?"

Quarles sprang from his chair.

"Ah, leave questioning alone. I do not know how much time we have to prevent injustice being done. Take this drawing, Wigan, find out where the man is, work

night and day to get the whole history, and then come to me. We must not lose a moment. Providence must have sent you to Chelsea this morning—another sign of encouragement."

I did not explain how I came to be there, nor say there was no foundation for encouragement in my unexpected arrival. Indeed, but for my talk with Zena that morning, I should have been inclined to argue with him. As it was, I left Chelsea only half convinced that I was not being misled by the fantastic dream of a man not in his usual state of health.

I was soon convinced of my error.

Quarles's drawing was the portrait of a real man. He was lying under sentence of death in Worcestershire, the case against him so clear that there seemed to be no doubt about his guilt. The story was a sordid one, had created no sensation, had presented no difficult problem. But, under the peculiar circumstances, it was only natural that I should work with feverish haste to learn all the details of the crime, and I intimated to the authorities that facts had come to my knowledge which threw a doubt on the justice of the sentence, and that a postponement at least of the last penalty of the law would be advisable. This advice was not the outcome of anything I discovered; it was given entirely on my faith in Christopher Quarles.

Later I told the following story to the professor and Zena in the empty room.

"Michael Hall, the condemned man, is an artist," I said. "The portrait of him, Professor, is a good one. I have seen him, and he impresses you at once as possessing the artistic temperament. Whether he has anything beyond the temperament, I cannot judge, but the fact remains that he has had little success. He is a gentleman, and there is something convincing in the manner in which he protests his innocence. Yet I am bound to say that every circumstance points to his guilt. Possessed of two or three hundred pounds, and an unlimited faith in himself, he married. There is one child, three years old. The money dwindled rapidly, and a year ago, to cut down expenses, he went to live at Thornfield, a village near Pershore, in Worcestershire. At Thornfield he became acquainted with an elderly gentleman named Parrish, a bookworm, something of a recluse, and an eccentric. For no particular reason, and apparently without any foundation, Mr. Parrish had the reputation of being a rich man. Generally speaking, the inhabitants of Thornfield are humble people, and the fact that Parrish had a little old silver may have given rise to the idea of his wealth. He

does not appear to have had even a banking account.

"The old gentleman welcomed a neighbor of his own class, and Hall was constantly in his house. That Hall should come to Thornfield and live in a tiny cottage might suggest to anyone that he was not overburdened with this world's goods, but Hall declares that Parrish had no knowledge of his circumstances. Only on one occasion was Parrish in his cottage, and money was never mentioned between them. Yet Hall was in difficulties. He pawned several things in Pershore—small articles of jewelry belonging to his wife—giving his name as George Cross, and an address in Pershore. One evening—a Sunday evening—Hall was with Parrish. The housekeeper—Mrs. Ashworth, an elderly woman—the only servant living in the house, said in her evidence that Hall came at seven o'clock. The church clock struck as he came in. Her master expected him to supper. Hall says that he left at half-past nine, but Mrs. Ashworth said it was midnight when he went. She had gone to bed at nine—early hours are the rule in Thornfield—and had been asleep. She was always a light sleeper. She was roused by the stealthy closing of the front door, and just then midnight struck. Early next morning—they rise early in Thornfield—Mrs. Ashworth came down and found her master upon the floor of his study—dead. He had been struck down with a life-preserver, which was found in the room and belonged to Hall. The housekeeper ran out into the village street, but it seems there was nobody about, and some twenty minutes elapsed before anyone came to whom she could give the alarm.

"Hall's arrest followed. From the first he protested his innocence, but the only point in his favor appears to be the fact that he was found at his cottage, and had not attempted to run away. Everything else seems to point to his guilt. Although he says he left Parrish's house at half-past nine, he did not arrive home until after midnight. His wife innocently gave this information, and Hall, who had not volunteered it, explained his late return by saying that he was worried financially, and had gone for a lonely walk to think matters over. He admits that the life-preserver belonged to him. Mr. Parrish had spoken once or twice of the possibility of his being robbed, and that evening Hall had made him a present of the weapon, but had not told his wife that he was going to do so. The police discovered that two days before the murder a valuable silver salver belonging to Parrish had been pawned in Pershore in the name of M. Hall, and the pawnbroker's assistant identified Hall. A search among Parrish's papers after the murder resulted in the discovery of a recent will, under which all the property was left to Hall. The condemned man declared he was ignorant of this fact, but

the prosecution suggested that his knowledge of it and the straits he was in for money were the motive for the crime. Except on the assumption that Hall is guilty there appears to be no motive for the murder. Nothing but this silver salver was missing."

Quarles had not interrupted me. He had listened to my narrative, his features set, his eyes closed, the whole of his mind evidently concentrated on the story. As I stopped I looked at Zena.

"I wonder the housekeeper did not look out of her bedroom window to see that it was Michael Hall who left the house," Zena said slowly.

"She slept at the back of the house," I returned.

"I had not thought of that." And then, after a pause, during which her grandfather's eyes remained fixed upon her as though he would compel her to say more, she went on: "How was it, since they are early risers in Thornfield, that Mrs. Ashworth had to wait twenty minutes before anyone came? The house isn't isolated, is it?"

"No. I understand it is in the middle of the village street."

"There may be something in that question, Wigan," said Quarles, becoming alert. "Tell me, are the house and its contents still untouched?"

"I believe so. According to Mrs. Ashworth, Mr. Parrish appears to have had only one relation living—a nephew, named Charles Eade. He lives in Birmingham, and at the trial said he knew nothing whatever about his uncle, and had not seen him for years."

"Any reason?"

"No; the family had drifted apart. I am simply stating what came out in the evidence."

"About the will," said Quarles. "Was any provision made for Mrs. Ashworth in it?"

"No; it leaves everything to Hall, and there is a recommendation to sell the books in London, except a few which are specially mentioned as being of no value intrinsically, and which Hall is advised to read. According to Hall, the old gentleman talked much about literature, and declared that the whole philosophy

of life was contained in about a score of books. I have a copy of the list given in the will."

"Who witnessed the signature to the will?" Quarles asked.

"A lawyer in Pershore and his clerk. This was the only business transaction the lawyer had had with Mr. Parrish, and he knew little about him."

"I think we must go to Birmingham," said Quarles. "Sometimes there is only one particular standpoint from which the real facts can be seen, and I fancy Birmingham represents that standpoint for us. I suppose you can arrange for us to have access to Mr. Parrish's house at Thornfield, Wigan?"

"I will see about that," I answered.

"Are you sure Michael Hall is not guilty?" asked Zena.

"Were he guilty I should not have seen him," answered Quarles decidedly.

"His poor wife!" said Zena.

"Pray, dear, that we may carry sunlight to her again," said the professor solemnly.

I thought that our journey to Birmingham was for the purpose of interviewing Parrish's nephew, but it was not. Quarles got a list of the leading secondhand booksellers there.

"A bookworm, Wigan, remains a bookworm to the end of his days. Although nothing has been said about it, I warrant Mr. Parrish bought books and had them sent to Thornfield."

"He might have bought them in London," I said.

"I think it was Birmingham," said Quarles.

So far he was right. It was the third place we visited. Baines and Son was the firm, and we saw old Mr. Baines. He had constantly sold books to Mr. Parrish, of Thornfield, who had been to his shop several times, but their intercourse was chiefly by correspondence. Good books! Certainly. Mr. Parrish knew what he was doing, and never bought rubbish.

"His purchases might be expected to increase in value?" asked Quarles.

"Yes; but, forgive me, why these questions?"

"Ah! I supposed you would have heard. Mr. Parrish is dead."

"Indeed! I am very sorry to hear it."

"We are looking into his affairs," Quarles went on. "Is there any money owing to you?"

"No."

"The fact is, Mr. Parrish was murdered."

"Murdered!" exclaimed Baines, starting from his chair. "Do you mean for some treasured volume he possessed? Do you mean by some bibliomaniac?"

"You think he may have had such a treasure, then?"

"I know he had many rare and valuable books," Baines answered.

"You don't happen to know a bibliomaniac who might commit murder?" said Quarles.

"No."

"Such information would help us, because a young man has been condemned for the murder, a man named Hall—Michael Hall."

"I never heard of him," said Baines. "I wonder I did not see the case in the paper."

"It caused little sensation," said Quarles. "At present it seems one of those crimes committed for small gain."

"Mr. Parrish must have been a man of considerable means," said the bookseller; "considerable means, although he was eccentric about money. He always sent me cash, or some check he had received, with a request that I would return him the balance in cash. Indeed, I have constantly acted as his banker. He has sent me checks and asked me to send him notes for them."

"Where did those checks come from—I mean whose were they? Were they for dividends?"

"Possibly, one or two of them, I do not remember; but I fancy he sold books

sometimes, and the checks represented the purchase money."

We thanked Mr. Baines, and then, just as we were leaving, Quarles said:

"By the way, do you happen to know a Mr. Charles Eade?"

"A solicitor?" queried the bookseller.

"I didn't know he was a solicitor, but he is a relation of Mr. Parrish's, I believe," Quarles answered.

"I was not aware of that," Baines returned. "Mr. Eade's office is in West Street—No. 40, I think. He comes in here occasionally to make small purchases."

"Not a bookworm like his uncle, eh?"

"Neither the taste nor the money, I should imagine," said Baines.

As soon as we were in the street the professor turned to me.

"That has been an interesting interview, Wigan. What do you think of the bibliomaniac idea?"

"I suppose it goes to confirm your theory?" I said.

"On the contrary, it was a new idea to me. It would be an idea well worth following if we found that one or two of Parrish's valuable books were missing; but we'll try another trail first. I think we will go to Pershore next."

"How about Charles Eade?"

"I expect he is in his office in West Street. I don't want to see him. Do you?"

"We might call upon him so as to leave no stone unturned. I don't think you quite appreciate the difficulty of this case. The man may be innocent, but we have got to prove it."

"My dear Wigan, if Baines had said that Eade was a bibliomaniac I should have gone to West Street at once. Since he is only a lawyer, I am convinced we should get no useful information out of him. Besides, he might very reasonably resent our interference in his uncle's affairs. It will be time enough to communicate with him when we have made some discovery which will help Michael Hall."

Next morning we journeyed to Pershore.

"Yesterday you suggested that I had a theory, Wigan," said Quarles, who had been leaning back in the corner of the railway carriage apparently asleep, but now became mentally energetic. "As a fact, my theory went no further than this: A bookworm in all probability buys books; to buy books requires money; therefore he must have money. In Thornfield Mr. Parrish was considered a man of means; our friend Baines confirms that belief. My theory is established."

"It doesn't carry us very far," I said.

"It provides another motive for the murder—robbery. The bookseller's story suggests that Parrish must have kept a considerable sum of money in the house. It is said nothing was taken, but a large amount in notes may be stolen without leaving any noticeable space vacant. Just one step forward we may take. If such a sum existed, as is probable, remember Parrish might at times think of burglars, might have mentioned his fears, without giving a reason, to Hall, and Hall, having a life-preserver, might make a present of it to his friend."

I did not contradict him, but, personally, I was not at all convinced.

From the station we went straight to the pawnbroker's and had an interview with the assistant who had identified Hall as the man who pawned the salver. We arranged that I was a detective helping the professor, who was interested in Hall, and could not believe that he was guilty. It proved an excellent line to adopt, for it brought out the young fellow's sympathy. I asked questions, after stating our position, and for a time Quarles remained an interested listener. The assistant described Hall fairly accurately.

"He had pawned things before, hadn't he?" I asked.

"Yes."

"You recognized Hall at once?"

"Yes——"

"There is one very curious point," I said: "so long as the articles were his own, and he had a right to pawn them, he gave a false name; yet, when he pawns an article he had stolen, he gave his own name."

"I think it seems more curious than it is," was the answer. "My experience is that whenever an important article is pawned the correct name is given. The affair becomes a financial transaction which there is no reason to be ashamed of."

"I understood that Hall had pawned things of some value before this salver," said Quarles; "jewelry belonging to his wife, for instance. Why didn't he give his own name then?"

"It is rather the importance of the article which counts than its actual value," said the assistant. "In this case I have no doubt the prisoner would have said that he had temporarily borrowed the salver. He must redeem it presently; it was an important matter, and by giving his own name the transaction seemed almost honest."

Quarles nodded, as though this argument impressed him; then he said suddenly:

"What is George Cross like?"

"That was the false name Hall used."

"Did you comment upon the fact when he pawned the salver in his own name?"

"No."

"It would have been natural to do so, wouldn't it?"

"Perhaps; but we were busy at the time, and——"

"And it didn't occur to you," said Quarles. "Now I suggest that when you picked out Hall you were really identifying the man you knew as George Cross, and that the man who pawned the salver and gave the name Hall was a different person altogether."

"No."

"Are you sure the salver was not pawned by a woman?"

"Certain."

"But you might reconsider your original statement if I produced another man?"

"If such a person exists, why has it not been suggested to me, say, by a photograph?"

The professor nodded and smiled, but I could get nothing out of him that evening, not even whether he was hopeful or not.

Next morning we went to Thornfield. I had arranged that we should be allowed

to visit the house. For the time being, the local constable had the keys, and we went to his house first. Quarles set him talking about the crime at once.

"Is Mrs. Hall still in the village?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. That's her cottage yonder," and he pointed down the village street. "Poor thing, we all sympathize with her."

"And Mrs. Ashworth, is she still here?"

"No, sir. She was willing, I believe, to remain in charge of Mr. Parrish's house, but it was decided that I should have the keys and look after it. She took a room in the village until after the trial; then she left."

"How long had she been with Mr. Parrish, constable?"

"About a year, sir. You're not thinking she had anything to do with the murder, are you? She wasn't equal to it. She is a little bit of a woman, and it was a tremendous blow which killed Mr. Parrish."

"It was quite early in the morning when she discovered the dead man, wasn't it?"

"Yes; before the village was awake."

"What do you know about Mr. Parrish's nephew?"

"I understand he claims the property as next-of-kin," said the constable; "but he hasn't been near the place, so I don't suppose he expects to be much richer for his uncle's death."

Quarles and I went through the village to Parrish's house, which was the most important in the street, but was of no great size. The room in which the dead man had been found was lined with books, and, with some excitement manifest in his face, Quarles took several volumes from the shelves and examined them.

"Value here, Wigan. The old gentleman knew what he was buying. These shelves represent a lot of money, even if he had no other investments. Have you the list of the books Hall was recommended to keep?"

I had. There were eighteen books in all, such classics as "Lamb's Essays," "Reynold's Discourses," and "Pope's Homer." We found only ten of them, and careful search convinced us that the others were not on the shelves.

"If you are looking for a cryptogram—a key to the hiding place of a fortune—the

missing books spoil it," I said.

"I confess that something of the kind was in my mind," said Quarks excitedly, "but the missing books are going to help us. The old gentleman had not read these books himself. See, Wigan, uncut pages; at least"—he took out a penknife —"not uncut, but carefully gummed together. I hadn't thought of this."

He slit the pages apart, and from between them took a ten-pound note. Other pages, when unfastened, yielded other notes—five pounds, twenty pounds, and one was for fifty pounds.

"Enough, Wigan!" he exclaimed. "We've something better to do than find bank-notes. You must see the constable at once, and tell him there is treasure in this house which requires special protection. Then communicate with the Birmingham police, and tell them not to lose sight of Charles Eade, and let them also have a description of Mrs. Ashworth. I expect she is lying low in Birmingham."

"I don't follow your line of reasoning, professor."

"I had no very definite theory beyond thinking that Mr. Parrish must be a man of considerable means," said Quarles. "That fact once established, we had a motive for the murder, which did not seem applicable to Michael Hall. It was said that nothing beyond the salver was missing. Only Mrs. Ashworth could establish that fact. You remember Zena's question: 'How was it, since people were such early risers in Thornfield, that Mrs. Ashworth had to wait so long before anyone came?' There was one obvious answer. She was up much earlier than usual that morning, perhaps had not been to bed that night. The constable had said that the village was not awake. Again, it was Mrs. Ashworth who gave information about the nephew in Birmingham. It is possible Parrish may have mentioned him to his housekeeper, but, since she had only been with him a year, and the old gentleman held no communication with his nephew, it is unlikely. Once more, the housekeeper was a little too definite about the time. She had a story to tell. The precision might be the result of careful rehearsal. These points were in my mind from the first, but they were too slight for evidence. Now the missing volumes give us the link we want. Who could have taken them? Either Mrs. Ashworth, or someone with her connivance. I don't think it was Mrs. Ashworth. I believe it was the man who murdered Mr. Parrish."

"His nephew?"

"Charles Eade; but I do not think he is his nephew. Let me reconstruct the plot. Supposing Eade, either from Mr. Baines or from some assistant in his shop, heard of Parrish and his eccentricities, he would naturally assume that a lot of money was kept in this house. When, a year ago, Mr. Parrish wanted a housekeeper the opportunity came to establish a footing here; so Mrs. Ashworth, the accomplice, came to Thornfield. A man like Parrish would be secretive, not easy to watch; but in time the housekeeper would find out where he hid his money, and would note the books. She would only be able to note those used during the past year—the eight books which are missing, Wigan. Now the robbery had to be carefully arranged, suspicion must be thrown upon someone, and Hall was at hand. To emphasize his need of money, the salver was pawned, I thought by Mrs. Ashworth, but doubtless Eade did it himself, choosing a busy time. The scoundrels chose the night when Hall was having supper with the old man, and whether the original intention was robbery only or murder, everything worked in their favor. Eade took the eight books away that night, and the housekeeper stayed to give the alarm and tell her story. Now, mark what happens. After the murder a will is found in which eighteen books are mentioned, and immediately we hear through Mrs. Ashworth that Mr. Parrish has a nephew living, who, as the constable tells us, had laid claim to the property. The villains are greedy, and want the other ten volumes."

"Is there any real evidence to support the story, professor?"

"Yes; those eight missing books, which will be found in the possession of Charles Eade."

Few men have received less sympathy than Charles Eade when he paid the last penalty of the law. He was not only a murderer, but had intended to let an innocent man suffer. The missing volumes were found, and some of the money saved; and it was a satisfaction that Mrs. Ashworth, who was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, confessed. Her story agreed with Quarles's theory in almost every particular, even to the fact that Eade was no relation to the dead man.

Quarles and I visited the Halls afterward, and the professor very simply told them of his experience, offering no explanation, expressing no opinion.

But as we traveled back to London, he said to me:

"If men were ready to receive them, such manifestations of mercy would be constant experiences. Is it not only natural they should be? Take a child; he is only happy and secure because every moment of his life his parents help him, protect him, think for him. Without such care and thought, would he live to become a man? It is a marvelous thing that, whereas a child learns to lean wholly on the wisdom of his parents, man, as a rule, seems incapable of wholly trusting an Almighty wisdom; and, when he is forced to realize it, calls it miraculous. The miracle would be if these things did not happen."

I did not answer. We were both silent until the train ran into Paddington.

CHAPTER V
THE EVIDENCE OF THE CIGARETTE-END

I suppose I have my fair share of self-confidence, but there have been occasions when I have felt intuitively that the only chance of success was to have Quarles with me from the beginning. The Kew mystery was a case in point.

It was half-past nine when the telephone bell rang. At first the inspector on duty at the station could only hear a buzzing sound, followed by a murmur of voices, which might have come from the exchange; then came the single word, "Police!" As soon as he had answered in the affirmative the message came in quick gasps in a woman's voice:

"Hambledon Road—fourteen—come—it's murder! Quick, I'm being——"

There was a faint cry, as though the woman had been suddenly dragged from the instrument.

The inspector at once sent off a constable, who, with Constable Baker, the man on the Hambledon Road beat at the time, went to No. 14. Their knock was not answered very promptly. A servant came to the door, still fidgeting with her cap and apron, as though she had put them on hastily, and she gave a start when she saw the policeman. She said her mistress—a Mrs. Fitzroy—was at home, but she seemed a little reluctant to let the officers walk into the dining-room without a preliminary announcement, which was only natural, perhaps. They entered to find the room empty. Mrs. Fitzroy was not in the house. The servant knew nothing about the telephone call. She said it was her night out, that she had come in by the back door, as usual, and was upstairs taking off her hat and jacket when the policeman knocked.

This was the outline of the mystery which I gave to Christopher Quarles as we walked from Kew Gardens Railway Station to Hambledon Road. The investigation had only been placed in my hands that morning, and I knew no details myself.

"Shall we find Constable Baker at the house?" he asked presently.

"Yes; I have arranged that," I answered.

The house was a fair size, semi-detached, with half a dozen steps up to the front door, and it had a basement. There was a small window on the right of the door which gave light to a wide passage hall, and on the other side was the large window of the dining-room.

Baker opened the door for us.

"No news of Mrs. Fitzroy?" I asked.

"None, sir." He was a smart man. I had worked with him before.

"What time was it when you entered the house last night?" asked Quarles.

"Ten o'clock, sir. A clock struck while we were standing on the steps."

"Was the light burning in the hall and in the dining-room?"

"Yes, sir; full on."

"And the dining-room door was shut?"

"Yes, sir."

"You searched the house for Mrs. Fitzroy?"

"We did. Have you just come from the police station?"

"No."

"I have reported one or two points," said Baker. "The gardens of these houses all have a door opening onto a footpath, on the other side of which there is a tennis club ground.

"The path ends in a blank wall at one end; the other end comes out into Melbury Avenue, a road running at right angles to Hambledon Road. I found the garden gate here unbolted, and the servant, Emma Lewis, says she has never known it to be unfastened before. Also in Melbury Avenue last evening I saw a taxi waiting. I saw it first at about eight o'clock, and it was still there at a quarter past nine, when I spoke to the driver. He said he had brought a gentleman down, who had told him to wait there, and had then walked up Melbury Avenue. It was not the

first time he had driven him to the avenue, and the driver supposed it was a clandestine love affair. After we found that Mrs. Fitzroy was missing, I went to look for the taxi. It had gone. I had noticed the number, however, and they are making inquiries at the police station."

"Good," said Quarles. "Now let us look at the dining-room. Nothing has been moved, I suppose."

"It's just as we found it last night," Baker returned.

It was a well-furnished room. An easy chair was close to the hearth, and an ordinary chair was turned sideways to the table. A swivel-chair was pushed back from the writing-table, which was in the window, and the telephone, which evidently stood on this table as a rule, was hanging over it, suspended by the cord, the receiver being upon its hook. The telephone directory lay open on the blotting-pad. For some time Quarles was interested in the telephone, the directory, and the pad, then he turned to take in the general aspect of the room.

"Some man was here, evidently," I said, pointing to the ashes on the tiled hearth, "and was smoking. It looks as if he had smoked at his ease for some time."

"Seated in one of those chairs probably," said Quarles. "Some ash is on the writing-table, too."

He took up a sheet of paper and scooped up a little of the ash from the hearth and examined it under his lens; and, having done this, he raked about in the cinders, but found nothing to interest him.

"I want a cigarette-end," he said, looking first in the coal-box, then along the mantelpiece and in the little ornaments there, and, finally, in the paper basket. "Ah, here is one. Thrown here, it suggests that the smoker might have been seated at the table, doesn't it? We progress, Wigan; we progress."

It was always impossible to tell whether the professor's remarks expressed his real opinion, or whether they were merely careless words spoken while his mind was busy in an altogether different direction. I hardly saw where our progression came in. I examined the carpet. If anyone had entered in a hurry to kidnap Mrs. Fitzroy he would not have spent much time in wiping his boots. I found a little soil on the hearthrug and by the writing-table. I pointed it out to the professor, who was still looking at the cigarette which lay in the palm of his hand.

"Yes, very interesting," said Quarles. "I expect the man came by way of the

garden and brought a little earth from that pathway with him. What do you make of this cigarette?"

"A cheap kind. Perhaps the lady smokes."

"We'll ask the servant. By the way, Baker, do you happen to know Mrs. Fitzroy?"

"I've seen a lady come out of this house on one or two occasions," answered the constable. "I described her to the servant, and have no doubt it was Mrs. Fitzroy. She is rather good-looking, fifty or thereabouts, but takes some pains to appear younger, I fancy."

"You are observant," Quarles remarked. "Shall we have the servant in, Wigan?"

Emma Lewin told us that she had been with Mrs. Fitzroy for over three years. Last night she had gone out as usual about six o'clock. She had left by the back door and had taken the key with her. She always did so. She returned just before ten, and had gone straight upstairs to take off her hat and jacket. She always did this before going in to see whether her mistress required anything.

"Was the dining-room door shut when you went upstairs?" I asked.

"Yes."

"You did not go by the garden gate last night?"

"No. I never go that way. The gate is never used."

"Did Mrs. Fitzroy have many visitors?"

"None to speak of. Not half a dozen people have called upon her since I have been here. I believe she had no relations. Once or twice a week she would be out all day, and occasionally she has been away for a night or two."

"Where has she gone on these occasions?" I asked.

"I do not know."

"And her correspondence—was it large?"

"She received very few letters," the servant answered; "whether she wrote many, I cannot say. I certainly didn't post them."

"Did she use the telephone much?"

"She gave orders to the tradesmen sometimes, and I have heard the bell ringing occasionally. You see, the kitchen is a basement one, and the bell might often ring without my hearing it."

"Did your mistress smoke?" Quarles asked suddenly.

"No, sir."

"How do you know she didn't?"

"I have heard her say she didn't agree with women smoking. Besides, when doing the rooms I should have found cigarette-ends."

"That seems conclusive," said Quarles. "Yesterday was Wednesday, your night out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is Wednesday always your night out?"

"It is."

"From six to ten?"

"Yes; it is a standing arrangement; nothing ever interferes with it."

"Very interesting," said the professor. "Now, of course you know what your mistress was wearing when you left her alone in the house last night?"

"A brown dress with——"

"I don't want to know," Quarles interrupted. "But I want you to go to your mistress's room and find out what hat and coat and what kind of boots she put on last night. She wouldn't be likely to go out dressed as you left her. You had better go with the young woman, Baker."

He spoke in rather a severe tone, and, when the girl had left the room with the constable, I asked him if he suspected her of complicity in the affair.

"My dear Wigan, as yet I am only gathering facts," he answered, "facts to fit theories. We may take the following items as facts: Mrs. Fitzroy did not smoke. She had few visitors. She received few letters. Once or twice a week she was out all day. The servant's night out is Wednesday. Yesterday, being Wednesday, a taxi waited for a considerable time in Melbury Avenue. The driver has brought his

fare to Melbury Avenue on previous occasions."

"And the theory?" I asked.

"Theories," he corrected; "there are many. If the taxi came on Wednesdays on the other occasions, the fare may have smoked this kind of cigarette. If so, he may be the man who kidnapped Mrs. Fitzroy. He may have been hurrying the lady down the narrow path while Baker and his companion were standing on the front door step. Out of such theories a score of others come naturally."

"By this time they may have heard of the driver at the police station. Shall I telephone?"

"Not yet," said Quarles. "We will try and discover how Mrs. Fitzroy was dressed first."

"And meanwhile we are giving our quarry time to escape," I said.

"We must risk something, and we haven't got enough facts to support any theory yet. I wonder whether Mrs. Fitzroy did use the telephone much?"

The speculation threw him into a reverie until Emma Lewin returned with the information that her mistress must have gone out dressed just as she had left her. No hat nor jacket nor wrap of any kind was missing, and she had not changed her indoor shoes.

"Thank you; that helps us very much. I don't think you can help us any more at present." And then, when the girl had gone, Quarles turned to Baker. "I understand you searched the house last night for Mrs. Fitzroy?"

"We did."

"Was it a thorough search—I mean did you look into every corner, every drawer, every cupboard for some sign of her? Did you explore the cellars, which, I expect, are large?"

"It was not quite as thorough as that," said Baker, trying to suppress a smile at the idea of finding Mrs. Fitzroy in a drawer, I suppose.

"You expected to find the lady lying on the carpet here?"

"Well, sir, I thought it likely at first; but, with the garden gate unfastened and the taxi in Melbury Avenue, I don't doubt the lady went that way."

"After telephoning to the police that she was being murdered?" said Quarles.

"I don't suggest that she went willingly," said Baker.

"But you do suggest that, being convinced she had gone, your search of the house was not very thorough?"

"I didn't mean to suggest that, either, sir," answered Baker, some resentment in his tone.

"We want Zena here, Wigan, to ask one of her absurd questions," Quarles went on. "I'll ask one in her place. Why was the police station rung up at all?"

"The woman rushed to the 'phone for help, and——"

"My dear Wigan, the directory is open at the page giving the number of the police station. What was her assailant doing while she turned up the number and rang up the exchange?"

"Probably he wasn't in the room, and her woman's wit——"

"Ah, you've been reading sensational fiction," he interrupted. "Let us stick to facts. The call must have been a deliberate one and would take time. There was evidently no desperate struggle in this room last night. The position of the two chairs by the hearth suggests that two persons at some time during the evening were sitting here together—one of them a man, since the hearth shows that he smoked. The time would be somewhere between six o'clock, when the servant went out, and nine-thirty, when the telephone message was received. If Baker can fix the time of the taxi's arrival in Melbury Avenue, perhaps we can be even more accurate."

"The taxi wasn't there at half-past seven," said the constable.

"Then we may say between seven-thirty and nine-thirty," said Quarles. "Now the only thing which suggests violence of any kind is the instrument hanging over the table. Had the person using it been forcibly dragged away, the instrument might have fallen in that position, but it would have been a stupendous miracle if the receiver had swung to its place on the hook. No, Wigan, the receiver was replaced carefully to cut the connection, and the instrument was probably hung as it is deliberately to attract attention. I come back to my question, then: Why was the police station rung up at all?"

I did not answer, and Baker shook his head in sympathy.

"I do not attempt to suggest what occurred while the two sat here by the fire," said Quarles, "but whatever it was, somebody wished it to be known that something had happened. That is my answer to the question. The message suggests murder. As the house has not yet been thoroughly searched, murder may actually have taken place."

Baker started, and I looked at the professor in astonishment.

"You think Mrs. Fitzroy is lying dead somewhere in this house?" I said.

"I have a theory which we may put to the test at once," returned Quarles.

"In the cellars, I suppose?"

"No, Wigan; we'll look everywhere else first. I expect to find a body, and not very securely hidden either; there wouldn't be much time; and, besides, I believe it is meant to be found. Still I do not expect to find Mrs. Fitzroy's body. I expect to find a dead man. Shall we go and look?"

A man in my profession perforce gets used to coming in contact with death in various forms, but there is always a certain thrill in doing so, and in the present search there was something uncanny. The quest was not a long one. In a small bedroom on the first floor, sparsely furnished and evidently used chiefly as a box-room, we found the body of a man under the bed. A cord had been thrown round his neck and he had been strangled fiercely and with powerful hands at the work.

"Not a woman's doing," said Quarles as he knelt down to examine the corpse.

There were no papers of any kind in the pockets, but there was money and a cigar case.

"Time is precious now, Wigan," said the professor. "You might telephone to the station and ask if they have found the driver of the taxi. I want to know if this poor fellow is the man he drove to Melbury Avenue last evening, also whether it has always been a Wednesday when he has brought him into this neighborhood; and, of course, you must ask him any questions which may lead to the identification of the dead man. I don't suppose he will be able to help you much in that direction. You will find, I fancy, that the driver got tired of waiting for his fare last night and drove away."

"Or took another fare—the murderer," I suggested.

"I don't think so," said Quarles. "You might also ask the inspector at the station whether he is prepared to swear that the first voice he heard over the 'phone—the voice which said 'police'—was a woman's. What time does it grow dark now, constable?"

"Early—half-past four, sir."

"I'll go, Wigan. I want to think the matter out before dark. Seven o'clock to-night—meet me at the top of the road at that time, and somewhere close have half a dozen plain clothes men ready for a raid. Now that we know murder has been done, you couldn't suggest a house to raid, I suppose, constable."

"I couldn't, sir."

"Nor can I at present. Seven o'clock to-night, Wigan."

The professor's manner, short, peremptory, self-sufficient, was at times calculated to disturb the serenity of an archangel. I had been on the point of quarreling with him more than once that morning, but the sudden demonstration of what seemed to be the wildest theory left me with nothing to say. Constable Baker had an idea of putting the case adequately, I think, when he remarked: "He ain't human, that's what he is."

The taxi driver had been found, and, when taken to Hambledon Road, recognized the dead man as his fare. He had driven him to Melbury Avenue on four occasions, and each time it had been a Wednesday. Of course, the gentleman might have come more than four times, and on other days besides Wednesdays for all he knew. On each occasion he had been called off a rank in Trafalgar Square. His fare had paid him for the down journey before walking up the avenue, and had never kept him waiting so long before, so he gave up the job and went back to town. He had not picked up another fare until he got to Kensington.

The inspector at the station was certain the message he had received was in a woman's voice, but he was not sure that the word "police" was in the same voice, or that it was a woman who spoke it.

At seven o'clock I was waiting for Quarles at the top of Hambledon Road. He was punctual to the minute.

"You've got the men, Wigan?"

"They are hanging about in Melbury Avenue."

"It may be there is hot work in front of us," said Quarles, "and the first move is yours. No. 6 Hambledon Road is the house we want, and you will go to the front door and ask to see the master. I fancy a maidservant will answer the door, but I am not sure. Whoever it is, prevent an alarm being given, and get into the house with the two men who will accompany you. That done, get the door into the garden open, and I will join you with the rest of the men. If there is any attempt at escape it will be by the garden, and we shall be waiting for them. Utter silence; that is imperative. Of course, they may be prepared, but probably they are not. If it is necessary to shoot, you must, and we will force our way in as best we can and take our part in the struggle. Come along, let's get the men together."

A few minutes later I had knocked at the door of No. 6; an elderly woman-servant came to the door, and I saw suspicion in her eyes. Even as I inquired for her master I seized her, and so successfully that she hadn't an opportunity to utter a sound. I asked her no question, certain that she would mislead me, and, leaving one of the men with her in the hall, I hastened with the other two to the door leading into the garden, fully expecting to be attacked. We saw no one, heard no movement; either the professor had made a mistake or the conspirators considered themselves secure.

Quarles and the men came in like shadows, so silent were they, and it was evident that the professor had given his companions instructions, for two of them quickly went toward the hall.

"The cellars, Wigan," he whispered. "I think it will be the cellars."

The house was a basement one, similar to No. 14, and from a stone passage we found a door giving on to a dozen steep steps. It was pitch dark below.

"Don't show a light," said Quarles as he pushed me gently to go forward. I didn't know it at the time, but only one man came down with us.

At the foot of the stairs a passage ran to right and left, and to the left, which was toward the garden side of the house, a thin line of light showed below a door. On tiptoe, ready for emergencies, and hardly daring to breathe, we approached it, and with one accord the professor and I put our ears to the door. For a while no sound came, then a paper rustled and a foot scraped lightly on the stone floor.

We had chanced to arrive during a pause in the conversation, for presently a voice, pitched low and monotonous in its tone, went on with an argument:

"I can find no excuse for you in that, Bertha Capracci. It is not admitted that your husband found death at the hands of his associates, but, were it so, it is no more than just. There are papers here proving beyond all doubt that he betrayed his friends."

"I have already said that is untrue," came the answer in a woman's voice.

"There is no doubt," said another man.

"None," said a third.

Three men at least were sitting in judgment upon this woman, and it was evident they were not English.

"Besides, I am not one of you," said the woman.

"In name, no; in reality, yes; since your husband must have let you into many secrets," returned the first speaker. "Your woman's wit has outplayed our spies until recently, but, once discovered, you have been constantly watched. We cannot prove that the failure of some of our plans, costing the lives of good comrades, has been due to your interference, but we suspect it. We found you in constant communication with this English Jew, Jacob Morrison, who is in the pay of the Continental police. He is dead, a warning to others, killed in your house, and busy eyes are now looking for you as his murderess. You have hidden your identity so entirely that all inquiry must speedily be baffled, and so you have played into our hands. Your disappearance will hardly reach to a nine days' wonder, and who will think to look for your body under the flags of this cellar? Death is the sentence of the Society, and forthwith."

I waited to hear a cry of terror, but it did not come. Nor was there a movement to suggest that the men had risen at once to the work, or, in spite of the restraining hand the professor laid on my arm, I should have been beating at the door to break it down.

"I offer you one chance of life," the man's voice droned on after a pause. "Confess everything. Give me the names of all those to whom you have given information concerning us, and you shall have your miserable life."

"You have killed the only man who knew anything from me," she answered.

"It's a lie," came the hissing reply. "Your cursed husband told you so much about us, he may have explained some of the means we employ to make unwilling tongues speak. I'll have the truth out of you."

One of the men must have sat close to her, for her sudden cry of fear was instantly smothered, and there was the sound of struggle and rough usage.

"Now—quickly," whispered Quarles; and the man who had followed us to the cellars had struck with a stout piece of iron between the door and its framework. The wood splintered immediately, and, almost before I was prepared, we were facing our enemies, and Quarles was shouting for the other men in the house to come to us.

"Hands up!" I cried.

They were unprepared, that was our salvation. Not one of the three had any intention of surrender, that was evident in a moment, but they had to get their hands on their weapons, and, fortunately, only one of them had a revolver. The other two rushed upon us with knives.

I think Quarles was the first to fire, and he was not a thought too soon. He said afterward that he meant to maim and not to kill, but his bullet passed through the man's brain, and he dropped like a stone. He was the one with the revolver, and, regardless of his own safety, he meant to silence the woman for ever.

The weapon was at her head when the villain dropped, and I have sometimes thought that, whatever his intention the moment before, in the act of pressing the trigger the professor realized that only the man's death could save the woman.

It was hot work for a moment. The man who had burst open the door got a nasty knife thrust, and I had been obliged to fire at my assailant before our comrades rushed to our aid. There is no enemy more dangerous than a man armed with a knife when he knows how to use it, and when the space to fight in is so confined that to use firearms is to endanger your friends. Indeed, I thought the woman had been shot, but she had only fainted, although it was quite impossible to question

her fully until next day.

"Those papers may be useful," said Quarles, when our captives had been taken to the police station, pointing to the documents which had fallen from a little table pushed aside in the struggle. "The ends of a big affair are in our hands, I fancy, and, with the help of Mrs. Fitzroy, we may get several more dangerous fanatics under lock and key."

Late that night I was with the professor in Chelsea. He had gone straight home from Hambledon Road, and, after a visit to the police station and a long consultation with Scotland Yard over the 'phone, I followed him. There were several questions I wanted to ask, for his handling of this affair seemed to me so near to the marvelous that I wondered whether he had had some knowledge of this gang before we had heard of the house in Kew.

"No, Wigan, no," he said, in reply to my question. "I did not even know there was such a place as Hambledon Road."

"I am altogether astonished."

"And not for the first time, eh, Wigan? Yet this case has been worked upon facts chiefly. It was clear that the idea of the woman going suddenly to the telephone to call for help was absurd, and, therefore, it was at least possible that she had spoken that message under compulsion. When the revolver was held to her head in the cellar to-night, it was probably not for the first time. As I said this morning, there was a desire to put the authorities on the scent. This suggested a conspiracy. So much for theory, now for facts."

"But we did not know murder had been committed then," I said.

"Mrs. Fitzroy said so in her message," Quarles answered, "and it was unlikely the police would have been called unless they were meant to discover something. But we had facts to go upon. It was evident that two persons had sat by the fire, the position of the chairs, the cigar ash on the hearth——"

"Cigarette, you mean."

"It was a cigar ash on the hearth, and I looked for a cigar end among the cinders and could not find one. It was cigarette ash on the writing-table, and I found the cigarette end, you will remember. It was possible, of course, that the same man had smoked a cigarette as well as a cigar, but the different position of the ash was significant. I concluded there were two men, one who had sat smoking a

cigar by the fire, one who, in leaning over to ring up the police, had dropped ash from a cigarette on to the writing-table. I concluded that the cigar smoker was the murdered man, and you will remember there was a cigar case in the pocket of the man we found. I think we shall discover that it was the cigarette smoker who killed him, and then compelled Mrs. Fitzroy to send that message. No doubt he had a companion with him, perhaps more than one, and I believe they have been living at No. 6 for some time watching Mrs. Fitzroy. We have heard to-night who Jacob Morrison was, and it was on Wednesday evenings that he came to No. 14. Possibly the watchers had not become aware of his visits until that evening; they may have kept watch in the Hambledon Road, whereas Mrs. Fitzroy unbolted the gate at the bottom of the garden for him as soon as the servant went out. You remember the cigarette end?"

"Yes, it was a cheap kind."

"And foreign," said Quarles; "Spagnolette Nationale. You can buy them done up in a gray paper case at any shop which sells tobacco in Italy, trenta centesimi for ten, I believe, and you can get them at certain places in Soho. You heard me ask Baker what time it grew dark. I had something to do then, but much to do first. To begin with, I had to find out what days the dust was collected, then to make judicious inquiries about foreigners living in the neighborhood. You see, since Mrs. Fitzroy had been taken away just as she was, and since Baker had only seen that one taxi waiting, I concluded the lady had not been taken far. The only house containing foreigners which seemed to suit my purpose was No. 6, and, when it was dark, I went to examine the dust-bin. There I found two or three of these cases of gray paper. You see, Wigan, the case was comparatively an easy one."

"It is a marvel to me that Mrs. Fitzroy was not murdered before we found her," I said.

"I knew there was a risk, but we were helpless," Quarles answered. "I had heard of No. 6 and its inhabitants soon after one o'clock, but if we had gone to the house in daylight we should only have hurried a tragedy probably. Besides, I had a theory. These villainous societies almost invariably have methods and rules. If a member is dispatched, some semblance of justice is given to his sentence. I thought the men who had done the kidnapping were not of the first importance, and that Mrs. Fitzroy would not be done away with before she had been confronted with some chief member of the gang. It was very necessary they should wring a confession from her if they could."

Early next morning two houses in Soho were raided and a number of arrests made; but, except for the two men we had taken in Hambledon Road, I do not think we got hold of anybody of importance. The raid, at any rate, did something to disturb a nest of anarchists, and, with the information in the hands of the Continental police through Jacob Morrison, and with what Mrs. Fitzroy could tell us, the society was scattered, and their efforts are likely to be moribund for some time. Mrs. Fitzroy was an Englishwoman married to an Italian, who had been a member of the society and had been done to death by his associates some four years ago. She said he was innocent and was determined to avenge him. The man who had killed Morrison had been shot by Quarles. He was the cigarette smoker. His two companions whom we had captured got terms of imprisonment, and will be deported on their release. I can only trust that Mrs. Fitzroy will keep out of their way then.

CHAPTER VI
THE MYSTERY OF "OLD MRS JARDINE"

My association with Professor Quarles undoubtedly had an effect upon my method of going to work in the elucidation of mysteries, and not always with a good result. His methods were his own, eminently successful when he used them, but dangerous in the hands of others. In attempting to theorize I am convinced I have sometimes lost sight of facts.

I am not sure that this reflection applies to the case of old Mrs. Jardine, but somehow my mind never seemed to get a firm grip of the affair. I was conscious of being indefinite, and had an unpleasant sensation that I had failed to see the obvious.

Old Mrs. Jardine lived at Wimbledon, in a house of some size standing in a well-grown garden. She was an invalid, confined to the house—indeed, to three or four rooms which opened into one another on the first floor—and she must have been an absolute annuity to Dr. Hawes, who visited her nearly every day. The household consisted of old Mrs. Jardine, Mrs. Harrison, also an elderly lady, who was her companion, Martha Wakeling, housekeeper and cook, who had been many years in her service; and a housemaid named Sarah Paget.

Into this household, in which no one took any particular interest, came tragedy, and the Wimbledon mystery developed into a sensation.

Early one morning Sarah Paget arrived at the doctor's, saying her mistress had been taken suddenly ill, and would he come immediately. She did not know what was the matter. The cook had sent her.

Three days before Dr. Hawes had gone away for a holiday, and his practice was in the hands of a locum, a young doctor named Dolman. He went at once. Mrs. Jardine was dead upon her bed. She had been found in the morning by Martha Wakeling lying just as the doctor saw her. She had been attacked in her sleep, Dolman thought, and her head had been smashed with some heavy instrument;

Mrs. Harrison, the companion, had disappeared. Of course, the police were sent for at once, and the case came into my hands that same day.

Dr. Dolman had seen his patient for the first time on the previous afternoon. Dr. Hawes had told him that she was something of a crank, could only walk a little, and suffered from indigestion and general debility, which was hardly wonderful, since she would make no effort to go out even for a drive. She seemed to enjoy being a confirmed invalid under constant medical treatment, and would certainly resent any neglect.

"She was sitting in an arm-chair when I saw her," Dolman told me, "and was in good spirits; inclined to be facetious, in fact, and to enjoy her little joke at my expense. She wanted to know what a young man could possibly know about an old woman's ailments, and wondered that Hawes was content to leave his patients in such inexperienced hands as mine. I do not think she was as bad as she would have people believe."

Dolman had not spoken to Mrs. Harrison, but he had seen her. She was sitting in the adjoining room doing some needlework. He had taken little notice of her, and was doubtful if he would know her again.

Martha Wakeling said it was her custom to go into her mistress's room on her way down in the morning, and she had found her dead on the bed. She had heard no noise in the night. Mrs. Harrison occupied a room opening out of Mrs. Jardine's, and it was empty that morning. The bed had been slept in, but the companion had gone.

"Was she on good terms with Mrs. Jardine?" I asked.

"Yes, oh, yes."

"You say it rather doubtfully?"

"The mistress wasn't always easy to get on with, and I daresay she tried Mrs. Harrison at times."

"And so Mrs. Harrison murdered her in a fit of anger," I suggested.

"I don't say that. She is not to be found; that's all I know for certain."

"Where did Mrs. Harrison come from? Who was she?"

"I think she answered the mistress's advertisement."

"How long has she been here?" I asked.

"Just over a year. Mrs. Jardine didn't get on well with the last two companions she had. They were younger women, and the place was too dull for them. They wanted to go out more, and Mrs. Jardine wanted someone who was content to live the kind of life she did. So she got this elderly companion."

"Mrs. Harrison had friends, I suppose?"

"I never saw nor heard of any."

"But she received letters?"

"I can't call to mind that she ever did. I fancy she was one of the lonely sort."

She was also uninteresting and commonplace in appearance, according to Martha Wakeling's description. The word-picture I managed to draw up for circulation had nothing distinctive about it. Nor did Martha know much of her mistress's relations. Mrs. Jardine had not been on friendly terms with them, and had not seen any of them in her time, as far as she knew; the only one she had heard mentioned was a nephew, a Mr. Thomas Jardine, who lived somewhere in London.

The upper floor of the house was unfurnished and locked up, and an unfastened window on the ground floor, opening into the garden, suggested the way Mrs. Harrison had left. I took immediate steps to delay the publication of the news of the tragedy. There were points in the case which might modify first suspicions considerably, and a few hours of unhampered investigation might be of great value.

Even a perfunctory search among Mrs. Jardine's papers proved that if she had not seen her nephew recently she had heard from him. I found two letters asking for money, a whine in them, and at the same time an underlying threat, as though the writer had it in his power to do mischief. Apparently Mrs. Jardine had a past which might account for her being a crank. A talk with her nephew should prove interesting.

I went to the address given in the letters—a flat in Hammersmith—but it was not until next morning that I got an interview with Thomas Jardine.

He was a big loose-limbed man, a gentleman come down in the world through dissipation. I told him I had come on behalf of Mrs. Jardine, and his first words

showed that he was either an excellent actor or that the news of his aunt's death had not yet reached him.

"If you are her business man and have brought me a check, you are welcome," he said.

"I have not brought the check—at present."

"Come, there's a hopeful tone about you," he returned, "and I'm hard up enough not to be particular or spiteful. Is the old girl willing to come to terms?"

"I am in rather a difficult position," I answered, carefully feeling my way. "I want to do the best I can for both sides, and, as you are probably aware, Mrs. Jardine is not one to talk very fully, even to her man of business."

"I warrant she has given you her version of the story."

"But not yours. I should like to hear yours."

"They won't agree; but the unvarnished truth is this. She was a Miss Stuart, or called herself so, and my uncle met her on a sea trip. He was in such a hurry to put his head in the noose that he married her without knowing anything about her. He imagined he had caught an angel; instead—well, to put it mildly, he had found an adventuress. She had taken good care to discover she had got hold of a rich man, and soon began her tricks. She alienated my uncle from his family, not particular about the truth so long as she got her way. My father was the kind of man who never succeeds at anything, and my uncle was constantly helping him. This came to an end when Mrs. Jardine got hold of the reins. She didn't spend money; she got it out of her husband and hoarded it, no doubt conscious that her opportunity of doing so might suddenly come to an end. It did. My father made it his business to hunt up her past history. It wasn't edifying. A lot she denied, but plenty remained which there was no denying. She had been a decoy for Continental thieves, she had seen the inside of a prison, and it would have been unsafe for her to travel in certain countries. She and my uncle separated. You can imagine Mrs. Jardine's feelings toward my father, but my uncle also seemed to hate him for having opened his eyes. I believe he gave him a sum of money and told him he would have nothing more to do with him. My uncle was a religious man, had strong views of right and wrong—some stupid views, too. When he died, to everybody's astonishment he had left his money to Mrs. Jardine for her life. At her death it was to come to my father for his life, and afterward to his son, without any restrictions whatever."

"To you?" I said.

"To me. My father has been dead some years, so as long as that old woman lives I am being kept out of my own. That is my side of the story."

I nodded, showing extreme interest—which, indeed, I felt. But for the fact that the companion was missing, this man's position would be a very unpleasant one. No one could have more interest in his aunt's death than he had.

"I daresay the old woman has told you that her husband's accusations were all false, and that by leaving such a will he repented before he died," Jardine went on, "but I have told you the facts."

"And yet you have written to her for money," I said quietly.

"So she has shown you the letters, has she?"

"I have seen them. Why write to her when you could so easily raise money on your expectations?"

"Raise money! Good heavens, I've raised every penny to be got from Jew or Gentile. There are the letters which came this morning. I haven't opened them yet, the outside is quite enough; money-lenders' complaints, half of them, and the other half bills demanding immediate payment. If you've ever had dealings with the fraternity, you can tell what is inside by the look of the envelope."

I turned the letters over; he was probably right as to their contents. There was one, however, in a woman's handwriting which interested me. I almost passed it to him, and then thought better of it.

"It struck me that there was a threatening tone in your letters," I said.

"Perhaps. I was not averse from frightening her a little if I could."

"Not very generous," I said.

"I don't feel generous. She'd have to come down very handsomely to make me drink her health."

"If your story is the correct one, there may be a reason for your aunt leading so secluded a life," I went on. "In marrying your uncle she may have tricked her confederates."

"It is more than possible," Jardine answered.

"Do you know any of them who would be likely to do her an injury?" I asked.

"You're thinking I would give the old woman away to them?" he laughed. "No; I have worked on the shady side at times, but I am not so bad as that."

"I wasn't thinking so."

"Then I don't understand your question. Is it likely I should have acquaintances in a gang of Continental thieves?"

"The night before last Mrs. Jardine was murdered," I said quietly.

The man sprang from his chair.

"Murdered! Then—by heaven! you're—you're thinking that——"

"And her companion, a Mrs. Harrison, is not to be found," I added.

"Mrs. Jardine—dead! Then I come into my own. The night before last—where was I? Drunk. I didn't get home."

"I know that. I called here yesterday."

"Are you thinking that I had a hand in it?"

"I am looking for her companion," I answered.

Had there been no missing companion I should have been very doubtful about Thomas Jardine; as it was, the two became connected in my mind. I left the Hammersmith flat, stopping outside to give instructions to the man I had brought with me to keep a watch upon Jardine's movements.

Then I went to Wimbledon to see Martha Wakeling again, but I did not tell her I had seen Jardine.

"Do you think you could find me any of Mrs. Harrison's handwriting?" I asked.

"I believe I can," she said, after a moment's thought. "She wrote a store's order the other day which was not sent. I believe it's in this drawer. Yes, here it is."

I glanced at it and put it in my pocket.

"I wonder whether this nephew has anything to do with the affair?" I said contemplatively.

"No," she said with decision.

"Why are you so certain? You said you didn't know him."

"I don't."

"I have discovered one thing," I said carelessly. "By Mrs. Jardine's death he comes into a lot of money."

"I've heard my mistress say something of the kind."

"You see, there would be a motive for the murder."

"The thing is to find Mrs. Harrison," she said. "A woman doesn't go away in the middle of the night unless she has a good reason for doing so."

Details of the crime, so far as they were known, were now published, and the description of Mrs. Harrison was circulated in the press.

When the inquest was adjourned, no doubt most people were surprised. Although I did not suppose the companion innocent, I was not satisfied that she alone was responsible for the crime. I had wondered whether the letter which I had seen in Jardine's flat had come from her, but the store's order which Martha Wakeling had given me proved that I was wrong. Possibly Mrs. Harrison was a member of the gang which Mrs. Jardine had forsaken, and the murder was one of revenge; yet Thomas Jardine profited so greatly that I could not dismiss him from my calculations. Besides, the old lady's will was suggestive. Over her husband's money she had no control, but she had saved a considerable amount, and, as though to make restitution to her husband's family, but with a curious reservation—only if she died a natural death.

Should she die by violence or accident, this money went to her "faithful servant and friend, Martha Wakeling." It was evident she had feared violence—apparently from her nephew—and it was significant that her papers proved that, although Jardine knew he was her heir, he was not aware of the condition.

Before the day fixed for the hearing of the adjourned inquest I went to see Christopher Quarles.

I had nearly finished the story before he showed any interest, and then we went to the empty room, with Zena with us, where I had to tell the tale all over again. He had to have his own way, or there was nothing to be got out of him at all.

"Was there no information to be had from Sarah Paget?" he asked, when I had finished.

"None whatever."

"Did Mrs. Jardine keep much money in the house?"

"Martha Wakeling says not."

"Then the companion was likely to get little by murdering her mistress," said Quarles.

"Either she did it in a fit of uncontrollable passion," I said, "or the motive was revenge."

"Possible solutions," returned the professor, "but robbed of their weight when we consider the motives which Thomas Jardine and Martha Wakeling had."

"I think——"

"One moment, Wigan; I am not theorizing, I am using facts. By murdering his aunt, Jardine lost her money——"

"He inherited three or four thousand a year," I interrupted.

"Which was mortgaged up to the hilt or over it; he told you so himself. Mrs. Jardine's money would have been very useful to him, and by killing her he would lose all chance of it."

"He did not know the condition," I said.

"So far as we know," Quarles answered. "I don't think we must consider that point as proved. Now take Martha Wakeling's position. By the violent death of her mistress she will come into this money. Was there any provision for her in the will if Mrs. Jardine died a natural death?"

"She got a legacy of a hundred pounds."

"You appreciate the enormous difference," said Quarles with that exasperating smile he had when he thinks he has driven his opponent into a corner.

"At any rate, we have no reason to suppose that Jardine did know the condition," I returned. "I do not believe he committed the murder, but I am inclined to think he and Mrs. Harrison are accomplices."

"A theory—my method, Wigan. Very good, but by the handwriting on that envelope you have tried to establish a connection between Jardine and Mrs. Harrison, and have failed."

"At present," I said irritably.

"It is a pity that some of the old superstitions do not hold good," said Quarles, "or at least are without significance in these practical days. You might have confronted Jardine with his victim, and the wounds might have given evidence by bleeding afresh. I suppose you haven't done this?"

"No, Jardine has not seen his aunt," I answered, still irritably.

The professor looked at Zena.

"It is curious the tragedy should happen while Dr. Hawes was away," Zena said. "What kind of man is his locum, Mr. Wigan?"

"Quite above suspicion," I answered.

"Ah, your question sets me theorizing, Zena," said Quarles, "and we have got to watch Martha Wakeling, Wigan. Yes, I am going to help you, and we'll start to-morrow morning."

We returned to the dining-room, and after a pleasant hour, during which we appeared to forget that such a place as Wimbledon existed, I left, far more of a lover than a detective.

Next morning Quarles called for me.

"We'll go to the stores first," he said. "I have a fancy to look at the items in the list sent. There might be some drug which would make Mrs. Jardine sleep more soundly."

"The list was not sent. I have it here."

"I mean the one sent in place of that," said the professor. "Of course one was sent. People who are not in the habit of having much money in the house would see that the store cupboard was replenished."

He was right. A list was shown to us, and I had some difficulty in not showing signs of excitement. The writing was the same as that on the envelope in Jardine's flat. It was peculiar writing, and I could swear to it.

"I think we shall find that Martha Wakeling wrote that," said Quarles. "If so, we establish a link between her and Jardine which neither of them has mentioned."

"But since she would profit by the crime, why should she communicate with him?"

"We are going to find out," he answered. "I presume you have not been keeping any particular watch upon Martha Wakeling?"

"No."

"Has she mentioned what she intends to do when this affair is over?"

"I think she said she would go back to her old village somewhere in Essex."

"Quite a rich woman, eh?" laughed Quarles. "But I doubt the statement about her old village. She is more likely to go where she is not known."

"You will change your opinion when you have talked to her."

"I hope to know all about her before I talk to her," Quarles returned. "We are going to Wimbledon, but not to an interview yet."

Arriving there, I went to the house to make sure that Martha Wakeling was there, and then, taking care not to be seen, joined the professor in the garden, where we hid in a shrubbery to watch anyone who came from or went to the house. It was a long wait—indeed, Quarles was rather doubtful whether anything would happen that day—but in the afternoon Martha Wakeling came out and passed into the road.

"We have got to follow her and not be seen," said Quarles.

There was some difficulty in doing so, for she was evidently careful not to be followed. She went to the station, and by District Railway to Victoria, and to a house in the Buckingham Palace Road.

"We must find out whom it is she comes to visit here, Wigan," said Quarles. "We will wait a few minutes, and then you must insure that we are shown up without being announced. I do not fancy we shall meet with any resistance."

The woman who opened the door to us showed no desire for secrecy. The lady who had just come in did not live there, she explained. If I wanted to see her, would I send in my name? It was not until I told her that I was a detective that

she led the way to the first floor, and we entered the room unannounced.

In an armchair sat an elderly woman, and from a chair at her side Martha Wakeling rose quickly. Quarles had entered the room first, and she did not notice me in the doorway.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" she asked.

"It is a surprise to find you in London," I said, coming forward.

"You! Yes, my sister is——"

Quarles had crossed toward the woman in the arm-chair.

"I am glad to see the journey has not hurt you, Mrs. Jardine," he said quietly.

It was a bow drawn at a venture, but Martha Wakeling's little cry of consternation was enough to prove that Quarles was right.

The arrest of Mrs. Jardine for the murder of her companion created a sensation, and I am doubtful whether the plea of insanity which saved her from the gallows and sent her to a criminal lunatic asylum was altogether justified.

The method in her madness was so extraordinary that the result of the trial would have been different, I fancy, had not Martha Wakeling's courage and care of her mistress aroused everybody's sympathy.

Martha Wakeling knew little of her mistress's past, but she had always known that she was not such an invalid as she pretended to be. If she chose to live that kind of life, it was nobody's business but her own, and the servant never suspected that she was afraid of being seen by some of her former associates.

Martha's story made it clear that Mrs. Jardine had nursed a great hatred for her husband's family, especially for her nephew, the son of the man who had made the accusations against her. Her will, her every action in the tragedy, pointed to premeditation. She chose the time when Dr. Hawes was away, and, saying it

would be an excellent joke to mislead a young doctor, she arranged that Mrs. Harrison should take her place when Dolman came. The companion could not refuse, very possibly enjoyed the joke.

Martha Wakeling knew of this arrangement, thought it silly, but never suspected any sinister intention.

In the middle of the night her mistress woke her up, and told her that she had killed Mrs. Harrison. Mrs. Jardine was excited, and explained that everyone would suppose that she herself had been murdered, and that her will and papers, and her nephew's impecunious position, would certainly bring the crime home to him. This was her revenge. She was mad; Martha was convinced of that. Mrs. Jardine never seemed in doubt that her servant, who was the only person who knew the truth, would help her. Mrs. Jardine intended to go away that night, and when the affair was over Martha would join her, and they could go and live quietly somewhere. She did not want her husband's money—she had enough of her own, and, since by her will it would come to Martha, there was no difficulty. Martha refused to be a party to such a crime, and succeeded in showing her mistress that she was in danger. Even if the body was taken for Mrs. Jardine, it was Mrs. Harrison who would be suspected, not Thomas Jardine. Poor Mrs. Harrison was dead, nothing could alter that, and Martha schemed to protect her mistress. She so far entered into her plan as to let it be supposed that the dead woman was Mrs. Jardine. Since the companion would not be found, the hue and cry would be after her. All that day her mistress was concealed in the house, as much afraid now as she had been exultant before, and in the evening Martha got her a lodging in Buckingham Palace Road.

Afterward she intended to take her away to some place where they were not known and look after her. Three times she had been to see her, fearful that her mistress might betray herself. And she had written to Thomas Jardine to warn him that his aunt had made no secret of her hatred, and that it might be said he had killed her. That communication Thomas Jardine had thought wise to keep to himself—for the present, at any rate—fully alive to the fact that, since he was drunk and quite unable to prove an alibi on the fatal night, and that it was not proved that the companion had committed a motiveless crime, he was in danger of arrest.

Zena had said it was curious the tragedy should happen while Dr. Hawes was away, and the professor declared it was this remark which had led him to believe that the dead woman was Mrs. Harrison and not Mrs. Jardine. On this supposition the attitude of Martha Wakeling was understandable. She might naturally wish to protect her mistress, and she was the only person who could help her in the deception.

The fact that I had given her a reason to suppose that I suspected the nephew would show her the necessity of warning him, and at the same time she would attempt to throw all the suspicion on Mrs. Harrison, who was past suffering.

This was Quarles's theory, and he had found the fact to support it in the handwriting of the store's order.

CHAPTER VII
THE DEATH-TRAP IN THE TUDOR ROOM

I had not been to Chelsea for some weeks—indeed, I had not been in town, business having kept me in the country—and I returned to find a letter from Quarles which had been waiting for me for three days.

Several cases were in my hands just then—affairs of no great difficulty nor any particular interest—and only in one case had I had any worry. This trouble was due, not so much to the case itself as to the fact that it had brought me in contact with another detective named Baines, who would persist in treating me as a rival. He was as irritating as Quarles himself could be on occasion, and was entirely without the professor's genius. To be candid, I may admit Baines had some excuse. Circumstances brought me into the affair at the eleventh hour, and he was afraid I should reap where he had planted.

It was a strange business from first to last, and one I am never likely to forget.

A man, riding across an open piece of country near Aylesbury early one morning, came upon a motor cyclist lying near his machine on the roadside. The machine had been reduced to scrap-iron. The man, who was dressed in overalls, seemed to have been killed outright by a blow on the head. Since the man still wore his goggles, and there was no sign of a struggle, Baines argued, and reasonably, I think, that death was not the result of foul play. That he had been run into by a motor car, and that the people in the car had either not stopped to see what damage was done, or, having seen it, feared to give information, was perhaps giving too loose a rein to imagination.

However, this was Baines's idea; and he had succeeded in hearing of a car with only one man in it which had been driven through Aylesbury at a furious pace on the night when a second and similar tragedy occurred, this time near Saffron Walden.

The man had been killed in the same fashion, he wore goggles and overalls, and

the machine was smashed, though not so completely. Neither of the men had been identified. In the first case, there might be a reason for this, as the man was a foreigner. In the second case, the man was an Englishman. Both the machines were old patterns, and of a cheap make, carried fictitious numbers, and Baines had been unable to find out where they had been purchased.

He held to his theory of the car, but was now inclined to think that the cyclists had been purposely driven into. Granted a certain shape of bonnet—and the car driven through Aylesbury appeared to have this shape—he contended that, in endeavoring to avoid the collision, a cyclist would be struck in exactly the manner indicated by the appearance of the head. He was therefore busy trying to trace a devil-mad motorist.

The discovery of a dead chauffeur on a lonely road near Newbury now brought me into the affair. He had apparently been killed in precisely the same manner as the victims of the Aylesbury and Saffron Walden tragedies; and so I was brought in contact with Baines. From the first he scorned my arguments and suggestions. It seemed to me that this third tragedy went to disprove his theory of a madly driven motor car, but he insisted that it was only a further proof. Was it not possible, he asked, that the mad owner of the car, believing that his chauffeur knew the truth, had killed him to protect himself? I asked him how he supposed the car had been driven at the chauffeur in order to injure him, exactly as it had injured men on cycles. When Baines answered that the chauffeur was probably on a cycle at the time, I wanted to know why, in this case, the motorist had gathered up the broken machine and taken it away. In short, we quarreled over the affair, and Baines was furious when I was able to prove that in neither case was the wrecked cycle a complete machine. True, in one case, only some trivial pieces were missing which might have been driven into the ground by the force of the fall; but in the other an important part was wanting, without which the machine could not have been driven.

I came to the conclusion that there had been foul play, that the broken machines were a blind, and that the men had been brought to the places where they were found after they were dead.

I returned to London to pursue inquiries in this direction, and found the letter from Quarles asking me to go and see him as soon as possible.

I went to Chelsea that evening, and was shown into the dining-room. The professor looked a little old to-night, I thought.

"Very glad to see you, Wigan. I want your help."

"I shall be delighted to give it, you have helped me so often. Your granddaughter is well, I trust?"

"Yes, she is away. She has taken a situation."

"A situation!" I exclaimed.

"The world hasn't much use for a professor of philosophy in these days, and that leads to financial difficulty for the professor," Quarles answered. "You glance round at the luxury of this room, I notice, and I can guess your thoughts. Selfish old brute, you are saying to yourself. But it was the child's wish, and we bide our time. She is made much of where she is. I think it is my loneliness which deserves most pity. Besides, there is no disgrace in honest work, either for man or woman."

Something of challenge was in his tone, and I hastened to agree with him. In a sense, the information was not unpleasant to me. Life was not to be all luxury for Zena Quarles. The social standing of a detective, however successful he may be, is not very high, and the necessity for her to work seemed to bring us nearer together. The value of what I could offer her was increased, and a spirit of hopefulness took possession of me.

"But I didn't ask you here to pity either Zena or myself," Quarles went on, after a pause. "I daresay you have heard of Mrs. Barrymore?"

"I have."

"She advertised for a private secretary, and Zena answered the advertisement. When a woman goes deeply into philanthropic work, visits hospitals, rescue homes, and the like, she often does it to fill a life which would otherwise be empty. Not to Mrs. Barrymore. She is a society woman as well, is to be met here, there and everywhere. She is a golfer, a yachtswoman, fond of sport generally, and withal a charming hostess. It is no wonder she wants a secretary. You don't suppose I should let Zena go anywhere to be treated as a kind of housemaid, and in a way that no self-respecting servant would stand?"

"Of course not. I gather that you know Mrs. Barrymore personally?"

"I saw her once or twice when she was a child. I knew her mother."

I looked up quickly, struck by his tone.

"There is romance in every life, Wigan. Here you touch mine. Mrs. Barrymore's mother married an American. She chose him rather than me, and, although I afterwards married, I have never forgotten her. Naturally, I feel an interest in her daughter, Mrs. Barrymore, and I want your help."

"In what way?"

"I want your opinion of her."

"But I don't know her."

"You must get to know her. She puzzles me, and certain things which Zena has told me make me think I might help her. I should like to do so, if I can. We have been useful to each other, Wigan, because our methods are different. I have formed a certain opinion of Mrs. Barrymore, the result of theorizing. I shall not tell you what it is because I want your unbiased view, arrived at by your method of going to work."

"There is a mystery about her, then?"

"My dear Wigan, that is exactly what I want to find out."

"How am I to make her acquaintance?" I asked.

"Not as Murray Wigan, certainly," he said, and then he added, after a pause: "Would you mind pretending to be Zena's lover? When I saw her a few days ago I said I would suggest this way to her."

Mind? Pretend! The professor little knew how the proposal pleased me. He was offering me a part I could play to perfection.

"It is a good idea," was all I said.

"We even thought of a name for you—George Hastings—and you are a surveyor. Being in Richmond, you thought you might venture to call, not having seen Zena for some time. Mrs. Barrymore lives at Lantern House, Richmond. If you see Mrs. Barrymore, as I hope you will, and make yourself agreeable, she may give you permission to come again. I think it will work all right."

"Will to-morrow be too soon to go?" I asked.

"No."

"If I am given the chance, I will certainly go again when I can. Unfortunately, I am very busy just now."

"Ah, I haven't asked you about your work. Anything interesting?"

"One case, or, rather, three cases in one." And I told him about the cyclists and the chauffeur.

"Only wounds in the head? What kind of wounds?" he asked.

"I did not see the cyclists. I can only speak of the chauffeur from direct knowledge. The forehead, just by the margin of the hair, was bruised and the skin slightly abraded. At the base of the head behind, under the hair, there was another bruise—round, the size of half a crown. There was no swelling, no blood. I am told that the cyclists were also bruised about the temples."

"What had the doctor to say?"

"Very little in the chauffeur's case. Some severe blow had been delivered, but he could not say how. He was puzzled. When I suggested the man might have been run down by a car—quoting Baines's idea—he said it was a possible explanation. He said so, I fancy, merely because he had no other suggestion to offer."

"And the man's face, Wigan?"

"If a man could see death in some horrible shape, and his features become suddenly fixed with terror, he might look like the chauffeur did," I answered.

"He has not been identified either?"

"Not yet, but I'm hoping to trace him."

"Have you thought of one point, Wigan?" said Quarles, with some eagerness. "He may not have been a chauffeur, nor the others cyclists. They may only have worn the clothes."

"It is possible," I returned. "His hands had done manual work, but not of an arduous kind. There were curious marks on the body, a discoloration under the arms, and the skin somewhat chafed. Also, on the outer side of the arms, there were marks just above the elbows—depressions rather than discolorations. A rope bound round the body might have produced the latter."

"There would have been marks upon the chest and back as well," said Quarles.

"I do not say it was a rope," I returned. "Have you any helpful theory, professor?"

For a few moments he had seemed keen—I should not have been surprised had he suggested our going to the empty room. Now he became apathetic, loose-minded, a man incapable of concentration. I had never known Quarles quite like this before.

"I will think of it. When I read the accounts in the papers, I thought I should like to assist you," he said slowly. "But it is impossible to-night. Zena is not here. I am an incomplete machine without her. You must have realized that, Wigan, by this time."

I have intimated before that the empty room, the listening for inspiration, and Quarles's faith in Zena's questions did not impress me very much. His excuse now I took as an intimation that he wanted to be alone.

"I will call at Mrs. Barrymore's to-morrow," I said as I rose to go.

"That's right; Lantern House, Richmond. And, by the way, Mr. Hastings—that is your name, remember—my granddaughter does not call herself Zena Quarles, but Mary Corbett. I have an old friend, Mrs. Corbett, and she has lent her name and her address for letters. Mrs. Barrymore may have heard of me from her mother, and mine is not a name easily forgotten. Besides——"

"I understand. You would help Mrs. Barrymore without her knowing it."

"There may be another reason. One does not advertise his financial difficulties if he can help it."

"Professor, we are friends," I said, with some hesitation. "If you want——"

"No, no," he answered quickly, "I do not want to borrow yet. Thank you all the same, Wigan. Good night. And don't forget you are in love with Mary Corbett."

On the following afternoon I went to Richmond, having supplied myself with some surveying instruments to support the part I was to play. This was unnecessary, perhaps, but I like to be on the safe side. I was excited. I was in love, there was no pretense about it, and if I could contrive to let Zena see the reality through the pretense, so much the better.

Lantern House, which had grounds running down to the river, was large, rambling, and parts of it were very old, contemporaneous with the old Palace of Richmond, it was said. A small cupola in the central portion of the building, possibly once used for star gazing, may have suggested the name.

Zena evidently expected me, for the servant, without making any inquiry, showed me into a room opening on to the gardens at the back. Zena rose hastily from a writing-table and hurried to meet me.

"George!" she exclaimed.

I caught both her outstretched hands in mine.

"Dearest!"

She turned quickly, a color in her cheeks, and then I saw that we were not alone. A lady had risen from a chair at the end of the room, and came forward.

"This is George Hastings, Mrs. Barrymore," Zena said.

"Well, Mr. Hastings, you may kiss her if you like. I shall not be shocked," and she laughed good-humoredly. "Mary told me that you might come, and I am interested in the man she honors. So many girls make fools of themselves, and marry worthless specimens. Outwardly, I see nothing to take exception to in you. Your character——"

"I think Mary is satisfied," I said.

"So it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks, eh?"

I laughed a little awkwardly, playing my part well, I fancy, and showing just sufficient anxiety to impress Mrs. Barrymore favorably.

She was a very handsome woman, tall, athletic, and evidently addicted to sport. Yet there was nothing ungraceful about her. Her manner was gracious and attractive, her dress was charming. It was a marvel she had succeeded in remaining a widow.

"I will leave you," she said presently. "But I can only spare Mary for a very short time to-day. You know, my dear, how busy we are with the appeal for that rescue society. Don't look so disappointed, Mr. Hastings. You may come to-morrow and have tea with Mary."

"Thank you so much."

"But remember, only a few minutes to-day."

As she went out of the room, Zena gave me a warning look. I was evidently to play my part even when Mrs. Barrymore was not there.

"Was there any harm in my coming, Mary?" I asked.

"No, dear. Mrs. Barrymore is very kind to me. George, you haven't kissed me yet."

She was afraid that curious eyes might be upon us, and felt that the parts we had assumed must be played thoroughly. I think the color deepened in my own cheeks as I bent and touched her forehead with my lips. I know hers did. For me it was a lover's kiss, the first I had ever given.

"There is danger, but I am not sure what it is," she whispered, as we stood close together. And then, drawing me to a chair, she said aloud: "Tell me all you have been doing, George."

I concocted a story of my surveying work, and managed to be the lover too. If we had an audience I fancy the deception was complete.

We were not left long together. Mrs. Barrymore came back with an apology, and I departed, thinking a great deal more about Zena than of any mystery there might be about her employer. Yet, from thinking of her, I began to fear for her. What danger could there be at Lantern House?

There was some mystery—the professor had said as much—but surely he would not let his granddaughter run any risk? Still there was danger enough for Zena to take precaution that our deception should not be discovered, even to the extent of allowing me to kiss her. I passed a restless night, and was in Richmond next day long before it was possible for me to go to the house.

When I did go, I was at least an hour before my time.

I was shown into the same room as on the previous day. Mrs. Barrymore was there alone.

"You are early," she said with a smile. "Lovers are ever impatient. Did you meet Mary?"

"No. Is she out?"

"Oh, you need not go. She will be back to tea, and I am not sorry to have a quiet talk with you, Mr. Hastings. I am interested in Mary Corbett. She is nearly alone in the world, and my sympathy goes out to such women. I have worked a great deal for societies dealing with women's status and employment, and am most anxious to see a revision of the laws which at present press too heavily on my sex. Come, tell me all about yourself, your present position, your prospects—everything."

The story I told her would not have done discredit to a weaver of romance, and she was so sympathetic a listener that I felt a little ashamed of myself for practicing such deception.

"I think I am satisfied," she said at last, "and I judge you have a soul above the mere commercial side of a surveyor's business—that the beautiful has an appeal to you. Do you know anything about this house?"

"I believe part of it is old," I said.

"Very old," she returned. "I like modern comforts, but I love the old things too. We have a few minutes before tea and Mary's return. I will show you the old part of Lantern House, if you like. I have tried to give the rooms their original appearance, and am rather proud of my achievement."

She was giving me an opportunity which I could hardly have expected, a chance of seeing something which would give me a clew to the mystery concerning her. I might have known better what to look for if only the professor had been more explicit.

Talking pleasantly, calling my attention to a view from a window, or to some unique piece of furniture, Mrs. Barrymore led me through several rooms, the contents of which told of the wealth and taste of the mistress of the house.

"I only use the old rooms on great occasions," she said, as we passed from a small boudoir into a dim passage. "I have thought of letting the public see them on certain days on payment of a small fee for the benefit of some charity, but I have not quite made up my mind. It would cut into my privacy a little, and in some ways I am selfish. There are two steps down, Mr. Hastings."

She had opened a door and preceded me into a room, Tudor in its construction, Tudor in its contents—at least, I suppose the contents were all in keeping, but I

had not sufficient knowledge to be quite definite upon the point. The effect, if somewhat stiff and severe, was pleasing.

"A Philistine friend of mine complains of the somberness," said Mrs. Barrymore, "and wants me to have the electric light here as it is in the rest of the house. Fancy Henry the Eighth wooing his many wives under the electric light! Why, they would almost have seen what a villain he was. Sit down for a moment, Mr. Hastings, and imagine yourself back across the centuries. It was just such a chair as that which the fat king used when he talked statecraft or divorce with Wolsey."

She seated herself by the table, and I took the chair she indicated. Never did blind man walk into a pit more unsuspectingly. The seat gave under me, half a dozen inches, perhaps, setting the hidden mechanism to quick work. My ankles were gripped, the arms closed across me, pinning me securely just above the elbows, and a bar shot under my chin, holding my head rigidly against the back of the chair.

Mrs. Barrymore got up quickly, went behind me, and, in a moment, had passed a cloth of some thick material over my mouth. Then she came and stood in front of me.

"Caught!" she said. "That chair holds you helpless and speechless. I know just how you feel. I am going to tell you why. I daresay you know I am an American—at least my father was, although my mother was English. I married an Englishman, who was a genius, a crank, and a devil. We lived in the States, where you know electrocution is the death penalty, and my husband, a genius in all that had to do with electricity, invented an improved method, using little current and dangerous in one particular—it is impossible to tell how the victim has died. He was so pleased with his invention he would not make it public. He used it chiefly to terrify me. I was rich, my money was my own, and to get money from me he has forced me into that chair, also an invention of his, and sworn he would kill me. Mine was a life of torture and terror. Then I played the siren with him. I asked him to explain his devilish machine to me, and vowed to make over to him a large sum of money in exchange for the secret. He agreed—the fool! I kept my promise and paid the money, but one night when he was drunk, I pushed him into that chair. He was the first victim of his own invention, and to this day his death remains a mystery."

She laughed very quietly—not like a mad woman—and, going to a corner of the

room, she opened a panel near the floor and brought out a curious contrivance, circular in shape, but not a complete circle—something like a metal cap with a triangular piece missing at the back. Wires were attached to it, and were also secured within the cupboard. They uncoiled as she came across the room carrying the metal cap in her hand.

"My husband was the type of brute who loves to torture women in some form or other," she said. "There are thousands of such men, especially in England, I think, or why are societies so necessary to protect women, to help them, to relieve them? Such devils are better out of the world, and I had the power to be something more than a philanthropist. I had the knowledge and the money to be an active agent. I came to England. I hate Englishmen because of my husband, and I have made a beginning. It was easy among my charitable concerns to hear of men who were brutes, and who would not be missed. In such a man I took an interest, was kind to him, brought him here to Lantern House to befriend him. He has sat in that chair as you are sitting, he has worn this cap as you wear it. How to get rid of him afterward? Underneath us is a basement where I have a car ready, a car I drive myself, and of the existence of which nobody knows. An old house was an advantage to me, you see. It is easy to put goggles and overalls on a dead man. To contrive an iron frame which should keep him in a sitting position was not difficult, and you are exactly over a trap through which you can be lowered into the car. Then a drive in the night, when I am dressed like a man, and have a companion with me who sits upright beside me, then an unfrequented piece of country, and I come home again—alone. Twice cyclists have been found—one of them a foreigner—their broken machines beside them. It was easy to buy a fifth rate motor machine, smash it, and carry it in the car. The cycle confused investigation, and I was secure from detection. Then a chauffeur was found. I did not take so much trouble with him, and I wondered how his death would be explained."

She laughed again.

"You may say you are not one of these brutes—perhaps not. But do you remember the day Lord Delmouth married Lady Evelyn Malling? Such a wealth of wedding presents required careful watching, and a guest was pointed out to me as Murray Wigan, the great detective. I never forget a face, and I never underrate an enemy. I heard that Murray Wigan was inquiring into the mysterious death of the chauffeur. I knew you the moment you came into the house. Who the girl is, I do not care. Your accomplice has nothing to fear—I do not war against women. I sent her to London. When she returns she will learn

that you have been and gone. You will be found, Murray Wigan, sixty or seventy miles from London, and since death by this method draws the features strangely, it is doubtful if you will be identified. You were clever to get upon my track, but you pay the penalty."

The perspiration stood out heavily upon me. Fear gripped me, and I was helpless. Yet even in this supreme moment, even when this fiend of a woman fitted that horrible metal cap upon my head, I remembered the marks upon the dead chauffeur. He had been electrocuted as I was to be. It was the frame holding him in a sitting posture which had marked his body—it was this awful chair which had left those depressions on his arms. I was glad to know the truth. It was the ruling passion, strong in death.

The woman crossed to the cupboard quickly. There was a click, the moving of the switch, and then—nothing. Thank God! Nothing. The cap gripped my head, that was all.

The woman looked at me, and then rushed to the door, only to stagger backward as Christopher Quarles and Zena met her on the threshold. Their first thought was for me, and Mrs. Barrymore had the moment for which she had always been prepared, doubtless. The poison pilule had been concealed in a signet ring she wore, and in a few moments she was lying dead in that horrible Tudor room.

That Mrs. Barrymore had invited me to come to tea on the following day, when there was no reason why I should not have stayed then, had aroused Zena's suspicions, and she had watched Mrs. Barrymore's every movement. Until then she knew nothing of the secret of the Tudor room, but she saw her employer go there and examine the cupboard.

In the night Zena went and examined it, and destroyed the current by rendering the switch ineffective. Every day since Zena had been at Lantern House Quarles had met her in the grounds. Of course she had not gone to London that day, but had met her grandfather, and they had entered the house together, unseen. They would have been in time to prevent my going through that horrible ordeal had I not arrived an hour before I was expected.

"You had no right to let Zena ran such a risk," I said to Quarles. "You ought not to have sent her to Lantern House to test your theories."

"She ran no risk," was his answer. "It was only against man Mrs. Barrymore fought. I am sorry you had such an experience, Wigan. I never supposed she

would attempt your life, did not imagine she would know who you were. Indeed, I was doubtful of my theory altogether. When the first cyclist was found, I suspected electrocution in some form, and the other two cases went to confirm the suspicion. I knew something of Barrymore, a hateful brute but a genius, and I knew his wonderful knowledge of electricity. His death must have been a relief to his wife, and the manner of it made me suspicious of her. He was found on a lonely road miles away from his home in Washington, and no one could tell how he died. Was it remarkable I should wonder if Mrs. Barrymore were responsible for the crimes here? And I would have saved her if I could, for the sake of her mother. If I could have done that, Wigan, you would have got no theory out of me in this case, and your friend Baines might have gone on hunting for his mad motorist for the rest of his days."

So I had touched the professor's romance, and now had one of my own. I had pretended to be a lover, and I had found a moment to tell Zena that it was no pretense with me. The color deepened in her cheeks as it had done when I kissed her, but she did not stop my confession.

"My grandfather——"

"He can still remain with us," I said eagerly, seeing no difficulties. "Say yes, Zena."

"It must not be yet."

"But some day?"

"Perhaps—some day."

And I was content.

CHAPTER VIII
THE MYSTERY OF CROSS ROADS FARM

We said nothing to the professor about the understanding we had come to. In his presence—and I had little opportunity of seeing Zena at any other time—we behaved toward each other as we had always done, and I did not think he had any idea of our secret. Personally, I felt the effects of my horrible experience in the Tudor room for some time, which I think accounts for my not doing myself justice in the next case I was called upon to undertake.

Let me recount the facts of this complex affair, which I take from the evidence given at the trial of Richard Coleman.

Cross Roads Farm, lying about a mile outside the village of Hanley, in Sussex, was owned by two brothers, Peter and Simon Judd.

They were twins, middle-aged, devoted to each other, and somewhat eccentric. Peter was well known to everybody. He went to market, paid the bills, and interviewed people when necessary. Simon seldom left the farm, and was little known in the neighborhood. They lived simply, had no servants in the house, and the villagers declared they must have been saving money for years. Mrs. Gilson, a widow in the village, went up to the farm daily, but was never there after eight o'clock.

At night the Judds were alone in the house. They never had visitors, they retired early, and their only known recreation was a game of chess before going to bed. No one, except Mrs. Gilson, and, on occasion, her son Jim, who was an "innocent," had been known to take a meal in their house. For Jim Gilson both brothers showed a pitying affection, and he came and went much as he liked, earning a few shillings by doing any odd job of which he was capable.

One evening in November Mrs. Gilson was returning from the farm considerably earlier than usual, when she met a man, a stranger, an unusual occurrence in a neighborhood where she knew everybody.

Next morning, on going to the farm, the blinds in the upper windows were not drawn as usual, a thing she had never known to happen before. The back door was generally standing open when she arrived; to-day it was shut, but was on the latch, and she entered, to come face to face with a tragedy.

In front of the fireplace in the sitting-room Peter Judd, clothed only in his pajamas, was lying face downward—dead! A small table on which the chessboard had stood was overturned, and the chessmen were scattered about the floor. There was no sign of his brother, but, wherever he was, it appeared that he too must be in his pajamas, for his bed had been slept in and his clothes were on a chair.

The doctor said that during the night Peter Judd had been strangled, marks of fingers being visible on his throat. Probably he had been seized from behind, and the shock of the attack had possibly accelerated his death, for he had apparently made little struggle to defend himself.

Police investigation, however, soon proved that a struggle had taken place in the house. On an upper landing the furniture was in disorder, and a piece of torn material, which Mrs. Gilson identified as belonging to pajamas which Simon Judd wore, was found. Another torn shred was found in the kitchen, where the table had been pushed out of its place. In the yard outside was a well-house. The door of this, which was always locked, had been forced, and caught by a splinter of wood was a third shred of the pajamas. On the floor of the shed was an old slipper, also belonging to Simon Judd, Mrs. Gilson said.

The well was dragged, with no result, which hardly astonished the neighborhood, for it was of immense depth, and tapped an underground pit of water, according to common report.

Then came Mrs. Gilson's story of the man she had met on the previous evening, and her description was so definite that within a few days a ne'er-do-well, Richard Coleman, was traced, and subsequently arrested. It was proved by more than one witness that he had been in Hanley that day, apparently on the tramp, and with no money, yet two days after the murder he was spending money freely in Guildford.

At first Coleman denied all knowledge of Cross Roads Farm, but afterward admitted that he had been there. The Judds were his uncles. He had not seen them for years, and had gone to ask for help. He wasn't in the house an hour, he declared, and said that his uncles had given him twenty pounds, for their dead

sister's sake. They had also given him a lecture on idleness, and sent him about his business. There had been no quarrel, and he knew nothing about the tragedy.

That he was the Judds' nephew was true, but for the rest of his story, no one believed it. The fact that he had denied all knowledge of Cross Roads Farm was strong evidence against him. He was brought to trial, and found guilty. His record was a bad one, yet the counsel's eloquence so impressed the jury that he was recommended to mercy, with the result that the death penalty was commuted to penal servitude for life.

Of this tragedy I knew nothing when Cross Roads Farm became the scene of a second mystery.

For five years—that is, since the death of the Judds—the house had been shut up. Neither of the brothers had made a will apparently; they had no solicitor, no banker. Either their wealth had been stolen by Coleman, and safely concealed by him before his arrest, or it existed only in the village imagination, or it remained hidden on the premises. The last, being the most romantic idea, found the greatest favor; but the possibility of treasure trove had not induced anyone to take the farm. The gardens grew into a tangle, through which the upper part of the house began to show signs of ruin. It was an uncanny spot, which people passed with apprehension at night, and looked askance at even in the daytime.

The only person who appeared to have no dread of the place was Jim Gilson. During the last five years he had grown rather more incapable. Physically he was a powerful man, mentally he was a baby; and whenever he could elude his mother's watchfulness he ran off eagerly to the farm and sat just inside the gate. Passers-by often saw him there, but whether he ever penetrated further over the uncanny ground was not known.

Sudden and unusual excitement on Jim's part led to the discovery of the second tragedy. There was another dead man at Cross Roads Farm, Jim declared, first to his mother and then to everyone he met. The constable, with others, went there, and it was found that Gilson had spoken the truth.

A tramp, dirty and unshaven, clothed in rags, lay face downward on the sitting-room floor. The doctor who had been called to Peter Judd came again. The tramp was lying in exactly the same position as Peter Judd had lain, the limbs stretched almost identically as his had been, and on his throat were similar finger-marks. The only difference the doctor could suggest was that the tramp seemed to have been seized from the front, whereas, he believed, Judd had been attacked from

behind. It was a suggestion more than a conviction.

It was natural, perhaps, that in Hanley people began to attribute both deaths to supernatural agency. Certainly there were curious points in the case, but it seemed to me that I had had harder problems to solve.

First, I made myself acquainted with the evidence which had been given at Richard Coleman's trial. I know that to read evidence is not the same thing as hearing it, but one or two points struck me forcibly. Why had Coleman been recommended to mercy? True, his counsel's address had been an eloquent one, but if the prisoner were guilty surely there could be no extenuating circumstances in such a dastardly crime. The evidence was strongly against Coleman, yet in spite of this the jury had recommended him to mercy. Was there a doubt in their minds? Do we not all know that subtle doubt which comes even hand in hand with what we believe is conviction? There have been times with us all when we have given judgment and immediately began to doubt that judgment. Unless something of this sort had happened to this jury, I could not understand the recommendation to mercy.

Again, I was not satisfied with the assumption that Simon Judd's dead body had been thrown into the well. The well was certainly of immense depth, and possibly tapped an underground cave full of water, which might account for the futility of dragging operations; but the shred of pajamas and the slipper found in the shed were not of themselves sufficient evidence that the body had been got rid of in this way. Even with the other signs of struggle in the house the evidence was not conclusive. Simon Judd might be alive, in which case he might be the murderer.

Such an hypothesis was, however, unlikely. The brothers were devoted to each other, as twins often are; the overturned chessboard proved that normal relations had existed between them that evening, that they had played their usual game before retiring. If Simon Judd was dead, and his body was not in the well, where was it? Hidden securely, at any rate, and therefore, presumably, by someone who knew the farm well, which Richard Coleman did not.

Again, why had the murderer troubled to hide only one body?

Another point which struck me as curious was the wonderful accuracy of Mrs. Gilson's description of Richard Coleman. It was nearly dark when she met him; in passing she could have little opportunity to examine him closely, yet her description was sufficient to lead to his arrest.

These considerations set me speculating and, with more excitement than was usual with me, I set to work to see how far my speculations were supported by facts. To begin with, I had an interview with Richard Coleman in prison. I did not tell him of the new tragedy at the farm; I merely said that some new facts had come to light, and that if he answered my questions it might be to his ultimate benefit.

"A man unjustly imprisoned does not easily believe that," he returned.

However, he told me his version of the story, exactly as he had told it at his trial.

"Do you remember meeting Mrs. Gilson?" I asked.

"Not particularly."

"You didn't stop and ask her the way?"

"No. I met two or three people on the way to the farm. They didn't interest me, and I had no reason to suppose that I interested them."

"Why did you deny knowing anything about Cross Roads Farm?"

"Well, one way and another there was a good deal against me at the time. It was natural to deny a leading statement like that made by the police, and I knew nothing about the murder then. You see, although I was innocent of murder, I wasn't an innocent man. I was in a hole, and attempted to lie myself out of it."

"Very foolish! It was a weighty argument against you. Did you see anyone else at the farm beside your uncles?"

"It was true what I said at the trial, that one of the workmen had just finished talking to my uncles at the door as I came in. The man gave evidence, said he had parted with the Judds much as I described, but that he had not seen me. I thought he said that to try and help me a bit, because I'm certain he saw me."

"Do you think it was the same man?"

"I didn't doubt that it was, but I couldn't have sworn to him; I was too much engaged in taking stock of the two men I had come to ask for help."

"Did you ask for work?"

"No, money."

"Did you demand any special sum?"

"No; and I didn't demand it, I asked. I was playing the penitent game, the prodigal anxious to reform. Had I demanded I should have got nothing. I had sized up my men all right. I got twenty pounds, which was far more than I expected. I hadn't had such a sum to my name for years."

"Was the money given willingly?"

"Not exactly willingly. My Uncle Peter did most of the talking—lecturing it was—but he seemed more impressed with my tale than Uncle Simon did. Simon Judd had a good many reasons why I should not have the money, but it was evident that Peter usually had the last word and his own way. I should say he took the lead in most things."

"Did he actually give you the money?"

"Yes, counting it into my hand quid by quid, as if he'd been parting with a fortune."

"Where did he get it from? Did he take it out of his pocket?"

"No; he went out of the room, leaving me with Simon, who didn't speak a word the whole time. Peter Judd was away about ten minutes. He came back with the money in his hand."

"And then you left the farm?"

"Yes; they didn't offer me anything to eat or drink. I have an idea that Peter thought of doing so, but Simon made some remark about throwing money away, and suggested my going at once."

"You didn't return to Hanley?"

"No, I went in the opposite direction."

Next day I was back at the farm, my attention concentrated on the well. I had already heard that this well was not much used, there being another under the scullery, to which a pump had been fixed, and which supplied better water. The windlass over the well in the shed substantiated this statement, for it was evident that it had stood idle for a long time.

Peter Judd had left the room to get the money, and had been absent ten minutes;

and the door of this shed had been found forced on the morning after the murder. Might the shed not be the treasure chamber?

The floor overlapped the mouth of the well considerably, and attached to the under part of this floor, and close to the well wall, I found a chain. Pulling this up, I raised a small but stout iron box fastened to the lower end of it. The box had been wrenched open and was empty. I had discovered the Judds' bank. No doubt it had been robbed on the night of the murder. By whom? By someone who had watched Peter Judd go there for the money. The answer came naturally to the question. That person was not Richard Coleman, unless his story were false from beginning to end, which was unlikely.

The next two days I devoted to a closer acquaintance with Mrs. Gilson. I acted intentionally in a manner to make her think I had nearly solved the mystery. I told her that I believed Richard Coleman was an innocent man. The result was exactly what I expected. She became nervous when I plied her with questions, and contradicted herself, growing confused when I pressed home a point. Once I purposely questioned her when her son was present, and her confusion became fear. Jim Gilson said little, but at times looked wonderfully intelligent. It was difficult to suppose that he did not perfectly understand me.

"You don't go and sit inside the gateway at Cross Roads Farm now, Jim," I said suddenly. Since this second discovery he had quite forsaken his haunt.

"No," he answered.

"Why not?"

"No one else will come there now. They're afraid."

"Of what?"

"Spirits."

"And of you, Jim—eh?"

The suggestion pleased him. He came and stood close to me, and rolled up his sleeve to show me how muscular his arms were.

"Splendid! Tell me, Jim, where is Simon Judd?"

"Buried!" he said, and slouched out of the room.

I looked at his mother. Poor woman! I pitied her.

"I didn't know—I didn't guess, not till afterward," she said. "Jim told me next day that he had seen a man go to the farm, told me what he was like, and I knew it was the man I had met. It was more Jim's description than mine that I gave. But I thought this man was the murderer, thought so for months, until Jim began to talk strange about money and that well. It was not until then that I knew he had been at the farm that night. And now this second murder! What will they do?"

"Release an innocent man."

"But to Jim?" she whispered.

"Find him not responsible for his actions, most likely. You ought to have spoken, Mrs. Gilson. An innocent man is in prison. They are likely to be severe with you."

"I don't care what happens to me; it's Jim I care about."

Later in the day I tried to get Jim to show me where Simon Judd was buried. He only laughed.

"And the money, Jim—what has become of it?"

Still his only answer was a laugh.

"By sitting at the gate you kept watch over it, I suppose? Had it somewhere close by, where you could get at it to play with; and when this tramp came you thought he would rob you. Is that the story?"

"It's all right now," he said solemnly.

My course was clear. Jim Gilson must be arrested, and a court of justice would have to say whether he was responsible for his actions or not. Personally, I was not sure that he was as mad as he pretended to be. The curious disposal of the shreds of pajamas showed cunning, a desire to mislead, or it may be there had been a struggle. Perhaps Simon Judd had fought desperately for his life, and the madman had buried him, entirely forgetting the dead body of Peter Judd, who had given him no trouble. Possibly he had left it with a purpose; certainly it had helped to convict an innocent man. Who can explain either the cunning or forgetfulness of a madman?

On the evening of the day following the arrest of Jim Gilson I received a telegram from Christopher Quarles, asking me to go to him without delay. He was in the empty room, his granddaughter with him.

"Wigan, this Sussex affair?" were the words with which he greeted me.

"All over. The murderer was arrested yesterday," I answered.

I had not seen Quarles for some days, and the case had not been mentioned between us. His theories would probably have hindered rather than helped me.

"You're wrong, all wrong," he said.

"My dear professor, nobody knows your ability better than I do, but you haven't had anything to do with this affair. I assure you——"

"You may tell me the whole story, if you like, but you're wrong. You haven't caught your man."

"Nonsense," I said angrily.

"Tell me the story."

"The newspaper résumé of the affair is quite correct," I said.

"I'd rather hear it from you."

And, in spite of my annoyance, I told it in answer to an appealing glance from Zena. There was nothing I would not have done to please her.

"I'll tell you the story in a different way," said Quarles, when I had finished, "and you can pull me up if I go outside reason. At the beginning of this mystery, four or five years ago, I felt no interest in it; now I am impelled to interfere. True, I have taken no active part in the affair, but with me that is not always necessary. Into my empty brain something has come from outside."

I smiled. There was something of the charlatan in him.

"The body of Peter Judd is found," Quarles went on, "his brother's isn't. Where is it? Down the well? You do not think so, yet by the shred of pajamas and the slipper found there it is desired by someone to suggest this solution. A well can be made to give up its secrets, as a rule, but not this particular well. This is a point in Richard Coleman's favor, since he would not be likely to have any knowledge of local lore; and, if you like, it is against Gilson, who might have

such knowledge. But what possible object could he have in laying such a misleading trail?"

"To implicate some other person—the man he had seen join the Judds as he left them."

"I am not combating your theory that two men left the Judds in much the same manner that night, and that the man who gave evidence at the trial was not the one Coleman saw. No doubt Coleman saw Gilson; but do you suggest it was a premeditated crime?"

"No. Gilson was curious about the visitor, and watched; and while he waited Peter Judd went to the well, and Gilson saw the gold. Then desire to possess came to him."

"So he murdered the two men who had been kind to him. Why?" asked Quarles. "During the night he could have broken open the shed and taken the gold. The Judds would undoubtedly have jumped to the conclusion that their nephew had robbed them."

"I should say Gilson's idea was to get the key, hence the murder."

"And while he was strangling Peter, what was Simon doing? Since Peter was found in the sitting-room in his pajamas, it is permissible to suppose that something had aroused him. If it did not arouse Simon too, Peter would be likely to do so, and at the very least he would have called for help the moment he was attacked."

"You forget the doctor's evidence," I said. "He was killed by the shock as much as by the man's fingers at his throat."

"A most important point," said Quarles; "we will come back to it in a minute. Having murdered both the Judds, this imbecile breaks into the shed, because he fails to find the key, I suppose; and having got the money, is satisfied. He hides one body and leaves the other. He lays a false trail for no earthly reason, I submit. For months he does not let fall a word to disturb his mother, but he haunts the gate of the farm."

"His mother knows he is guilty, professor; remember that."

"Did she see him do it? Has he shown her the money?"

"No."

"Then, I ask, what made Gilson haunt the farm? The right answer to that question will put you on the right road. It was Zena who propounded that question to me."

"In seeking for motives we must not be too precise in dealing with a madman," I said. "I think his idea was to protect the money which he had hidden somewhere close at hand."

"I don't," said Quarles. "He was watching for the man who murdered Peter Judd."

"Rather a fantastic conclusion, isn't it?" I said.

"It might be were there no evidence to support it. Let me tell the story as I imagine it. The twin brothers were much attached to each other. Few people knew them well; they kept altogether to themselves. From Coleman's statement it would seem that Peter took the lead. It was he who went for the money. He appears to have managed all the money transactions. It may have been merely a division of labor, but there may have been another reason. Perhaps Simon's temperament was to waste money, and to keep him out of temptation Peter kept the key of the treasury."

"Still a little fantastic, I fancy," I said somewhat contemptuously.

"Quite true, and we will go a little farther on the same road. We will assume that the sight of gold was not good for the moral welfare of Simon Judd. So long as he did not see gold he was content to go on his simple way, but the sight of it set him desiring possession. The nephew came, and twenty sovereigns were fetched from the treasury chest and displayed before Simon's gloating eyes. There was a sudden desire to possess gold himself. Peter had the key, had a hiding-place for it, probably; and on this night, thinking of his nephew, was not careful enough to conceal that hiding-place from his brother, or it may be he was forgetful, and left the key on the mantelshelf. In the night he remembered it, or was aroused by some noise, and went down to find Simon, who was fully dressed, taking the key. Some words may have been spoken; Peter may have reasoned with him, but Simon was beyond reason. He attacked his brother, and killed him. The shock of such a thing may well have had something to do with Peter's death, as the doctor suggests. Would shock have had such effect upon him, do you suppose, had he been attacked by Gilson, an innocent imbecile?"

I did not answer.

"Simon at once realized his position. Suspicion must fall upon him unless he was murdered too. So he laid the trail, shreds of his pajamas here and there, and the old slipper. The well would be an excellent grave for him. He remembered that Gilson saw Coleman arrive; suspicion would fall upon Coleman. Conscience was dead now, he could take the gold. So he left Cross Roads Farm, being careful to dress himself in clothes that probably only his brother knew he possessed, and left his ordinary clothes on the chair in his room."

"And Gilson?" I asked.

"No doubt he saw Peter Judd go to the shed, and was fascinated by the sight of the gold; at any rate, he remained there. He would see Coleman leave. That he saw the actual murder is unlikely, did not know of it until the next day, I should conjecture; but he would see what Simon Judd did, would see him take the money and go. When he knew Peter Judd was dead, Gilson would guess who had killed him. He would say nothing, because both men had been good to him; but knowing the two brothers, being in touch, perhaps, since he is one of God's fools, with a plane of thought which is above the normal man, he waited for Simon Judd's return, and he has not been disappointed."

"Not disappointed!" I exclaimed.

"I imagine Simon spent his money riotously, every penny of it, conscience troubling him at times, which trouble he drowned with drink and drugs; but in the end he was irresistibly drawn back, a tramp, dirty, unrecognizable, except to the eyes expecting him—Gilson's."

"And then?"

Quarles paused for a moment.

"If Gilson watched him closely, as he probably did, he may some day, in a lucid interval, confirm my surmise. I think Simon Judd stood before the lifted veil when he returned to Cross Roads Farm again; that on the spot where so many familiar hours had been spent he saw his brother once more, and remorse came to him. The gold had gone, you see. Every detail of that tragic night was recalled in a moment of time, and, terror seizing him, he clutched himself by the throat and fell dead."

"I think you are right, dear," Zena said solemnly.

"But how is it no one knew him?" I asked.

"Few people did know him, and he had passed through five years of debauchery. Find someone who knew of some peculiarity he had. Coleman might help you here. Gilson knew him. Didn't he tell you Simon Judd was buried? That would be a day or so after the tramp had been buried in Hanley."

This case was certainly one of my failures, although I had to accept praise when both Coleman and Gilson were released.

It happened, too, that Coleman knew that, as a young man, his Uncle Simon had undergone an operation, the scar of which the doctor found on the tramp's body.

Jim Gilson was never lucid enough to give a detailed account of what happened when Simon Judd returned to the farm, but piecing together statements he made at intervals there is little doubt that Quarles's surmise was not very far from the truth.

CHAPTER IX
THE CONUNDRUM OF THE GOLF LINKS

I have wondered sometimes whether I have ever really liked Christopher Quarles; at times I have certainly resented his treatment, and had he been requested to make out a list of his friends, quite possibly my name would not have figured in the list unless Zena had written it out for him. Some remark of the professor's had annoyed me at this time, and I had studiously kept away from Chelsea for some days, when one morning I received a telegram:

"If nothing better to do, join us here for a few days.—Quarles, Marine Hotel, Lingham."

I did not even know they were out of town, for Zena and I never wrote to each other, and I had a strong suspicion the invitation meant that the professor wanted my help in some case in which he was interested. Still, there would be leisure hours, and I had visions of pleasant rambles with Zena. If I could manage it, some of them should be when the moon traced a pale gold path across the sleeping waters. I may say at once that some moonlight walks were accomplished, though fewer than I could have wished, and that, although there was no business behind the professor's invitation, my visit to Lingham resulted in the solution of a mystery which had begun some months before and had baffled all inquiry ever since.

Lingham, as everybody knows, is a great yachting center, and as I journeyed down to the East Coast I wondered if yachting interested Quarles, and, if not, why he had chosen Lingham for a holiday.

The professor was a man of surprises. I have seen him looking so old that a walk to the end of the short street in Chelsea might reasonably be expected to try his capacity for exercise; and, again, I have seen him look almost young; indeed, in these reminiscences I have shown that at times he did not seem to know what fatigue meant. When he met me in the vestibule of the Marine Hotel he looked

no more than middle-aged, and as physically fit as a man could be. He was dressed in loose tweeds, and wore a pair of heavy boots which, even to look at, almost made one feel tired.

"Welcome, my dear fellow!" he said. "But why bring such infernal weather with you? It began to blow at the very time you must have been leaving town, and has been increasing ever since. It has put a stop to all racing."

"I didn't know you took an interest in yachting."

"I don't. Golf, Wigan! At golf I am an enthusiast. There's a good sporting course here, that's why I came to Lingham. You've brought your clubs, I see."

"Chance. You did not say anything about golf in your wire."

"Why should I? Useless waste of money. I remembered your telling me once that you never went for your holiday without taking your clubs. We shall have grand sport."

He laughed quite boisterously, and a man who was passing through the hall looked at me and smiled. I recollected that smile afterward, but took little notice of it just then, because Zena was coming down the stairs.

Before dinner that evening it blew a gale, and from windows overlooking the deserted parade we watched a sullen, angry sea pounding the sandy shore and hissing into long lines of foam, which the wind caught up and carried viciously inland.

"Isn't that a sail—a yacht?" said Zena suddenly, pointing out to sea, over which darkness was gathering like a pall.

It was, and those on board of her must be having a bad time, not to say a perilous one. She was certainly not built for such weather as this, but she must be a stout little craft to stand it as she did, and they were no fools who had the handling of her.

"Blown right out of her course, I should think," said Quarles. "The yachts shelter in the creek to the south yonder. I should not wonder if that boat hopes to make the creek which lies on the other side of the golf course."

"She's more likely to come ashore," said a man standing behind us, and he spoke with the air of an expert in such matters. "There's no anchorage in that creek,

and, besides, a bar of mud lies right across the mouth of it."

As the curved line of the sea front presently hid the yacht from our view the gong sounded for dinner—a very welcome sound, and I, for one, thought no more about the yacht that night.

Before morning the gale had subsided, but the day was sullen and cloudy, threatening rain, and we did not attempt golf until after lunch.

It was an eighteen-hole course, and might be reckoned sporting, but it was not ideal. There was too much loose sand, and a great quantity of that rank grass which flourishes on sand dunes. It said much for the management that the greens were as good as they were.

I had just played two holes with the professor before I remembered the man who had smiled in the hall of the hotel yesterday. Certainly Quarles was an enthusiast. In all the etiquette of the game he was perfect, but as a player he was the very last word. He persisted in driving with a full swing, usually with comic effect; he was provided with a very full complement of clubs, and was precise in always using the right one; but he seemed physically incapable of keeping his eye on the ball, and constantly hit out, as if he were playing cricket; yet the bigger ass he made of himself the greater seemed his enjoyment. He never lost his temper. Other men would have emptied themselves of the dregs of their vocabulary; Quarles only smiled, cheerfully explaining how he had come to top a ball, or why he had taken half a dozen shots to get out of a bunker. No wonder the man in the hotel had laughed.

There was one particularly difficult hole. The bogey was six. It required a good drive to get over a ridge of high ground; beyond was a brassey shot, then an iron, and a mashie on to the green. To the left lay a creek, a narrow water course between mud. My drive did not reach the ridge, on the top of which was a direction post; and the professor pulled his ball, which landed perilously near the mud. It took him three shots to come up with me, and when at last we mounted the ridge we saw there was a man on the distant green, which lay in a hollow surrounded by bunkers, behind which was the bank of the curving creek.

"Fore!" shouted Quarles.

I almost laughed. It was certain the man would have ample time to get off the green before the professor arrived there. Quarles waited for a moment, but the man ahead took no notice, possibly had not heard him.

The professor took a fall swing with his brassey, and, for a wonder, the ball went as straight and true as any golfer could desire.

"Ah! I am getting into form, Wigan," he exclaimed. "What is that fool doing yonder? Fore!"

This time the man looked round and waved to us to come on, which we did slowly, for Quarles's form was speedily out again.

The man on the green was a curiosity. Thirty-five or thereabouts, I judged him to be; a thin man, but wiry, with a stiff figure and an immobile face, which looked as if he had never been guilty of showing an emotion. His eyes were beady, and fixed you; his mouth gave the impression of being so seldom used for speech that it had become partially atrophied. His costume, perhaps meant to be sporting, missed the mark—looked as if he had borrowed the various articles from different friends; and he was practicing putting with a thin-faced mashie, very rusty in the head, and dilapidated in the shaft.

He stood aside and watched Quarles miss two short puts.

"Difficult," he remarked. "I'm practicing it."

Quarles looked at the speaker, then at the mashie.

"With that?"

"Why not?" asked the man.

"Why?" asked Quarles.

"If I can do it with this I can do it with anything," was the answer.

"That's true," said the professor, making for the next tee. There was no arguing with a man of this type.

The tee was on the top of the creek bank.

"I was right," said Quarles. "Look, Wigan, they did make for this haven last night."

It was almost low water. The bank on the golf course side was steep, varying in height, but comparatively low near the tee, and an irregular line of piles stuck up out of the mud below, the tops of half a dozen of them rising higher than the bank. On the other side of the creek the shore sloped up gradually from a wide

stretch of mud.

In the narrow waterway was a yacht, about eighteen tons, I judged. That she was the same we had seen laboring in the gale last night I could not say, but certainly she was much weather-marked and looked forlorn. She had not had a coat of paint recently, the brasswork on her was green with neglect, and her ropes and sails looked old and badly cared for. Yet her lines were dainty, and, straining at her hawser, she reminded me of a disappointed woman fretting to free herself from an undesirable position.

A yacht is always so sentient a thing, and seems so full of conscious life.

Quarles appeared to understand my momentary preoccupation.

"Don't take any notice of her," he said. "We're out for golf. I always manage a good drive from this tee."

This time was an exception, at any rate, and, in fact, for the remainder of the round he played worse than before, if that were possible. But he was perfectly satisfied with himself, and talked nothing but golf as we walked back, until we were close to the hotel, when he stopped suddenly.

"Queer chap, that, on the green."

"Very."

"Do you think he came from the yacht?"

"I was wondering whether he hadn't escaped from an asylum," I answered.

"I wonder what he was doing on the green," Quarles went on. "I saw no one else playing this afternoon, so he had the green to himself, except for the little time we disturbed him. When I first saw him it didn't seem to me that he was practicing putting, and I thought he watched us rather curiously."

"A theory, professor?" I asked with a smile.

"No, no; just wonder. By the way, don't say anything to that expert who was so certain that the yacht couldn't get into the creek. He mightn't like to know he was mistaken."

After dinner that evening Zena and I went out. There was no moon; indeed, it was not very pleasant weather, but it was a pleasant walk, and entirely to my

satisfaction.

When we returned I found Quarles in a corner of the smoking room leaning back in an armchair with his eyes closed. He looked up suddenly as I approached him.

"Cold out?" he asked.

"Nothing to speak of."

"Feel inclined to go a little way with me now?"

"Certainly."

"Good! Say in a quarter of an hour's time. I shall get out of this dress and put on some warmer clothes. I should advise you to do the same."

I took his advice, and I was not surprised when he turned to me as soon as we had left the hotel and said:

"That yacht, Wigan; we'll go and have a look at her."

"It's too dark to see her."

"She may show a light," he chuckled. "Anyway, we will go and have a look."

We started along the front in the direction of the golf course, but at the end of the parade, instead of turning inland as I expected, to cross the course to the creek, Quarles led the way on to the sands. Here was a favorite bathing place, and there were many small tents nestling under the sandhills, looking a little the worse for last night's gale. At this hour the spot was quite deserted.

"Getting toward high water," said the professor, "and a smooth sea to-night. Can you row, Wigan?"

"An oarsman would probably say I couldn't," I answered.

"There's a stout little boat hereabouts—takes swimmers out for a dive into deep water. We'll borrow it, and see what you can do."

Always there was something in Quarles's way of going to work which had the effect of giving one a thrill, of stringing up the nerves, and making one eager to know all that was in his mind. You were satisfied there was something more to learn, and felt it would be worth learning. I asked no questions now as I helped to push a good-sized dinghy into the water. Oars were in it, and a coil of rope.

"Anyone might go off with it," said Quarles. "I noticed the other day that the boatman did not trouble to take the oars out. I suppose he believes in the honesty of Lingham."

If I am no great stylist, I am not deficient in muscle, and, with the set of the tide to help me, we were not long in making the mouth of the creek.

"The yacht is some way up, Wigan, and maybe there are sharp ears on her. Tie your handkerchief round that rowlock, and I'll tie mine round this. You must pull gently and make no noise. The tide is still running in, and will carry us up. By the way, when you're on holiday do you still keep your hip pocket filled?"

"Yes, when I go on expeditions of this sort."

"Good! Keep under the bank as much as possible, and don't stick on the mud."

I did little more than keep the boat straight, was careful not to make any noise, and in the shadow of the bank we were not very likely to be seen. A heavy, leaden sky made the night dark, and there was a sullen rush in the water.

"Steady!" whispered Quarles.

We were abreast of the first of the piles which I had noticed in the morning. Now it was standing out of water instead of mud.

"She shows no light," said Quarles. "We'll get alongside."

With the incoming tide the yacht had swung around, and was straining at the hawser which held her, the water slapping at her bows with fretful insistency. Quarles held on to her, bringing us with a slight bump against her side. Keen ears would have heard the contact, but no voice challenged.

We had come up on the side of the yacht which was nearest the golf course.

"There's no boat fastened to her, Wigan," said Quarles. "Probably there is no one on board. Let's go round to the other side."

There we found the steps used for boarding her.

"If there's anyone here, Wigan, we're two landlubbers who've got benighted and have a bad attack of nerves," whispered Quarles. "Hitch one end of that coil of rope to the painter, so that when we fasten our boat to the stays on the other side of the yacht she'll float far astern. When they return they are almost certain to

come up on this side to the steps, so will not be likely either to see the rope or our boat in the dark."

I fastened the rope to the painter as Quarles suggested, and climbed on to the yacht after him. Then I let the tide carry our boat astern, and, crossing the deck, tied the other end of the rope securely to the stays on the other side.

The sky seemed to have become heavier and more leaden; it was too dark to see anything clearly. There was little wind, yet a subdued and ghostly note sounded in the yacht's rigging, and the water swirling at her bows seemed to emphasize her loneliness. So far as I could see, she was in exactly the same condition as when I had seen her from the golf course. No one was on deck, and no sound came from below.

"Queer feeling about her, don't you think?" said Quarles. "We're just deadly afraid of the night and spooks, that's what we are if there is anyone to question us."

I followed him down into the cabin. At the foot of the companion Quarles flashed a pocket electric torch. It was only a momentary flash, then darkness again as he gave a warning little hiss.

Three glasses on the table was all I had seen. I supposed the professor had seen something more, but I was wrong.

After standing perfectly motionless for a minute or so, he flashed the light again, and sent the ray round the cabin. The appointments were faded, the covering of the long, fixed seats on either side of the table was torn in places. One of these seats had evidently served as a bunk, for a pillow and folded blanket were lying upon it. All the paint work was dirty and scratched. Forward, there was a door into the galley; aft, another door to another cabin.

"A crew of three," said Quarles. "Three glasses, plenty of liquor left in the bottle in the rack yonder, a pipe and a pouch, and a conundrum."

He let the light rest on a sheet of paper lying beside the glasses. On it was written: "S. B. Piles—one with chain—9th link. N. B. Direct. Mud—high water —90 and 4 feet."

"A conundrum, Wigan. What do you make of it?"

He held out the paper to me, a useless thing to do, since he allowed the ray from

the torch to wander slowly round the cabin again.

"We must look at the pile with the chain," he muttered in a disconnected way, as though he were thinking of something quite different.

"And at the ninth link of the chain," I said.

"Yes, at the ninth link. A conundrum, Wigan. A——"

He stopped. His eyes had suddenly become fixed upon some object behind me. The electric ray fell slanting close by me, and when I turned I saw that the end of it was under the cushioned seat on one side of the table. The light fell upon a golf club—a rusty mashie.

"That man on the green was one of the crew, Wigan," said Quarles; and then when I picked up the club we looked into each other's eyes.

"Did I not say the yacht had a queer feeling about her?" he said in a whisper.

I knew what he meant. The mashie had something besides rust on it now, something wet, moist and sticky.

Quarles glanced at the door of the galley as he put the paper on the table, careful to place it in the exact position in which he had found it; then he went quickly to the cabin aft.

On either side of a fixed washing cabinet there was a bunk, and in one of them lay the man we had seen on the green. The wound upon his head told to what a terrible use the club had been put since he had played with it that afternoon. He had been fiercely struck from behind, and then strong fingers had strangled out whatever life remained in him. He was fully dressed, and there had been little or no struggle. His would-be sportsmanlike attire was barely disarranged, and even in death his pose was stiff, and his set face exhibited no emotion. Quarles lifted up one of his hands and looked at the palm and at the nails. He let the light rest upon the hand that I might see it. Then he pointed to a straight mark across the forehead, just below the hair, and nodded.

We were back in the saloon-cabin again when I touched the professor's arm, and in an instant the torch was out. I had caught the sound of splashing oars.

"Put the club back under the seat," said Quarles, and then, with movements stealthy as a cat's, he led the way to the galley door. We were in our hiding place

not a moment too soon.

Two men came hurriedly down the companion. A match was struck, but there was not a chink in the boarding through which we could see into the cabin. It seemed certain they had not discovered our dinghy, and had no suspicion that they were not alone upon the yacht.

"It's plain enough. There's no other meaning to it." The speaker had a heavy voice, a gurgle in it, and I judged the heavier tread of the two was his. "Ninety feet, it says, captain; and we measured that string to exactly ninety feet."

"Feet might only refer to the four, and not to both figures," was the answer in a sharp, incisive voice.

"He said it was both."

"And I'm not sure he lied," returned the man addressed as captain. "The distance was originally paced out no doubt, and pacing out ninety feet ain't the same as an exact measurement."

"We made allowances," growled the other.

"We'd been wiser to go on looking instead of coming back. You're too previous, mate."

"You didn't trust him any more'n I did."

"No; but he had the name right enough," answered the captain, "and the time—a year last February. I always put that job down to Glider. Let's get back while the dark lasts."

"Come to think of it, it's strange Glider should have made a confidant of him," said the other.

"Sized him up, and took his chance for the sake of the missus," returned the captain.

"I'm not going back until I've seen whether he's got other papers about him."

"He chucked his clothes overboard," said the captain.

"He'd keep papers tied round him, maybe. I'll soon find out."

There was a heavy tread, and the opening of the door of the cabin aft. There was

the rending of cloth, and the man swore the whole time, perhaps to keep up his courage for the horrible task.

"Nothing!" he said, coming back into the saloon-cabin. "Say, captain, supposing it's all a plant—a trap!"

There was a pause and my hand went to my revolver. If the suggestion should take root, would they not at once search the galley?

"He'd a mind to get the lot, that was his game," said the captain.

They went on deck, we could hear them stamping about overhead. Then came an oath, and a quick movement. I thought they were coming down again, but a moment later there was the soft swish of oars, followed by silence.

"Carefully!" said Quarles, as I fumbled at the galley door. "One of them may have remained to shoot us from the top of the companion."

He was wrong, but it was more than probable that such an idea had occurred to them. They had discovered our dinghy! It had been cut adrift, and the scoundrels had escaped, leaving us isolated on the yacht. I snapped out a good round oath.

"Can you swim, Wigan?" asked the professor.

At full tide the creek was wide, and the sullen, rushing water had a hungry and cruel sound.

"Not well enough to venture here, and in the dark," I said.

"And I cannot swim at all," said Quarles. "We are caught until morning and low-water. It's cold, and beginning to rain. With all its defects I prefer the cabin."

He went below and declared that he must get a little sleep. Whether he did or not, I cannot say; I know that I never felt less inclined to close my eyes. We had been trapped, that made me mad; and I could not forget our gruesome companion behind the door of the aft cabin.

There was a glimmer of daylight when Quarles moved.

"This is nearly as good a place to think in as my empty room at Chelsea, Wigan. What do you make of the mystery?"

"A trio of villains after buried treasure."

"Which they could not find; and two of them are scuttling away to save their necks."

"So you think the dead man yonder fooled them?"

"No. I think there is some flaw in the conundrum. By the way, why is a golf course called links?"

"It's a Scotch word for a sandy tract near the sea, isn't it?"

"But to an untutored mind, Wigan, especially if it were not Scotch, there might be another meaning, one based on number, for instance. As a chain consists of links, so a golf course, which has eighteen links. It is a possible view, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"I see they have taken the paper," said Quarles; "but I dare say you remember the wording. S. B., that means south bank; N. B., north bank. I have no doubt there is a pile with a chain on it, whether with nine or ninety links does not matter. It was on the green of the ninth hole that the man was practicing. For the word "link" substitute "hole," and you get a particular pile connected with the ninth hole, which, of course, has a flag, and so we get a particular direction indicated. From the high-water line of mud on the north bank we continue this ascertained direction for ninety feet, and then we dig down four feet."

"And find nothing," I said.

"Exactly! There is a flaw somewhere, but the treasure is there," said Quarles. "The rascals who have given us an uncomfortable night evidently believed that the man they called Glider had told the truth; more, they had already put the job down to him, you will remember. Now, how was it Glider gave his secret away to the man in yonder cabin? Obviously he couldn't come and get the treasure himself."

"A convict," I said, "who gave information to a fellow convict about to be released."

"I don't think so," said Quarles. "As a convict, these men, who have been convicts themselves, or will be, would have had sympathy with him. They hadn't any. They were afraid of him. They felt it was strange that Glider should have confided in him, and could only find an explanation by supposing that Glider had sized him up and taken his chance for the sake of the missus. We may

assume, therefore, that Glider had trusted a man no one would expect him to trust. This suggests urgency, and I fancy a man, nicknamed Glider, has recently died in one of His Majesty's prisons—Portland I should guess. Probably our adventurers sailed from Weymouth. Now, Glider could not have been in Portland long. A year last February he was free to do the job with which this expedition is connected, and of which I should imagine he is not suspected by the police. Probably he was taken for some other crime soon after he had committed this one. He had no opportunity to dig up the treasure he had buried, which he certainly would have done as soon as possible. Yet Glider must have been long enough in prison to size up the dead man yonder—a work of some time, I fancy. You noticed his hands. Did they show any evidence of his having worked as a convict? You saw the mark across the forehead. That was made by a stiff cap worn constantly until a day or two ago. I think we shall find there is a warder missing from Portland."

"A warder!"

The idea was startling, yet I could pick no hole in the professor's argument.

"Even a warder is not free from temptation, and I take it this man was tempted, and fell. Glider, no doubt, told him of the captain and his mate. He had worked with them before, probably, and trusted them; also, he might think they would be a check upon the warder. I shouldn't be surprised if the warder were the only one of the three who insisted that the widow should have her share, and so came by his death. The flaw in the riddle keeps the treasure safe. Perhaps I shall solve it during the day. By the way, Wigan, it must be getting near low-water."

It was a beastly morning, persistent rain from a leaden sky. The tide was out, only a thin strip of water separating the yacht from the mud.

"I fear there will be no golfers on the links to-day to whom we might signal," said Quarles; "and I could not even swim that."

"I can," I answered.

"It would be better than spending another night here," said the professor. "Send a boat round for me, and inform the police. I am afraid the captain and his mate have got too long a start; but don't leave Lingham until we have had another talk. While I am alone I may read the riddle."

The ducking I did not mind, and the swim was no more than a few vigorous

strokes, but I had forgotten the mud. As I struggled through it, squelching, knee-deep, Quarles called to me:

"They must have landed him at high-water yesterday, Wigan, and then crossed over and taken the direction from him. I thought he was feeling about with the flag when we first saw him on the green. No doubt he made some sign to the others across the creek to lie low when he saw us coming. They marked the place in daylight and went at night to dig."

I sank at least ten inches deeper into the mud while he was speaking. He got no answer out of me. I felt like hating my best friend just then.

After changing my clothes at the hotel, where I accounted for my condition by a story, original but not true, I told Zena shortly what had happened, then sent a boat for the professor. I then told the Lingham police, who wired to the police at Colchester, and I also telegraphed to Scotland Yard and to Portland Prison.

I did not see Quarles again until the afternoon.

"Have you solved the riddle?" I asked.

"I think so. We'll go to that ninth hole at once. The police are continuing the excavations begun by our friends. I've had a talk to the professional at the golf club. They move the position of the holes on a green from time to time, you know, Wigan; and with the professional's help I think we shall be able to find out where it was a year last February. He is a methodical fellow. That will give us a different direction on the north bank of the creek. It was a natural oversight on the convict's part. Were I not a golfer I might not have thought of the solution."

We found the treasure a long way from where the other digging had been done. It consisted of jewels which, in the early part of the previous year, had been stolen from Fenton Hall, some two miles inland. The theft, which had taken place when the house was full of week-end visitors, had been quickly discovered, and the thief, finding it impossible to get clear away with his spoil, had buried it on the desolate bank of the creek, marking the spot by a mental line drawn through the chained pile and the flag on the golf course. He must have known the neighborhood, and knew this was the ninth hole, or link as he called it, or as the warder had written it down. For Quarles was right, a warder was missing from Portland, and was found dead in that aft cabin.

The yacht was known at Weymouth, and belonged to a retired seaman, a Captain

Wells, who lived at a little hotel when he was in the town. He was often away—sometimes in his yacht, sometimes in London—and there was little doubt that his boat had often been used to take stolen property across to the Continent. Neither the captain nor his mate could be traced now, but it was some satisfaction that they had not secured the jewels.

As I have said, I did manage to get some moonlight walks with Zena, but not many, for a week after we had recovered the Fenton Hall jewels I was called back to town to interview Lord Leconbridge.

CHAPTER X
THE DIAMOND NECKLACE SCANDAL

I never heard Lord Leconbridge address the House of Lords, but it has been said that every sentence he uttered required half a dozen marginal notes, that his speeches were the concentrated essence of his vast knowledge, and, without annotation, were quite incomprehensible to those who were less familiar with the subject. I understood the truth of this when I was brought in contact with him over the affair of the diamond necklace, a sensation which set fashionable London gossiping all the season, and, according to some people, has never been cleared up satisfactorily.

I can give the story Lord Leconbridge told me in a few lines:

With his wife and Mr. Rupert Lester, his son by his first marriage, he attended a reception at the Duchess of Exmoor's, in Park Lane. Lady Leconbridge was wearing the famous diamonds. He was about to present Jacob Hartman, the banker, to his wife, when he noticed that the necklace was gone. His wife was quite unconscious of the fact till that moment. A search was instituted, but without result, and in the few hours which had elapsed between the time of the loss and my interview with him nothing had been heard of the jewels.

The story, as I told it three days later to Christopher Quarles, was an edition with marginal notes, the result of investigation and questions put to many people.

"I am interested in Lord Leconbridge," said the professor; "he is one of the few men who count. Whether I shall get interested in his family jewels is another matter. Still, we happen to be in the empty room, and Zena is here to ask absurd questions; so tell your story, Wigan."

"When Lady Leconbridge came down to dinner that evening she was wearing pearls. As she entered the drawing-room her husband admired her appearance and her dress, but suggested that the diamonds would be more suitable than the pearls. She questioned his taste, and appealed to her stepson. This only appeared

to make her husband more determined, and Lady Leconbridge went upstairs and changed the pearls for the diamonds. The jewels were certainly not lost on the way to Park Lane, for the Duchess of Exmoor noticed them five minutes before they were missing. The loss was discovered by Lord Leconbridge when he was about to present Jacob Hartmann to his wife. The reception was a semi-political one; a footman says he knew everyone who passed through the hall; and I have ascertained that the known thieves, who might be able to deal with such stones as these, were not at work that night. A curious story comes from a housemaid. On the chance of catching a glimpse of some of the guests, she was looking down from a dark corner of the stairs on to a corridor which was only dimly lighted, not being used much that evening, when she heard the low voices of a man and woman talking eagerly. The woman was either afraid or angry, and the man seemed excited. Then she saw a man come quickly along the corridor, and the next moment there was the sound of broken glass. She did not know who he was, and the woman she did not see at all. The servant thought no more of the incident until she heard that the diamonds were missing. The window of a small room opening out of this corridor was found broken, and I find ample evidence that it was broken from inside. A thief might have escaped that way, but it would be a difficult task."

"Who first told you that Lady Leconbridge was wearing pearls when she went down to dinner?" asked Quarles.

"Her maid."

"Lord Leconbridge did not mention this fact?"

"No; but later he corroborated the maid's story; as did also his wife and his son."

"What is Lord Leconbridge's attitude?" asked Quarles.

"He is extremely irritated, rather at the annoyance caused to his wife than at the loss of the jewels, I fancy."

"Were I Lady Leconbridge I should be something more than annoyed," Zena remarked.

"Ah! that's not the point, my dear," and the professor picked up an evening paper. "At the end of a column of stuff dealing with this robbery there is this paragraph: 'Before her marriage Lady Leconbridge was Miss Helen Farrow, an actress, who was rapidly making a reputation. Not long ago, it will be

remembered, she played Lady Teazle at a command performance of Sheridan's masterpiece. Her last part was that of Mrs. Clare in Brickell's play, which was such a success at the St. George's Theater, and her charming impersonation of the heroine will be fresh in the public mind. Her marriage came as a great surprise, both to the theatrical and social world.'

"A short paragraph," Quarles went on, "but with a sting in the tail of it. People talked a great deal at the time of the marriage three years ago. Leconbridge was called an old fool for going to the stage for a second wife, and it was suggested that, if he must marry an actress, he might have made a better choice. When this kind of thing is said about a beautiful woman there are plenty of evil-minded persons to make the worst of it. You see, Zena, there is some reason for Lord Leconbridge's irritability."

"I do not believe there was the slightest foundation for the gossip," I said. "Lady Leconbridge is a most charming person."

"I know nothing about her," said Quarles, tapping the paper; "but I am certain that this affair will revive the old gossip."

"I wonder why the duchess noticed the diamonds so particularly that evening," said Zena.

"Probably because she had not seen them before," I answered. "Mr. Lester told me they were seldom worn—suggested, indeed, that their size and setting were so conspicuous as to make them rather vulgar."

"I did not know that famous family jewels could be considered vulgar," she returned; "but, if so, why was Lord Leconbridge so anxious that his wife should wear them on this occasion?"

Quarles nodded and looked at me.

"A whim," I said; "hardening into a firm determination when his son opposed him. Men are like that."

"Are father and son not on good terms, then?"

"It has been said that Lord Leconbridge worships his son," I returned.

"What age is Rupert Lester?" Zena asked.

"About twenty-five."

"And Lady Leconbridge?"

"Two or three years older."

"And Mr. Lester's support of Lady Leconbridge when she preferred the pearls only made his father more determined that the diamonds should be worn. I wonder——"

"Ah! that past gossip is having its effect upon your judgment," said Quarles.

"You may put that idea out of your mind, Zena," I said. "Mr. Rupert Lester is engaged to Miss Margery Dinneford. It is common knowledge that old Dinneford had other views for his only daughter, but finally allowed his opposition to be overruled. Margery Dinneford and Lady Leconbridge are the greatest of friends."

"As a matter of fact, such an idea had not entered my mind," Zena said. "I was wondering why Lord Leconbridge introduced Jacob Hartmann to his wife."

"Hartmann is a very wealthy banker," I answered, "who has been extremely useful to the Conservative Party. He is the first of his family, so to speak, and is engaged in winning a big social position. Since Lord Leconbridge is a very important member of the Conservative Party, it is quite natural that such an introduction should take place."

"Very interesting," said Quarles; "but are we really required to clear Lady Leconbridge's character? Let us get back to the diamonds. They were kept in the house, I presume?"

"In a safe in the wall in Lady Leconbridge's bedroom."

"The maid knew they were there?"

"Yes."

"It is a point to remember," said Quarles. "We may have to come back to it if we find no other way out of the difficulty. The diamonds were seldom worn, therefore we may assume that any question of suiting the particular dress Lady Leconbridge had on that night is beside the question. For some reason her husband wished her to wear the diamonds on this occasion. Now, if he had reason to suppose that the jewels were not in the safe, his determination is explained, also his annoyance that his son should attempt to thwart him by

agreeing with Lady Leconbridge. However, the diamonds were forthcoming, and at a certain moment the Duchess of Exmoor is able to say that Lady Leconbridge was wearing them. Five minutes later they had disappeared. You make a point of the fact that expert thieves were not at work that night, Wigan. Do you imagine that an amateur could take the jewels from the lady's neck without her knowing it?"

"You must not lay too much stress upon my point about the expert thieves," I said. "Some gang we know nothing about may have been at work. It certainly is possible to remove a necklace without the wearer being aware of the fact, especially if her mind is fully occupied at the time. In a few moments, no doubt, some movement of her body would have caused Lady Leconbridge to discover the loss, but before this happened her husband was beside her."

"With the banker," said Quarles. "It was at the moment that he brought up Hartmann to present him to his wife that he noticed the diamonds were missing. Is it not possible that Hartmann and the diamonds were in some way connected in his mind?"

"Possible, of course, but——"

"Remember, Wigan, Lord Leconbridge did not mention the substitution of the diamonds for the pearls to you—a curious omission. I have a theory that the stones were to be a demonstration, a proof of something, and that Lord Leconbridge's irritation arises from the fact that he has not been able to give this proof."

"Proof of what?"

"Ah! that's the question, Wigan; and we have nothing at present to help us to an answer."

"You don't suppose Hartmann was responsible for the jewels not being there?"

"I have no fact to support such a theory."

"Do you suggest that Lady Leconbridge was as anxious that Hartmann should not see the jewels as her husband was that he should?"

"I have not made such a suggestion. Since Leconbridge did not tell his wife why he wanted her to wear the diamonds, he probably did not prepare her for Hartmann's introduction. It is difficult to see what time she would have to rob herself and conceal the spoil."

"Is Lord Leconbridge a poor man?" Zena asked.

"No," I answered; "although I dare say he has plenty of use for his money."

"Perhaps he wanted to sell the diamonds."

"It is possible," said Quarles. "The stones were a means to some end. Just hand me paper and a pencil, Wigan. My theory grows. Is Lady Leconbridge still in town?"

"I believe she has gone to Grasslands, their seat in Worcestershire."

"Poor lady! The middle of the season, too. Read that, Wigan," and he passed me the paper on which he had been scribbling. I read it aloud:

"If the person who took, or found, the diamond necklace lost on the evening of Monday, the 14th inst., at the Duchess of Exmoor's house, in Park Lane, will return the same to Lord Leconbridge, at 190 Hill Street, the said person will save

himself or herself all further trouble."

"Get Lord Leconbridge's consent to insert that in the papers," said Quarles. "If he presses you for a reason, you can say that an entirely innocent person is likely to be saved from grave suspicion."

"If you think that Lady Leconbridge is——"

"I do not fancy I mention her name there," said Quarles sharply. "We are after the truth; and, Wigan, when the diamonds are returned, tell Lord Leconbridge not to mention the fact to anyone—anyone, mind, until you have seen them. When you go to see them I want to go with you. You must arrange that as best you can."

I had considerable difficulty in getting Lord Leconbridge to agree to the insertion of this notice, and his reluctance certainly gave support to part of the professor's theory. It looked as if he were bent on concealing some point of importance.

However, he gave his consent, and the day following the appearance of the advertisement I heard from him that the necklace had been returned.

I had told him that when I came to see the stones it would be necessary to bring a fellow officer with me, so there was no need to explain Quarles's presence when we went to Hill Street.

The necklace had been packed in wadding in a small, flat, wooden box, had come through the post, unregistered, and had been posted in London. The writing on the brown paper covering was evidently disguised, and might be either a man's or a woman's.

Quarles examined it with a lens, but made no comment.

"You did not expect to regain possession of the necklace so easily, Lord Leconbridge," he said, looking at the stones.

"No."

"A curious robbery, and, since the jewels have been returned, a curious reason for it exists, no doubt. I suppose you cannot give us any helpful suggestion in that direction?"

"No."

"Of course, we have promised not to worry the person responsible any further, but for our own satisfaction——" And then, after a pause, he added: "I suppose it would be a satisfaction to you to get at the exact truth?"

"I don't quite follow the drift of your question," said Leconbridge.

"You have the diamonds; the matter might be allowed to drop if you have any reason to think that, by taking further steps, family affairs might be disclosed which would cause scandal."

For a moment Leconbridge remained silent, his jaw very firmly set.

"I wish to know the exact truth," he said slowly, "but under no circumstances must the person who has returned the diamonds suffer. Our word is pledged."

"That is understood," Quarles said. "Let me ask one or two questions, then—rather impertinent ones, but necessary. These stones have been in your family a long while?"

"Three hundred years."

"They are not often worn, I believe?"

"Not often."

"And on this particular night you expressed a wish that they should be worn?"

"I did."

"Quite natural at such an important reception," said Quarles, as though the idea of there being a definite purpose behind the wish had never entered his head. "Lady Leconbridge offered no objection, I presume?"

"She preferred the pearls, but she changed them at my request."

"You were not in the habit of keeping the jewels at your banker's?"

"No; they were kept in a safe in my wife's room."

"Rather risky," said Quarles. "To an outsider it seems foolish to keep such jewels constantly in the house, especially when they are so seldom worn. Have you ever contemplated selling the diamonds?"

"Never."

"Has Lady Leconbridge at any time suggested that you should?"

"Certainly not!"

"You are prepared to swear that your wife wore this necklace at the Duchess of Exmoor's reception?" said Quarles, holding up the jewels.

"I am."

"It only shows how risky it is to keep such valuables in the house. These stones are not diamonds, but paste."

"What!"

Well might Lord Leconbridge start forward and look at the necklace. I did the same myself.

"Very well executed, but paste," said Quarles.

"Do you suggest——"

"Pardon me, I have made no suggestion; I have merely stated a fact."

"It isn't true; it's absurd!"

"You may prove me right or wrong by showing the stones to an expert. Why not show them to Jacob Hartmann?"

"Hartmann! Why to him?"

"Because I believe he knows more about precious stones than any man in this country."

For the space of a minute Leconbridge and the professor stood looking at each other in silence.

"I did not know that," said Leconbridge.

"I am a man of the world rather than a detective," said Quarles, his manner suddenly changing, "and to some extent I can appreciate your position. May I become a friendly adviser? Lock this necklace up, and let no one know it has been returned. Take my word for it that the stones are imitation, and leave the matter in my hands. I give you my word that I believe, when the full explanation is forthcoming, you will be perfectly satisfied with it. Will you trust me, Lord

Leconbridge?"

"Yes," came the firm answer, after a pause.

"It will be the work of a few hours, I hope," said Quarles, taking up his hat; "and, of course, it is agreed that the person who returned the jewels is not to suffer."

Quarles was thoughtful as we walked away from Hill Street, and well he might be. He had promised a great deal, and how he was going to fulfil that promise was beyond my comprehension.

"You expected to surprise Lord Leconbridge into an admission and were disappointed?" I said.

"On the contrary, he told me rather more than I expected," was the answer. "Evidently he had a purpose in wanting his wife to wear the diamonds. It is fairly clear, I think, that he did not believe she had parted with the necklace, therefore his purpose had to do with some one who would be at the reception that night. Jacob Hartmann seems to fit that part. It is wonderful, Wigan, what a lot of trouble is caused when a person tells only half the truth."

"I can understand Lord Leconbridge's reticence," I said.

"Yes. As a fact, I wasn't thinking of Lord Leconbridge just at the moment. My present difficulty is to decide which road to take. One is easy, the other difficult. Let us get into this taxi. How true it is that the longest way round is often the shortest road home."

He told the man to drive to Old Broad Street.

"A theory may lead to disaster, professor," I said.

"Ah! but we are going into the city to look for facts. I have noticed, Wigan, that lately you have become strangely susceptible to beauty."

I wondered if he had guessed that I was in love with Zena.

"If you refer to Lady Leconbridge——"

"I don't. I speak in the abstract. Still, there exists a certain amount of evidence against her, and your refusal to admit it has warped your judgment in this case, I fancy. Do you know Jacob Hartmann?"

"No."

"A very pleasant man, I am told. We are going to see him, so shall be able to judge for ourselves. You must question; I am merely your assistant. Your line is this: You have got Lord and Lady Leconbridge's story, and you are not quite satisfied. You recognize that the affair is a delicate one, but you are not going to wink at the compounding of a felony to hush up a family scandal."

All the way to the city Quarles continued to coach me, giving me certain points and questions which I was to lead up to gradually. I understood why he had warned me against susceptibility to beauty, for the whole trend of these questions was toward damning Lady Leconbridge.

Mr. Hartmann received us in his private room, and, although reluctant to talk about an affair which was no business of his, was willing to give any help in his power. I repeated the story as Lord Leconbridge had first told it to me, just the bare facts, and I dwelt upon the delicacy of the affair.

"You did not actually see the necklace, I suppose?"

"No; and in the excitement I was not presented to Lady Leconbridge," Hartmann answered.

"Was she very much agitated?" I asked.

"She was curiously calm."

"I believe you know something about precious stones, Mr. Hartmann?"

"Gems are a hobby of mine," he said with a smile.

"I want your opinion. Do you think paste might deceive an expert?"

"At a casual glance—yes, if it were good paste."

"For instance," I said, "if Lady Leconbridge had been wearing the necklace when you approached her would you have known had it been paste?"

"I should," he answered, with a satisfied smile.

"But yours would have been only a casual glance. A man is more likely to be interested in a woman's beauty than in the jewels she is wearing. Besides, you would not expect Lady Leconbridge to be wearing paste."

"I should have known," he said.

"You say Lady Leconbridge was not agitated by her loss?"

"I said she was curiously calm," he answered. "She was hiding her true feelings, perhaps. At the moment the actress may have predominated. You know, of course, that Lady Leconbridge was an actress before her marriage?"

"Helen Farrow—yes. Wasn't there some gossip about her at the time of her marriage?"

"There was."

"No truth in it, I suppose?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Evidently you think there was."

"So much smoke must have had some fire behind it, I am afraid," said the banker. "You have hinted at the delicacy of this affair, so you must ask me no more questions in that direction."

"Her past could hardly have any bearing on the loss of the diamonds," I said.

"I should have thought it might have," said Hartmann, "but then I am not a detective."

Quarles shifted his position a little. From the moment he had sat down he had been absorbed in the pattern of the carpet, apparently.

"You might be right, I think," I said. "One thing is certain, an ordinary thief would have great difficulty in dealing with the stones."

"I suppose so."

"He could only pass them to some one who could afford to bide his time, receiving small payment for the risk he had run?"

"True."

"And it would be extremely awkward for the person in whose possession the stones were found. That is the detective's point of view."

"Such a person might be able to prove that he was a legitimate possessor."

"I was thinking of the Slade case," I answered. "Messrs. Bartrams, the

pawnbrokers, you know, came very badly out of that. They looked uncommonly like receivers of property which they knew had been stolen."

"Now I am out of my depth," said the banker, rising to bring the interview to an end.

"Just one question," said Quarles, looking up suddenly. "Is the necklace in one of your safes in the bank here?"

"Here! It is hardly a joking matter."

"It is not a joke, but curiosity," said Quarles. "I thought you would keep the jewels at Messrs. Bartrams and not here at the bank. It is rather awkward for you, Mr. Hartmann."

"What do you mean?"

"I am wondering how you will explain your possession of Lady Leconbridge's stolen diamond necklace."

Hartmann stretched out his hand to the bell on his table.

"Ring if you want it to be known that Jacob Hartmann, the well-known and much respected banker, is also Bartrams, who have a very bad name, I can assure you."

"So you are here to trick me?" said Hartmann, thrusting his hands into his pockets as though to prevent himself touching the bell.

"No; to warn you," Quarles answered. "I have not collected all the details yet, but I think you know more of Miss Farrow than you have admitted, and are inclined to be revengeful. You must not use the weapon which chance has put into your hands."

"Must not?"

"It would be folly. The jewels will be applied for in due course, and there the matter must end. A detrimental word concerning Lady Leconbridge, and your position as sole owner of Bartrams would become awkward, while your chance of getting a footing in the society you are striving so hard to enter would be gone. Unfortunately for you, I know too much. I am inclined to be generous."

"A poor argument," laughed Hartmann. "The interview is over."

"Generosity is at a discount," said Quarles. "By the first post to-morrow Lord Leconbridge must receive from you an ample apology. You must state emphatically that there is not a shadow of truth in the hints you have dropped lately concerning his wife. You must also confess that three years ago you were instrumental in spreading utterly false reports about Helen Farrow. You may excuse yourself as best pleases you."

"I shall send no apology."

"By the first post, please," said Quarles, "or by noon Scotland Yard will be busy with the career of Mr. Jacob Hartmann. Good day to you."

It was not until we were in the empty room at Chelsea, Zena with us, that the professor would discuss the case.

"The difficult way was the right one, Wigan," he said. "You are convinced, I presume, that Hartmann has the diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Let me deal with the banker's part in the story first—some theory in the solution, but with facts to support it. Since Leconbridge is an important member of the Conservative Party, and Hartmann has for some time supported the party, I asked myself why Hartmann had not met Lady Leconbridge before. Lord Leconbridge was practically bound to extend him hospitality; that he had not done so, in the only way serviceable to the banker, pointed to the probability that Lady Leconbridge would not know him. Why? Had he pestered her in her theater days and, because she scorned him, had he been responsible for the gossip three years ago? It was evident, I argued, that there was some connection, in Lord Leconbridge's mind, between Hartmann and the diamonds. The banker had done or said something to make Leconbridge suspicious; had suggested possibly, among other things, that his wife could not produce the diamonds were she asked to do so. The real necklace had come into his hands, and he meant to take his revenge."

"But how did he get the jewels?" asked Zena.

"Let me clear up the banker first," said Quarles. "To-day, Wigan, he gave himself away when he said he would know if Lady Leconbridge were wearing paste. Of course he would know, because he had the real stones. No doubt he would have pronounced them paste before the assembled guests—a disclosure which might

have proved disastrous to Lady Leconbridge. Whether Hartmann knows the true story of the necklace or not, I cannot say."

"What is the true story?" asked Zena.

"We may conjecture fairly confidently up to a certain point," said the professor. "As Wigan told us the other day, Mr. Dinneford objected to his daughter's engagement to Rupert Lester. Dinneford is a wealthy man, fond of his money; Lester was a spendthrift, and in debt. Lord Leconbridge came to the rescue and paid his debts, after a severe interview with his son, no doubt. I will hazard a guess that the son did not tell his father everything—sons, in these circumstances, seldom do. The creditor left unpaid, some hireling of Hartmann's it may be, began to press the young man—may have suggested, even, how easily he could raise money on the diamonds, which were so seldom worn."

"Do you mean that Lady Leconbridge helped him?" asked Zena.

"It may be," said Quarles. "Knowing how enraged her husband would be with his son, she may have lent Lester the diamonds to pawn. The fact that she appealed to him to support her in her choice of the pearls lends weight to this view, but the housemaid's story of hearing an angry woman's voice in the corridor leads me to think otherwise. I fancy Lester must have heard his father speak to Hartmann at the reception, and gathered that the diamonds were to be a proof of something to the banker. Knowing Hartmann's knowledge of stones, he went to Lady Leconbridge, took her into the corridor, where she learnt for the first time that he had taken the real jewels, and that she was wearing the imitation he had put in their place. She was angry, refused to have anything to do with the deception, and then, partly to help him, but chiefly to thwart her enemy, Hartmann, she consented to lose the diamonds. Lester took the necklace, and, to give the idea that a robbery had taken place, and the thief escaped, broke the window of the small room. When he saw the advertisement he returned the necklace, hoping the mystery would come to an end so far as the outer world was concerned; and at the present time, I imagine, he is either trying to raise money enough to redeem the jewels, or is getting up his courage to confess to his father. He has probably promised Lady Leconbridge that he will do one or the other before she returns from Grasslands."

What Rupert Lester's confession meant to his father no one will ever know probably. Practically, in every detail, he confirmed the professor's theory, and possibly Quarles and I saw Lord Leconbridge nearer the breaking point than

anyone else.

Leconbridge showed us Hartmann's letter of apology.

"The snake's fangs are drawn," said Quarles. "Now you can let it be known through the press that the necklace lost at the Duchess of Exmoor's has been returned. It is the exact truth. The real diamonds you may redeem as soon as you like, and I think this letter insures that no lies will be told about your wife in future."

"But my son is——"

"He is your son, Lord Leconbridge, and our word is pledged not to make the person who returned the necklace suffer."

Leconbridge held out his hand.

"May I give one other word of advice?" said Quarles. "This must have been a terrible ordeal to Lady Leconbridge. If I were you I should go to Grasslands to-day."

And the professor and I went out of the room, closing the door gently behind us.

CHAPTER XI
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DR. SMITH

Zena had been away visiting friends and on the very day of her return I was obliged to leave London, much to my annoyance. The case came into my hands only because the detective who would have done the work in the ordinary way was ill. Had he been well, little might have been heard of the affair; but through me it came under the notice of Christopher Quarles, and it was he who suggested that there was a mystery. Anyone who cares to turn up the files of the newspapers of that date will find that the police methods, and some commercial methods, too, came in for rather drastic criticism.

Dr. Richmond Smith had a house on the outskirts of Riversmouth, where he looked after three or four weak-minded patients. One afternoon in late September he went out, saying he would not be long. His wife was able to fix the time at half-past four. By dinner time he had not returned and she became alarmed. He was a man of methodical, even eccentric, habits; he seldom went outside his own grounds—the fact had caused people in the neighborhood to consider him peculiar—and his wife had no reason to suppose he had gone outside the grounds on this occasion. Dr. Smith's assistant, Patrick Evans, who was a male attendant, not a medical man, said he searched the house and grounds, expecting to find that the doctor had been taken suddenly ill; but the doctor was nowhere to be found. Later in the evening Mrs. Smith communicated with the police.

This man Evans was an intelligent fellow, and when I took up the case I found him extremely useful. He wasn't too full of his own ideas, and answered my questions definitely. So far as he knew, Dr. Smith had nothing on his mind. He was not the kind of man to commit suicide.

"Having to deal constantly with weak-minded people might have an effect upon him," I suggested.

"It might, of course," Evans answered; "but it hasn't had any effect upon me, and, in a way, I should say the doctor was a more phlegmatic person than I am. Nothing moved him very much."

"Had he enemies?"

"I have no reason to think so."

"No money worries?"

"He never said anything to suggest such a thing. Had there been any lack of money, I should have expected to see a certain pinching process in the house."

There was no sign of this. The arrangements for the patients were on the side of luxury, and there was ample evidence of the kindest and most considerate treatment. I judged that Mrs. Smith was a capable manager. When I first saw her she had got over her excitement, and was able to talk of her husband quite calmly. She admitted that he was eccentric, and she believed an eccentric action had cost him his life. She had some reason for this belief.

Dr. Smith had a small boat of five or six tons, old and shabby, but perfectly seaworthy. This he kept moored in one of the small coves to the east of Riversmouth. This boat had gone.

I examined these coves carefully. They were protected by a spur of rock which ran out to sea. Many of them were only caves eaten out of the cliffs, the depth of water in them varying considerably. At low tide some of them were almost dry, while others, even at the greatest ebb, still had deep water in them. They were great holes, in fact, which the sea constantly replenished. That a boat had been moored in one of them was evident, and there was some doubt at first whether it had not been beached for the winter, as had been done in previous years; but no one knew anything about it, and the boat was not to be found.

Until quite the end of September the weather had been perfect; there was no reason why the boat should not have been used with safety and pleasure, and on the night of Dr. Smith's disappearance the sea was perfectly calm. As a matter of fact, however, the doctor was never known to use the boat. The Riversmouth people declared that they only knew Smith by the occasional glimpse they had of him in his garden when they passed; that they never met him either in the town or on the way to the coves; and, indeed, the only person who had any knowledge of him at all was Mr. Ferguson, a solicitor. On two occasions he had seen him at

his house on small matters of business, and once he had met him in London to introduce him to an insurance company. Whether a policy had been taken out or not he did not know, as Dr. Smith had arranged to take the commission himself if he completed the policy.

Evans was not prepared to say that the doctor never used the boat. It was true that he seldom went beyond the garden, but this was not to say that he never did. People might have met him and not recognized who he was. Once or twice during the summer Evans had been out in the boat himself, at the doctor's suggestion. It was a good little boat, and quite easy for one person to manage.

Mrs. Smith did not believe that her husband ever used the boat, and had never understood why he kept it. He had bought it for practically nothing, and she could only suppose that the fact of making a bargain had appealed to him.

"Was he careless about money matters?" I asked.

"There was always plenty of money," she answered, "but I know very little about his financial affairs. I think he was a little fearful about the future, and some four years ago he talked about insuring his life. Whether he did so or not, I cannot say."

A description of the missing man was circulated in the press; but we could give no portrait; such a thing did not exist. The Riversmouth people considered this publication futile. They were convinced that the missing boat was proof enough that the doctor had disappeared, and, while I searched for additional facts, I was inclined to agree with them.

I was not long without a solid fact to deal with. I have said that it was a calm night when the doctor disappeared, but since then the weather had changed.

A southwesterly gale sent the great breakers foaming all along the shore, until even the waters of the sheltered coves were troubled. Between the east and the west cliffs was a stretch of shingle, and here, early in the morning of the fourth day, some wreckage was cast up by the swirling waters. There was no doubt that it was part of the doctor's boat. A fisherman and Patrick Evans were able to identify it even before a fragment bearing the name *Betty* came ashore.

No body, however, was washed up, nor anything to suggest that the doctor had been on his boat.

Certain inquiries necessitated my going to town next day, and I took the

opportunity of going to Chelsea, not really to see Quarles, but to see Zena. I had no need of his help in the Riversmouth case, and, had he not been so anxious to know what I had been doing during the last few days, I should not have mentioned it.

As it was, I told him the story.

"It's a strange thing, Wigan, but I have had a presentiment for the last forty-eight hours that a particularly difficult mystery was coming to me. Have you any other case in hand or pending?"

"No."

"Then this may be the one."

"I don't think there is much mystery about it," I answered. "I expect the body to come ashore presently."

"How about the insurance?" asked Quarles.

"The policy is in force with the Meteor Insurance Company for fifteen thousand pounds. He has paid the premiums regularly, less commission."

"The premiums have been paid by check, I suppose?"

"Yes. The doctor had an account at the Capital and Provincial here in London. It has never been a large account, but has been open for a long while. The doctor did all his business by letter, and does not appear to have been inside the bank for years."

"If he were in the boat, it is strange his body hasn't been washed up, isn't it?" asked Zena.

"I think a body might take longer to come ashore than wreckage," I answered. "Or it may have been caught in another current, and will be thrown up farther along the coast."

Quarles nodded.

"Of course, there is the possibility that Dr. Smith is not dead," I went on, "that he has disappeared intentionally, hoping to defraud the insurance company. Were you thinking of that, Zena?"

"No; I was only wondering why the body had not been found."

"And you, professor?"

"Oh, I haven't developed a theory yet! If no body is found, I presume the company will withhold the payment of the money for a time."

"Naturally, I didn't discuss that question with them," I returned. "I imagine no very thorough search of the doctor's papers has yet been made, for Mrs. Smith knew nothing definite about the insurance, and, indeed, very little about her husband's affairs."

"Well, we must wait for the body," said the professor.

"You have the same opinion as I have, and expect it to come ashore."

"I have formed no opinion," he answered, "but, judging from your account, I should think the body will be found presently. When it is I should like to see it, Wigan. The case doesn't really interest me yet, but my presentiment does. When I feel my particular corner of the web of existence trembling I—but it is too late to get on my hobby to-night. I'm tired, and I dare say you and Zena want to have a talk. You're a lucky dog, Wigan, a very lucky dog."

He chuckled as he left the room, and Zena and I looked at each other in astonishment. It was the first intimation he had given that he knew our secret. He declared later that he had known it exactly as long as we had, which was probably an exaggeration; but at any rate it made things easier for us.

I returned to Riversmouth next day, and two days later the doctor's body was found. As I had suggested to Zena, it had evidently been caught by another current, and was discovered among the rocks in a little bay about half a mile east of the coves. A lad saw it from the top of the cliffs and gave information.

I telegraphed to Quarles at once, and he arrived in Riversmouth that afternoon.

Mrs. Smith, Patrick Evans, and the solicitor, Ferguson, had already identified the body when Quarles and I went to see it at the mortuary.

The professor spent a long time examining the dead man and his clothing. He was particularly interested in the collar of his coat, and in certain rents in the coat and trousers. I must confess he seemed to be looking for a mystery where none existed. A silver watch found in the dead man's pocket had the initials "R. S." on it, and a signet ring on his finger also bore these initials. There could

be no doubt of the man's identity.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"Nothing——"

"That presentiment is misleading you."

"Maybe," said Quarles.

"There is no doubt that he was drowned, and there is not the slightest indication that he was the victim of foul play before he was in the water."

"I am inclined to agree with you."

"The only question is whether his death was the result of an accident or whether he committed suicide."

"I shouldn't like to express an opinion," Quarles returned shortly. "By the way, Wigan, who found the body?"

"A boy belonging to the town."

"I suppose we can get hold of him?"

"He is ready to talk to anyone about it."

"We'll go and find him," said Quarles. "I'm staying in Riversmouth to-night; no, not with you. I don't want to be identified with the case in any way. When is the inquest?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"Then to-morrow afternoon you might show me these coves."

"Certainly."

"Now for this boy."

The wind was blowing half a gale as we went through the town.

"It has been blowing like this ever since the night the doctor disappeared, hasn't it?" asked Quarles.

"Worse than this part of the time. What's the theory, professor?"

"I'm wondering whether there is not some way of clearing up the accident or suicide question."

We found the lad at his home, and Quarles listened attentively to his graphic description of seeing the water playing with the corpse as it lay caught on the rocks.

"Had you gone that way on purpose to see if it had come ashore?" asked Quarles.

"I had and I hadn't. You don't know old Clay, I suppose. He's a fisherman who thinks he knows everything, and he said it was impossible for a body to be washed up on that side of the east cliff."

"And you knew better?"

"It wasn't that. There were several people standing round at the time, and they laughed at old Clay for being so positive. He was wrong, you see."

"Evidently. Do you remember who was there at the time?"

"I didn't notice. I was listening to what Clay was saying. I don't suppose he'll talk so much after this."

Quarles made no comment on what the lad had said as we walked to the end of the street together, and we parted after arranging our visit to the coves on the following afternoon.

Next day about noon I walked up to see Mrs. Smith. The assistant, Evans, came to me, bringing me her apologies. Unless it were anything of the gravest importance, would I mind coming again?

"The fact is, she has been upset this morning," Evans went on. "A gentleman unexpectedly turned up to see the doctor about a new patient coming here. He had not heard of the doctor's tragic death, and Mrs. Smith had to explain."

"Very trying for her," I said.

"And, to make it worse, the man was rather stupid," said Evans. "He didn't seem to understand the position, nor why the doctor's death should prevent arrangements being made. He appeared to have got it into his head that we were unwilling to let him see how the house was conducted. I was called in to the rescue, and I took him over the house. If the weak-minded patient is a relative, I

should think the disease is hereditary."

"Why?"

"He could not understand any explanation," said Evans. "He even selected a bedroom which happened to be mine, and would go into details why it was exactly the room he desired. Of course, the house is to be given up. I believe the relations of the three patients we have already have been written to."

"I wanted to ask Mrs. Smith if the doctor's papers throw any light upon his death."

"They do not. Mr. Ferguson was here nearly the whole of yesterday, and he told me there was nothing to suggest that the doctor was in difficulties, or that he contemplated taking his own life. His will was found. He leaves everything to his wife, but Mr. Ferguson said there was not much to leave beyond his life policy."

"That represents a large sum," I said.

"Does it? I'm glad for Mrs. Smith's sake. Mr. Ferguson didn't mention the amount. I wish it had been large enough for the doctor to think of leaving me a bit. At my age a man doesn't easily get another job."

In the afternoon I met Quarles, and we went to look at the coves. Even at high water it was possible to walk round them by means of a fairly wide ledge of rock. I showed him where the boat had been kept, pointed out an oar and a boathook lying on the ledge, but he took only a perfunctory interest, and spent much more time examining the adjoining coves and the projecting spur of rock which ran out to sea. He scrambled out to the end of this spur and seemed interested in the waves breaking upon it; then he turned and surveyed the land, taking a pair of glasses from his pocket to examine the general contour of the coast more clearly.

"It would be under that point yonder where the body was found," he said.

"Yes."

"It is possible to walk round the rocks to that point, I suppose?"

"Yes, but——"

"Oh, I am not going to do it," he answered. "I was only wondering why old Clay

was so certain that a body could not be washed ashore there. Has anything further happened since we parted yesterday?"

I told him about Mrs. Smith's visitor.

"You didn't catch sight of him, Wigan?"

"He had gone before I arrived."

"I wonder if he knew anything about the doctor."

"Are you not yet satisfied that this is not the difficult case about which you had a presentiment?" I asked.

"No," was the sharp answer as he replaced the glasses in his pocket. "I'm going back to Chelsea to think about it. Found drowned; that will be the verdict of the inquest to-morrow, but that won't prove anything. Mrs. Smith is going to leave Riversmouth, you say?"

"So Evans told me."

"The moment she moves have her watched," said Quarles. "Put the best man you have on to the job. It is likely to be a long business, and in the meanwhile a hint might be given to the insurance company not to be in too great a hurry to pay over the money."

"Would you have Patrick Evans watched, too?" I asked, a little sarcasm in my tone, perhaps, for any suspicion of Mrs. Smith seemed to me ridiculous.

"No. You can let him go where he likes; he is all right," and he looked at me steadily for a moment.

I knew what was passing through his mind. Quite recently he had become interested in a case which was in my hands. He had opposed my solution of the difficulty with another which contradicted me at every point, and we had almost quarreled about it, when a new fact came to light, proving that he was altogether wrong. Even Christopher Quarles was not infallible. Evidently he had noticed the sarcasm in my voice, and would have me remember how often he had been right.

In the Riversmouth case, I argued, the professor was hampered by circumstances. He had got it into his brain that he was called upon to deal with a difficult problem, and very naturally he saw difficulties where there were none. I

knew from my own experience that for a detective a preconceived idea is deadly. He can only see things from one point of view. I was convinced this was Quarles's position, and the straightforward evidence given at the inquest next day only confirmed this conviction.

If doubt remained in anyone's mind as to the identity of the body, it was settled beyond all question. A large sum of money being involved, the insurance company sent down an official who had seen Dr. Smith when he called about taking out a policy. He recognized the dead man at once. Quarles was not even right as regards the verdict. The doctor's evidence suggested that there were certain signs of a struggle which one would not expect to find in a deliberate suicide, but which were natural if a man tried to save himself from drowning. This, and there being no reason why Dr. Smith should have taken his own life, and the conviction of his wife and his assistant that he was not the kind of man to do such a thing, so impressed the jury that they returned a verdict of accidental death by drowning.

Here would have been an end of the case had not the insurance company raised difficulties and made all sorts of excuses to delay the payment of the money. Criticism was aroused; letters appeared in the papers. The company stated that they were acting on the advice of their solicitors, and then someone suggested that solicitors of such standing as the firm mentioned would hardly persevere in such advice unless the police authorities were behind them. So police methods were criticized by all kinds of people anxious to rush into print, and since I was the immediate cause of the trouble, acting on Christopher Quarles's advice, I grew a little anxious.

Mrs. Smith had come to London and was staying at a boarding house in Bloomsbury, a most injured woman by common consent. From the moment she had left Riversmouth I had had her watched, and nothing had happened. Why had I set a spy upon her movements? Because I had listened to Quarles in that empty room at Chelsea.

Two days after the inquest I went to see the professor. He had read the account in the papers.

"You see it was not 'Found drowned,'" I said.

"I thought it would be," he returned. "A momentary ray of light illumined those twelve good men, and they agreed that it could not be suicide."

"Of course it might have been an accident," I said, "but I don't think the evidence justified the verdict."

"A strange case, Wigan, and very difficult because it seems so easy. There are one or two curious points to begin with. Practically no one in Riversmouth knew Dr. Smith. He seldom went outside his own grounds. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that he was a peculiar man. He bought a boat because it happened to be a bargain, his wife thinks, suggesting that spending his money in this way to no purpose was a hobby with him; yet we hear nothing of any other bargains to support the idea. Until we have evidence to the contrary, then, we may assume that some idea was in his mind when he bought the boat. He didn't forget all about its existence, remember, because twice during the summer he sent his assistant out in it, and the assistant pronounces it a very good boat and easy to manage. Now, what possessed Dr. Smith to go for a sail on that particular day and at that time of the day? He was certainly not an ardent yachtsman."

"Since he was peculiar, it is naturally difficult to account for his actions," I said.

"A possible explanation," Quarles returned.

"He may always have had the idea of suicide at the back of his brain," said Zena. "It may have been in his mind when he bought the boat. If one lives near the sea and contemplates suicide, it would be natural to choose drowning."

"There is much in that argument," said the professor.

"It was in my mind when I said it was curious no body was washed up with the wreckage," said Zena.

"That remark of yours set me thinking," Quarles went on. "I wondered, Wigan, whether the doctor was on board the boat when she capsized, or whatever it was that happened to her. Now my wonder is increased. The waves had battered the boat to pieces, but when the body is found, caught on the rocks, it is comparatively uninjured."

"Doubtless it had been carried farther out to sea," I said.

"But it had to come ashore, and the weather was stormy the whole time. It could hardly have escaped altogether. There was something else to raise doubt. There were rents in the coat, rents which were all much alike, and a curious bulge in the collar of the coat. These things gave me a definite theory. The doctor was not in the boat, nor had he committed suicide."

"Are you suggesting murder?"

"I am."

"At the inquest the doctor distinctly said that there were no marks on the body to suggest he had been the victim of foul play. He was drowned; he was not killed first and put in the water afterward."

"I quite agree with the doctor's evidence," said Quarles, "but he is not a detective. Let me reconstruct what happened. Dr. Smith came to the cove either with a companion or to meet someone. Possibly the doctor had a drink, let us say from a bottle in the boat's locker. I do not press this point, but it would make the work easier. The companion pushed the doctor into the water, and with a boathook—there was one lying on the rocky ledge—he held him under until he drowned. Once the hook was fixed into the collar of the coat it would be comparatively easy. Afterward a piece of rock tied to the body would keep it under water. I suggest this could be done with least danger in the cove next to the one where the boat was kept. It is deeper, darker, and would not be likely to receive so much attention when it became known that the doctor was missing. So the body would be securely hidden.

"Then the boat, as soon as it was dark enough, was towed out to the end of the spur and scuttled. The water is shallow there, and as soon as the wind got up it was battered to pieces and presently the wreckage came ashore. Why shouldn't the body have been left to come ashore too? you may ask. Old Clay is learned in the currents of this part of the coast, and he will tell you there is no certainty what will happen to wreckage. During a southwesterly gale it may be thrown up on the shingle; at any other time it may be carried out to sea.

"At the time of the murder it was quite calm, and it was necessary that the body should be found. The murderer was in no hurry, and at first too many people went round to look at the coves for it to be safe for him to take any steps. But he got his opportunity probably on the night you spent in London when you first mentioned the case to me, you remember. He got up the body from its hiding-place, and with the boathook pulled it partly through the water and partly over the rocks, and fixed it in the place where it was found, the one place where Clay is certain wreckage never comes ashore."

"I think the theory is fanciful, professor."

"I grant that only the brain of a master criminal could conceive such a crime.

There was my difficulty. Where was this master criminal to be found?"

"And what was his motive?" I said. "There is the insurance money, but that comes to the wife. She could not have carried out such a fantastic crime, nor do I believe for a moment that she instigated it."

"On both points I am with you," said Quarles. "Now let us consider another question—the identity of the dead man."

"Surely there is no question about that? The official from the insurance office ____"

"Exactly, Wigan; you hit the weak spot in my theory. You will not deny that under certain conditions—criminal conditions—the wife, the assistant, and even the solicitor, Ferguson, might agree to a wrong identification; the insurance official is outside any such suspicion. He declares the dead man to be Dr. Smith. Now, Wigan, look at that notice," and he handed me a cutting from a six months old newspaper. "You see it is the obituary notice of a Dr. London, who was one of the doctors of the Meteor Insurance Company, and I have ascertained that it was he who medically examined Dr. Smith in connection with the life policy. He passed him as a first-class life. I do not fancy any doctor would have passed as a first-class life such a man as was washed up by the sea. Dr. London's death, therefore, removed a valuable witness."

"I cannot see that there is any question about the identity," I said.

"For a moment let us consider facts," said Quarles. "Mrs. Smith declares that she knows nothing about her husband's affairs, but she does mention a life policy, adding that she does not know whether it is in force or not. Nothing very significant in that; but, curiously enough, the solicitor, Ferguson, volunteers the statement that he introduced Smith to an office, but does not know whether the policy was taken out, because Dr. Smith insisted he should have the benefit of the commission himself. Ferguson is in a small way of business; it is evident that he did not do much work for Dr. Smith, and one wonders why he met him in town and took all this trouble when he was to get nothing out of it. The assistant, Evans, knows nothing about a life policy; in fact, intelligent as he is, he gives little information whatever. Yet there is no doubt that he was a person of some consequence in the household. When the man came to see Dr. Smith, and Mrs. Smith had to explain that her husband was dead, Evans was sent for, and he told you that he had had a trying time with the old gentleman."

"He did."

"I was the old fool," said Quarles.

"You?"

"I wanted to see the house and its inhabitants. Mrs. Smith was upset; she was, in fact, a little afraid of me, Wigan. I was an unexpected element in the affair. Patrick Evans is intelligent—very much so; but he did not give you quite a correct version of what happened. He was not sent for; he came into the room with Mrs. Smith and he did most of the talking."

"Did you make any discovery in the house?"

"Only that Patrick Evans was an important member in it. Now the fact that only these three people had identified the body fitted my theory exactly; but when the insurance official did so, I was puzzled. Still, my belief is this, that the person taken to the insurance company by Ferguson was not the same person who afterward went to Dr. London to be examined."

"The difficulties your theory gets over, professor, are enormous."

"Look at it this way," said Quarles. "Dr. Smith, who was a man of no importance, and had done little in his profession, took a weak-minded patient into his house. Where he lived at the time we do not know. This patient may have had friends who died; possibly he was left on the doctor's hands without adequate payment. We will suppose, further, that this patient had peculiarities—a love of being important, of being somebody, of being flattered, and above all of loving a secret to an abnormal degree. Except to those who knew him well, he appeared a normal individual under ordinary circumstances. We get to facts when we say that Smith had schemes in his head. He contemplated insuring his life for a large sum, and we will assume that he meant to reap the benefit himself. How did he go to work? He took a house at Riversmouth, where he was unknown, and in due course arrived there with his wife, who was privy to his scheme, and his one patient."

"It was not until he had settled in Riversmouth that he had patients," I said. "That fact is established."

"Let me get to my point, Wigan. It was necessary that the doctor should have an assistant, so we get Evans at Riversmouth. The doctor, by flattery, by pandering to his love of secrecy, suggested to his patient that he should call himself Dr.

Smith. So the scheme was floated. It must necessarily be a work of time, during which the doctor must live. He took three other patients, who were well cared for and looked after, chiefly by Evans. Through Ferguson, who I suggest became a partner in the scheme, the insurance was effected. When the time was ripe, Dr. London being dead, this patient, who had come to be known as Dr. Smith by the few people who had caught sight of him, was murdered, drowned, in the way I have suggested, by the doctor. The wife remained to claim the money. So we watch her, and through her we shall presently catch her husband."

"And the assistant?" I asked.

"I grant, Wigan, that the facts supporting my theory are not so strong as I could wish; that is why we cannot act, why we must wait. We have a master criminal to deal with in Mr. Smith, who remains in hiding for a time. What he calls himself now I cannot say, but we know him as Patrick Evans."

We had to wait a long time. Mrs. Smith even had the temerity to commence legal proceedings against the insurance company, and then, probably for the purpose of getting coached upon some difficult point, she had a secret meeting with Evans in a restaurant in Soho. Husband and wife and the solicitor Ferguson were arrested. Mrs. Smith and Ferguson were brought to trial and sentenced as accessories before the fact, but the doctor succeeded in committing suicide in his cell.

CHAPTER XII
THE AFFAIR OF THE STOLEN GOLD

"So you have your wish, Wigan," said the professor, one evening a few weeks later, discussing a sensational case which was almost without parallel in the history of London.

During the winter months a remarkable series of safe robberies had taken place in the metropolis. In each case the safe had been blown open in the most scientific manner, and neither the public nor the police doubted that an exceptionally expert gang was at work; but it was a gang of which Scotland Yard had no knowledge, and a rumor had got about—how, I cannot say—that the thieves were Americans. Moreover, it was so evident that the thieves knew where and when they were likely to obtain the greatest haul that in one or two instances grave suspicions had fallen upon employees of the firms robbed, but there was not sufficient evidence to warrant arrest.

As it happened, none of these cases had come into my hands, and I had told Christopher Quarles that I was disappointed. He suggested that I might fail, as others had done, which was possible, even probable, but somehow I had a lust to try my strength against this gang, and there was a conviction at the back of my mind that I should succeed. Well, I had got my chance, at any rate, and before I had finished my narrative the professor was just as keen as I was.

At some time between the early closing on Saturday afternoon and nine o'clock on Sunday morning the head office of the City, Suburban and Provincial Bank, in Lombard Street, had been robbed of an immense sum in gold and valuables. The full amount of the loss had not yet been ascertained, but it was soon apparent that the first estimate was below the mark. Banks, as is well known, always keep a very large sum in gold upon the premises in case of emergency, and, naturally, extreme precaution is taken for its safety. At the City, Suburban and Provincial Bank this gold reserve, in sealed bags, containing definite sums, was in an inner strong-room. The steel doors of both the outer and inner rooms

had been blown open with an explosive of immense strength but presumably making little noise. Several bags of gold had been taken from the inner safe, and in the outer safe two or three deed boxes belonging to clients had been forced open, and jewels stolen from them.

On Saturday the night porter was a man named Coulsdon, who had been in the service of the bank for many years. It was his duty to visit every part of the premises at intervals during the night, and to register the time of each visit by the telltale clocks provided for the purpose. He was armed with a revolver, and by means of an electric bell in the entrance-hall could communicate, if necessary, with the porter who lived on the premises.

His vigil ended at nine o'clock on the Sunday morning, when two clerks arrived to stay in the bank all Sunday. This was a special duty, especially paid for, and, as a general rule, each pair of clerks had the duty for four Sundays, when they were relieved by another pair. It was the custom for the resident porter to admit the clerks at a side door of the bank, opening into the narrow street turning at right angles to Lombard Street.

Thomas, the resident porter, did this as usual on Sunday, but no Coulsdon made his appearance. On glancing at one of the clocks, it was found that no visit was registered since two o'clock, and it was evident that something was wrong. The clerks, with Thomas, the porter, went at once to the strong-rooms, and found the ruined door and Coulsdon lying, gagged and unconscious, in the outer safe. Urgent messages were at once dispatched to one of the directors and one of the three general managers, who were known to be in town.

"And to-day is Wednesday," said Quarles, with a lift of his eyebrows. "The thieves have a long start. Now for details, Wigan."

"The porter, Coulsdon, did not regain consciousness for some hours," I said. "He can tell us little. To reach the strong-rooms you have to descend half a dozen steps, and as he reached the foot of these he received a blow out of the darkness, whether from a weapon or a fist only he cannot say, but the effect was stunning, and he cannot swear what happened afterward. He thinks something was thrown over his head, but he really remembers nothing from the time he was struck to the time he woke up."

"An old servant of the bank, you say?"

"Yes, but only recently moved to London. He has been porter at the Leamington

branch. There is a disposition to suspect Coulsdon," I went on; "and not without reason, seeing that he is a big, hefty man, who might be expected to give a good account of himself. But there is a curious complication. About a month ago a clerk named Frederick Ewing was summarily dismissed. He had been in the bank some years, had risen in the service, and was trusted. He was in the securities department, and had considerable knowledge of the methods used with regard to the strong-rooms. It was discovered through a sudden and unexpected inspection that certain small sums had been taken from the petty cash of this department. Only Ewing had access to this money, and, as a matter of fact, he confessed. He had only borrowed the money temporarily, he said, and pleaded earnestly that drastic measures should not be resorted to. However, since the integrity of a bank official must be above suspicion, he was dismissed at a moment's notice. He was not prosecuted."

"What has become of him?" asked Quarles.

"I can find no trace of him at all. He had lodgings in Hammersmith. He returned there after his dismissal, remained there until the next day, and then went out, saying he would be away for a couple of nights. He has not returned; nor has a search in his rooms disclosed any clew. He appears to have had no friends and received hardly any letters."

Quarles nodded his head thoughtfully for a few moments.

"How did the thieves get into the bank?" he asked.

"Through a window at the top of the buildings, which gives on to the roof," I answered. "One of the bars to this window was wrenched out, and the roof outside shows that men have stood there to accomplish the work. The bank is not an isolated building. A journey from its roof to the roofs of the adjacent buildings is not difficult, and I am working on the hypothesis that the thieves entered the adjacent block of offices and crossed the roof. There are two facts which seem to support this idea. Quite recently some repairs to the roof of the building became necessary, and two men were engaged upon it for three days. They may have been members of the gang, and it is curious they have left the employment of the firm which had the work in hand. So far I have failed to trace them. Again, an office in this building, occupied by a man named Bowman, calling himself a mortgage broker, has remained closed since Saturday. Bowman has not been there very long, but until now has been regular in his attendance. I am inclined to think he will not be seen there again."

"How much do these bags of gold weigh?" asked Zena thoughtfully.

"They are very heavy," I answered.

"But how was the gold got away?" said Zena.

"I can only surmise as to that," I said with a smile. "The street which runs beside the bank is somewhat dimly lighted, and almost opposite to the private door of the bank there is an archway leading to a small yard and the premises of Thorne & Co., wine merchants. The archway is closed by a gate. The locked gate would present small difficulty to a gang which had carefully prepared their scheme, and very likely a motor car was driven under this archway ready to take the spoil away."

"It is possible, but I should want to find out something more about Frederick Ewing," said Zena.

"I am inclined to think that is a suggestion worth consideration," said Quarles. "This is a case in which one looks for negatives to a series of propositions. We may ask first, whether a gang, however expert, could have carried out such a robbery, knowing when and where to go and what to take, without some help from within. The answer seems to be, no. Was that information obtained merely through somebody's indiscretion? Hardly! Only a few people would be capable of giving the necessary information. Coulsdon, the porter, might give it. Did he? The fact that he was knocked insensible does not exonerate him; that might be part of a prearranged plan. On the whole, however, Ewing appears to be a more likely person. He was dishonest, that we know; he was in a position to give the information; he would be smarting under the disgrace of his dismissal; an offer of a substantial payment would, therefore, be tempting; and, moreover, he is not to be found."

"I think it very probable that information was obtained from Ewing," I said. "But it may have been given without any criminal intention. In my opinion the planning of the robbery must have begun before Ewing's dismissal. Besides, though I have failed to trace Ewing, I do not find anything against him beyond this matter of the petty cash. There are no debts worth mentioning, and no entanglements of any kind apparently."

"So we get no definite answer regarding him," said the professor; "we must, so to speak, put him aside for further consideration. Let us get back to the gang for a moment. That money would require a lot of moving, Wigan. Assuming

Coulsdon to be honest, the door of the strong-room was intact at two o'clock on Sunday morning. The tell-tale clock is a witness to this, and seven hours later the alarm was given. I do not say that a motor car might not have been loaded as you suggest and driven out of the city without attracting the notice of the police, but if you ask me whether it is likely I must decidedly answer in the negative."

"The fact remains that the gold was got away," I answered. "You cannot alter that."

"Our methods sometimes clash, Wigan. You make a theory to fit the facts; I get a theory first, and then look for facts to fit it. I grant yours is the more orthodox method; still, what is considered orthodox has sometimes been shown to be wrong; and as for facts—well, if I choose to think that this gold has not left the city, how can you convince me beyond all dispute that it has? You can't. You do not know. For instance, it might be concealed in this man Bowman's office. Say you are able to prove that it isn't, there are still many other offices in the building where it might be hidden, ready to be got rid of gradually. At this stage of the inquiry, at any rate, we are not prepared to guarantee the honesty of all the firms in the block of buildings adjoining the bank."

"So that is your theory?" I said, somewhat impressed by it, I admit.

"No, it isn't," said Quarles. "I was merely showing how unstable was your central fact. No, my theory is quite different."

"May I hear what it is?"

"I agree with Zena. Continue to hunt for Frederick Ewing. Get a dozen men on to the business, if you like. Instruct them to pick up the most trivial items of information concerning him. Run his companions to earth, find out all about his debts, however small they may be; that's the line along which you are likely to pick up the clew. If you can manage to put another detective on the job with you, I am a candidate for the post. I should like to see the strong-rooms and the window, and to ask a few questions."

My suggestion that Christopher Quarles should be associated with me in the inquiry met with some opposition. The officials of the bank seemed a little nervous of too much publicity. The fact of the robbery, quite apart from the actual loss, had injured the bank considerably. However, all objections were overruled.

When Quarles and I went to the bank, we were requested to walk in and see Mr. Wickstead, who was one of the three general managers, and he very graciously apologized to the professor for the difficulties which had been raised.

"I need not tell you that this is a very serious business for us," he said. "The loss, large as it is, constitutes the least part of the damage. Clients, naturally enough, are anxious about the security of their own property, and already some nervous persons have removed their deed boxes."

"I can quite see the necessity of precaution," said Quarles. "You may rely on my discretion. May I ask whether the full amount of the loss has yet been ascertained?"

"Yes, I think we have now got to the bottom of it."

"The securities—deeds, bonds, and such-like—have they been tampered with?"

"No."

"The gang must have possessed wonderful knowledge," said Quarles.

"Marvelous."

"May I take it, Mr. Wickstead, that there is no suspicion of collusion with officials in the bank?"

"You may. Of course, you are aware that we had to dismiss a clerk recently?"

"Yes, who cannot be found. I understand that he would be in a position to give the necessary information if he chose to do so?"

"That is true. He was in a position of some importance."

"With regard to this gold reserve, how often is it examined?" asked Quarles.

"At intervals, not regular intervals. The unexpected inspection is generally considered the best. We have a staff of inspectors for this purpose."

"My point is this," said Quarles; "might the robbery of this gold extend over a period of time, several weeks, let us say—a bag taken to-day, for instance, replaced by a dummy one, perhaps, and another bag taken in three days' time, and so on?"

Mr. Wickstead smiled.

"This reserve is kept in an inner strong-room. Three keys are necessary to open the door, and these three keys are kept by three different persons. I have one. Three of us have to go together to open that inner room."

"Ewing would never be there alone, then?"

"Certainly not," Wickstead answered. "For my part, I do not believe Frederick Ewing had anything to do with the affair at all. The circumstances of his dismissal naturally make him suspect, but I think that offense was the beginning and end of his dishonesty."

"Yet he has disappeared," said Quarles, "and it looks as if he had taken extreme care to leave no clew behind him."

"He would feel the disgrace keenly, I imagine, and would wish to efface himself," the general manager returned.

"There was no question of prosecuting him, I suppose?"

"One of the directors suggested that course, but it was decided not to do so."

"Could Ewing possibly have heard that a prosecution was contemplated?" asked Quarles. "That would account for his complete disappearance."

"He certainly could not have heard of it. I am sorry for Ewing; indeed, I tried to get the directors to reconsider their decision and give him another chance. It is a terrible thing for a man to have to face poverty and degradation like that. All I achieved was to get laughed at for my sentimentality."

"Then you would still trust Ewing?"

"I would," Mr. Wickstead answered with deliberation.

Quarles and I then went to examine the strong-rooms, which were empty now, the securities having been removed to other rooms.

A constable was on duty in the passage leading to them, and materials lying about showed that the work of fitting new doors was to commence at once. Quarles put on a particularly heavy pair of spectacles and produced a high-power pocket lens as well. He examined the locks and hinges of the ruined doors, and the various bolts which were thrown by the action of the turning keys. He carefully scanned the marks and the ruin which the explosion had made, and also the steel-bound holes into which the bolts fitted when the doors were fastened. Both the inner and the outer strong-rooms were examined with the same close scrutiny, and I pointed out to him the spot where the porter, Coulsdon, had been found, and where the rifled deed boxes had stood.

"Had the boxes been blown open?"

"No; forced open," I answered.

"I am not sure what explosive was used upon the doors, Wigan—gelignite or some similar preparation, I suppose—but it was powerful and peculiar in its action. How about finger-prints?"

"There were none on the doors. Either the explosion destroyed all trace or the

men wore gloves."

"I suppose men of an expert gang would take that precaution?"

"They would be likely to think of everything."

"Yes; but since the gang is entirely unknown at Scotland Yard, that might be considered an unnecessary precaution, eh?"

He turned his attention to the ruined doors of the inner room again, picking out minute pieces of débris from the lock with a pair of tiny forceps, and examining the pieces under the lens.

"I cannot be certain what explosive was used, Wigan, and the light here is bad. I will examine some of this dust at home," and he emptied the contents of the palm of his hand into a small envelope, which he folded up carefully and placed in an inner pocket.

Then he examined the floor of the outer room, and the passage without, picking up several bits of rubbish, but finding nothing of interest.

From the strong-rooms we went to the top of the building and examined the window and the roof. The window was at the end of a passage.

"Where do you suppose the thieves came from to get to this window?" Quarles asked, after he had examined it and the roof outside.

"The window yonder belongs to the adjoining block of offices," I said, pointing across the roofs. "It is quite easy to reach."

We started to go to it, but had only gone a little way when Quarles stopped.

"You may find it easy, Wigan, but my legs are not so young as they were, and climbing a roof is outside their business."

"At any rate, you can see that it is an easy journey," I said.

"Oh, yes, for young legs; and it is not likely this gang is composed of old crooks. By the way, I think they must have got out of this window as well as in at it. Look at this scratch on the sill—a boot heel, I should say, and the position would mean that the man was getting out. It is not certain that the stuff was not carried across the roof, Wigan. I wonder whether Mr. Bowman has returned to his office yet?"

"I have a man watching for him," I answered.

"It's a curious case," said Quarles as we went downstairs. "I suppose you have inquired among the staff whether anyone knew Frederick Ewing intimately, visited him at Hammersmith, knew his private friends, hobbies, and so forth."

"Yes. Nobody appears to have known anything about him outside the office."

"I should like to have a look at the desk he occupied. I suppose that can be managed."

Permission was given us. The man who used it now got up to allow us to examine it, and Quarles again used his lens, going over the desk without and within.

"Was Mr. Ewing rather an untidy person?" he asked, turning to the clerk.

"No, I don't think so. I hardly knew him."

"Kept himself to himself a good deal, eh?"

"Yes; I believe that was the general impression."

"A bit of a dreamer, Wigan, I should say."

And then the professor thanked the clerk, and we left the bank.

"We've got to find Frederick Ewing," said Quarles decidedly. "He is the keystone to the mystery. Without definite knowledge concerning him we are powerless, I fancy. Even if we make an arrest, even if we arrest a gang of men, we could prove nothing. They are not likely to be found carrying any of the missing jewels, and there is precious little evidence to be got out of a sovereign. Months must elapse before the jewels, one or two at a time, filter into the market, and no banknotes or bonds which might further us with a clew have been taken. Ewing must be found."

In this direction I was up against a blank wall. I gave instruction for every shop, every public-house in the neighborhood of Ewing's lodgings, to be visited, and practically there was no result. A tobacconist fancied he recognized a customer from the description given of him, but that was all. Ewing had once belonged to a rowing club at Hammersmith, but had gone in for little serious practice. And the day after Quarles and I had visited the bank I drew another blank. Bowman, the mortgage broker, returned to his office. Not only was it quite certain that

none of the gold was hidden there, but he explained his absence so thoroughly that it was impossible to suppose he had anything to do with the affair.

Two or three days slipped by, days of strenuous work, which seemed absolutely useless, and then I got a wire from Quarles asking me to meet him at Chiswick Station that evening, which I did.

"I must apologize, Wigan," was his greeting. "It's my temperament, I suppose, but I cannot help keeping a line of argument to myself until I find that it really leads somewhere. This was my theory with regard to Ewing. Since he did not make friends, either in the bank or out of it, he was likely to be something of a dreamer. Such men usually are, unless they have some definite hobby to employ them. We heard of no such hobby in Ewing's case, and the fact that his rise in the bank had been rapid suggested a competent and conscientious worker. But he was a dreamer, all the same—a man looking forward to the future, and a man who dreams in this way usually looks forward to some definite point. In the case of a young man—and Ewing is not old—that point may be a woman. So I examined Ewing's desk. He was given to scribbling on it and smearing out the writing. There were a quantity of ink smudges, but some pen marks remained, figures for the most part, and I found a name—Ursula. That rejoiced me; it might have been Mary, and for one Ursula there are—well, a great many Marys in the world. I looked for a second name, dreading to find Smith. I found Ursula Ewing, that was his dream, Wigan; but I also found Ursula Yerbury. If he were in love with Ursula Yerbury, which seemed probable, and she with him, which of course was not certain, then I argued that she must live in easy distance from Hammersmith. If not, he would have constantly received letters from her, and we know that he received very few letters. Also, if they were in love, he might have deceived her regarding his dismissal, or she would keep his secret and shield him. Inquiry for her must therefore be made carefully, and I set Zena to work—a girl looking for a girl friend she had lost sight of. It proved easier than it might have been. We found there was a man named Yerbury living in Fulham; he was the third of the name Zena had tried, and he had a niece, Ursula, living in lodgings here in Chiswick. She is a typist, and should be home by this time in the evening. She is expecting an old school friend—that was the vague message Zena left with her landlady—she will see us."

"I congratulate you, professor; it looks as if you had got on Ewing's track."

"We shall know better in an hour's time," he answered. "No. 10 Old Cedar Lane is the address. Pleasant flavor in some of these Chiswick names."

There was nothing particularly striking about Ursula Yerbury, but her personality grew upon one. The moment we entered her small but comfortable sitting-room it was apparent to me that she was on her guard. She had expected some old school friend, and had been tricked. Quarles came to the point at once. To clear up the mystery of the sensational robbery in the city, he wanted to find Frederick Ewing. Miss Yerbury knew him, of course, and could no doubt supply the information.

"You have had your journey in vain," she answered.

"That is a pity," Quarles said, and in short, terse sentences he told her the history of the robbery, so far as we knew it, speaking of Ewing's dishonesty in a cold, matter-of-fact way, and giving reasons why Ewing should be suspected of helping a gang.

"Now, my dear young lady, I'm an eccentric," he went on. "One petty theft does not make a criminal, and I do not believe Frederick Ewing is a criminal. But do not mistake me; if he cannot be found he will certainly be branded as one."

"I do not know where he is," she answered firmly, though her lips quivered.

"Still, you may know enough to help me to clear his name," said Quarles.

"You mean—but he told me himself."

"Ah, that is what I mean," said Quarles. "You can tell me something. Take my word for it, you will be doing Ewing a service by telling me what you know."

The professor looked exceedingly benevolent, and his tone was persuasive. It was so necessary to obtain information that the means were justified—one cannot be sentimental in detective work—yet I pitied the woman.

"You know that Mr. Ewing was dismissed from the bank—and why?" she said.

Quarles nodded.

"He did not tell me at first. He wrote to me, saying he had been sent out of town on business. I had no suspicion that anything was wrong. Some days later I received a telegram asking me to meet him near Victoria. It was then he told me of his dismissal. He had supposed that he would not be prosecuted, but the bank had, after all, decided to make an example of him. He had gone away to hide himself. A friend was helping him to get out of the country, and——"

"Who was the friend?" asked Quarles.

"Frederick would not say. He had promised not to tell anyone who he was; indeed, he had promised not to hold any communication with anyone. The latter promise he had broken by meeting me. We were—we are engaged. I would not take back my freedom. He will write to me presently, and then I shall join him wherever he is."

"That was before the great robbery of the bank," said Quarles.

"Days before," she answered.

"And you do not know where he is now?"

"No."

I had pitied her, now I could not help admiring her. Of course, the story was a fabrication. She had met Quarles on his own ground, and beaten him. She had seen through his persuasive manner, and in a few words had entirely dissociated her lover from the robbery, and shown the futility of attempting to find him. The professor did not let her see his disappointment.

"Most useful information, Miss Yerbury," he said. "I am sure you will not regret having told me the truth."

He was silent for a little while, as we went back to the station, and then he said suddenly:

"A queer story, Wigan."

"Clever!" I answered.

"Extremely clever. We have a curious rogue to deal with, the motive obscure. There's a very strange mental twist somewhere."

"And we're no nearer a solution of the problem," I said.

"Anyway, we'll visit the bank again to-morrow. Eleven o'clock, Wigan. Until then I want to be alone. Good night!"

We could not see Mr. Wickstead at once when we went to the bank next day, and although the general manager apologized for keeping us waiting, he was evidently very busy, and wanted to be rid of us as quickly as possible.

"I'm afraid you don't make much progress," he said. "My directors are beginning to say that the publicity is worse than the loss."

"We go slowly," I answered; "but for the general safety publicity is necessary in an affair of this kind."

"We will not detain you," said Quarles. "I can see we have come at an inconvenient time. Just one question. Had the locks of the strong-room doors been repaired recently?"

"No. They were in excellent order."

"It has not even been necessary to have new keys made?"

"No."

Quarles rose, and thanked him; then, as he reached the door, he paused.

"Oh, it may interest you to know that we have got on the track of Frederick Ewing," he said.

"Then there has been some progress. I am glad. Still, I am afraid Ewing will not be able to throw much light on this affair. Where is he?"

"Abroad," Quarles answered. "We expect to have definite information this afternoon. It is often easier to find criminals when they go abroad than when they remain hidden in England."

When we were outside the bank Quarles began to chuckle.

"It doesn't do to let these fellows think we are doing nothing, Wigan; and, in a sense, we have got on Ewing's track. We have found the woman. Isn't that always considered the great point?"

"This seems to be one of the exceptions which are supposed to prove the rule," I answered.

"We'll get back to Chelsea. I daresay Zena can give us some lunch."

From that moment until the three of us retired to the empty room after lunch Quarles would not talk about the case, but when we were in the empty room he began at once.

"Zena from the first suggested that we must find Frederick Ewing," said Quarles;

"and her intuition was right. We know—at least I think we may take it as an established fact—that a very expert gang has been at work in London during the past few months, and it was reasonable to assume that this robbery was their work, with the help of someone connected with the bank. Practically speaking, it would have been impossible without inside and absolutely accurate information. A process of elimination left Ewing as the likely person to give this help. We need not go over all the difficulties the gang would have to contend with; they were many, not the least being the successful removal of the spoil; but I asked myself whether this gang was not a sort of obsession with us, whether the robbery might not have been a one-man job. You will remember I questioned the general manager on the possibility of Ewing being alone in the strong-rooms, and whether the gold might not have been removed by degrees. He laughed at the idea, but ridicule never yet made me give up a theory. I looked for something to support my theory, and I found many things. The action of the explosive had been peculiar. The manner of the damage was not quite what one would have expected from gelignite, or some equally powerful preparation. Further, why was Coulsdon found in the outer safe? It is reasonable to suppose that he was rendered insensible before the explosion took place, or he might have heard it. Why, then, should he be dragged into the safe? A gang would not have troubled to do this, but, if the job were a one-man affair, the thief might reasonably want to keep his eye upon the porter in case he should recover consciousness. Now, to come back to the explosion, it seemed to me that so far as the door of the inner strong-room was concerned it had not been locked, at any rate not fully locked, when the explosion took place. Was there any support to this theory to be found? Yes. I will show you presently the débris I picked out of the lock. It contains portions—small, but quite recognizable—of a key, not polished, as would be the case if used constantly, but rough. This suggested that duplicate keys had been made. That key, Wigan, I believe, was in the lock when the explosion took place. It was blown to pieces by the explosion, but the burglar must have discovered his mistake, and gathered up the pieces, for I could discover nothing either on the strong-room floor or in the passage without. I found another support to my theory in the window on the roof. Someone had got out as well as in—got out, Wigan, to hide, and got in again when the moment for action had come."

"But——"

"I haven't finished yet," said Quarles, interrupting me. "Obviously one man couldn't remove all that gold and get it away from the city that night. The robber, with the duplicate keys he had in his possession, could go to that strong-room

when he liked; all he had to do was to take the precaution that he was not seen. A very few visits sufficed, no doubt; but on each occasion he brought away some spoil with him, which he concealed, I imagine, somewhere in the bank, where he could easily get at it. The robbery extended over a period of time, that is my point, and whether dummy bags were substituted for those taken, or a bag was gradually emptied, does not matter."

"But, my dear professor, your ingenious theory overlooks the fact that, if it were true, there would be no use for the final catastrophe—for attacking the porter and blowing up the strong-room."

"Ah! that brings me to the mental attitude of the thief. I think we shall find that an inspection of those strong-rooms was imminent, and the thief was anxious, first, to make a last addition to his store, and, secondly, to suggest the work of a gang, and so minimize all risk to himself. Besides——"

The professor paused. There was a knock at the door, and the servant brought in a telegram. Quarles opened it and read it.

"Besides, one has to consider the mental twist a man may have," he went on. "We shall probably find in this case that at the back of the robbery was an awful dread of the future, of the helplessness and poverty that might come into it, an abnormal morbidness which so constantly drives men to strange actions."

"But how could Ewing manage to conceal himself in the bank, or get into it even? Everybody knew him, everybody probably knew of his dismissal."

"How about the window in the roof?" said Quarles, handing me the telegram, and I read: "Left early this afternoon; returned home."

"That refers to the general manager, Mr. Wickstead," said Quarles. "Probably he does not intend to remain at home, but we may catch him there. I have a man watching him. I thought my statement that we had traced Ewing would frighten him. He is the thief, Wigan. He is also the friend Ewing spoke about to Ursula Yerbury. Don't you see the cleverness? He helped Ewing out of the country, after frightening him by saying that a prosecution had been decided upon; sent him somewhere where he was not likely to hear of the robbery, and tried to throw dust in our eyes by expressing pity for him and a belief in his innocence."

"If you are right, what a villain!" I exclaimed.

"An abnormal dread of the future, Wigan; I think we shall find that is at the

bottom of it, and we shall probably find also that the whole of the spoil is intact. The law, of course, cannot enter into these curious mental attitudes. Come! I think we shall provide a sensation for the world of finance."

The arrest of Mr. Wickstead when he was on the point of bolting, and his subsequent confession, certainly made a sensation; and, as Quarles had surmised, the whole of the money and the jewels were found concealed in Mr. Wickstead's house.

The manner of the robbery was much as Quarles had imagined it, and there is little doubt that Wickstead was in an abnormal mental condition. But he was not mad, and was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment.

It was a sad case altogether, the only bright spot in it being the marriage of Ursula Yerbury to the man she had trusted, in spite of his lapse from the path of rectitude.

CHAPTER XIII
THE WILL OF THE ECCENTRIC MR. FRISBY

I have said that, owing to Quarles's dislike of publicity, I was constantly receiving praise which I did not merit; but in the curious affair of Mr. Frisby's will, although I received substantial benefits, the professor was obliged to put up with the eulogy. The case was never in my hands professionally; indeed, strictly speaking, there was no case for the police to deal with. All I really did was to use my position to clear away difficulties and give Quarles a clear field for his investigations. He declared that he went into the thing for the sake of the reward which was offered, but it was undoubtedly the intricacy of the problem which attracted him.

I will tell Mr. Frisby's history as a connected narrative at once; but, of course, the theory was not complete when Quarles decided to attempt the solution of the difficulty. We got the outline from newspaper paragraphs and comments; but some of the details, such as the tenor of Mr. Frisby's letter to his nephew, were only filled in after we had taken up the case seriously.

James Frisby, a native of Boston, in Lincolnshire, was apparently a very ordinary young man indeed. He was a clerk in the office of a solicitor in the town, named Giles, and in his leisure hours was inclined to consort with the most undesirable companions, and to be a too frequent visitor to the public-house bars. Without his doing anything very outrageous, the position of black sheep of his family was assigned to him, and a too puritanical spirit, perhaps, had judged him to be well on the downward path, when a girl named Edith Turner, the daughter of a small but prosperous farmer at Spilsby, came into his circle. According to all accounts, she was the sort of girl any man might fall in love with; exactly what she saw in James Frisby was not so apparent. However, there was undoubtedly mutual affection; but the girl's family strongly objected to the friendship, and the girl herself was not to be persuaded to act in opposition to her father's wishes. Frisby pleaded, made all sorts of promises for the future, and, when these proved of no avail, he threw up his situation and went to Australia.

There was evidently more in him than people gave him credit for. Some twenty-five years afterward he returned to Boston an exceedingly wealthy man, and an eccentric one. He immediately entered into negotiations to purchase the Towers, a large house some three miles out of Boston on the Spilsby Road. It had stood empty a long time, and he spent an immense amount of money upon alterations and in furnishing it, giving no information to anyone concerning himself or his intentions.

Twenty-five years had brought many changes. The old town nestling, and dozing a little perhaps, under the great church with its high tower, a landmark far across the fen country and out to sea, was much the same; but a new generation of people lived in it. Frisby's friends had gone, were dead or scattered about the world, and he had only one relation living, a nephew, the son of an elder sister. Frisby Morton was in business in London, was married and doing fairly well, and had so lost touch with his native place that he heard nothing about his uncle's return until James Frisby had settled at the Towers.

Five or six years after Frisby had left Boston, Edith Turner had become Edith Oglethorpe, the wife of a farmer. There was nothing to show that she had grieved very much for her first lover, no suggestion that she had not been a happy wife and mother. Both she and her husband were dead when Frisby returned, and their later years had been clouded with misfortune. Bad harvests and ill-luck had eaten up their savings, and they had been able to do very little for their only son. They appear to have had many ambitions for him, all of which remained unfulfilled.

James Frisby found the lad, then between seventeen and eighteen, in a grocer's shop in Wide Bargate, one of the main thoroughfares of the town, and at once proposed to adopt him. It was natural that Frisby should be interested in the son of the woman he had loved; it was natural, too, that the boy should jump at the prospect which opened out to him, but it was curious how quickly these two came to love each other. For Frisby probably there was in the son something of what he had loved in the mother; and the lad, no doubt, saw in the man all those good and lovable qualities which Frisby took no trouble to exhibit to the world.

A tutor came to the Towers; in due course young Oglethorpe went to Cambridge, and came home to be the constant companion of his adopted father. Such a life would have been bad for most young men, but Edward Oglethorpe appeared to be an exception to the rule. He had everybody's good word, not because of his wealthy position, but for his own sake. That he would come into all Frisby's

money no one doubted.

There are few who are not attracted by wealth, and it was only natural that Frisby Morton should take an early opportunity of making himself known to his uncle. He was his only kith and kin; he might reasonably hope to reap some advantage from his wealthy relative. Whether he approached his uncle in too open a manner, or whether James Frisby had something against his sister or brother-in-law, some injury which he had nursed all these years and had not forgiven, was not known. The one thing certain was that Frisby disliked his nephew and took some trouble to make his adopted son dislike him too. Morton persistently paid flying visits to the Towers, getting small welcome, and on one occasion there was a quarrel, entirely of his uncle's making, Morton declared. That there was some truth in this seemed probable, for shortly afterward James Frisby wrote to him. It may be he considered the letter a sort of apology. He said frankly that he did not like him, and that he didn't want to have anything more to do with him.

"It isn't your fault, and it isn't mine. It just happens," he wrote. "Still, I do realize that you are my nephew, I do understand that you have some reason for thinking that you have a claim upon me. That I am a rich man is my attraction for you. I know it; you need not scruple to admit it. My money will all go to my adopted son, Edward Oglethorpe; but, as I have said, you are my nephew, and the enclosed check recognizes the relationship, and pays for it. Please understand that it is all you will ever get."

The ungracious tone of the letter lost some of its sting by reason of the largeness of the check, which was for ten thousand pounds. Morton's credit was none too strong, so it suited his purpose to make no secret of the gift. To one or two persons in Boston he showed Mr. Frisby's letter, which suggested that he realized the finality of the transaction, and seemed content to drop his uncle's acquaintance. Whether he really gave up all hope of further advantage was another matter.

James Frisby's death, which occurred about ten years after his return to England, caused a sensation not only in Lincolnshire, but throughout the country. When he was taken ill it was not thought that anything serious was the matter with him, but a stroke followed, and the doctor pronounced his condition to be grave. Oglethorpe immediately telegraphed to Morton. Apparently he had not troubled either to like or dislike him, and thought it only right that the nephew should know of his uncle's condition. That Morton had received ten thousand pounds he

was aware, but he knew nothing of the letter which accompanied the gift, or he might have hesitated to send for him. Morton came to the Towers and stayed there. His uncle had lost all power of speech, hardly seemed to recognize those about him, yet it was evident that something troubled him. They thought it was the light in the room. They darkened it, and, that having no effect, they increased it, but failed to satisfy the old man, who worked his hands backward and forward as if he were wringing them at the inability of those by his bedside to comprehend him. In this manner James Frisby passed out of life.

The first note of sensation came quickly. No will could be found, and it was soon rumored that no will had been made. Mr. Giles, the chief solicitor in Boston, son of the Giles in whose office Mr. Frisby had started life, had no will in his possession, nor had any other solicitor in the town; and the advertisements which appeared in the London and provincial papers failed to produce any solicitor who had. Diligent search in the house was without result. Not only was there no will, but there was not even a scrap of paper of any kind to indicate what the old man's wishes were. Mr. Giles, with an eye to business in the future, made himself agreeable to Frisby Morton, who, if no will were forthcoming, would come into the property as next of kin. The general opinion was that no will had been made, but a servant at the Towers declared that he and another servant had witnessed their master's signature to some document soon after Edward Oglethorpe had come there to live. The other witness had recently left the Towers, but was easily found in Lincoln. That they had witnessed the signature to a will neither of them could affirm; their master had not said what the document was, but they had supposed it was his will. They both agreed as to what the paper was like. Moreover, the man who had taken another situation in Lincoln gave an item of information which added to the sensation. Some little time after he had witnessed the signature, he chanced to meet Mr. Frisby Morton in Boston, and in the course of conversation had mentioned what he had done. He could not say that Mr. Morton was particularly interested, but he asked several questions about Mr. Frisby and young Mr. Oglethorpe. Gossip in a provincial town, especially when it concerns an affair which everyone is talking about, is apt to become a serious matter. It did in this case. It only required someone to say that Morton had been told of a will for someone else to suggest that he might know where the will was at the present moment. This gossip found its way into Mr. Giles's office, and the solicitor gave immediate advice to his client. Frisby Morton was furious. Rumors of libel actions were in the air, not one but many, and Morton declared that the foul insinuation could only have come from one source, and expressed his conviction that Oglethorpe was

responsible for it. Oglethorpe, in his turn, was indignant at being considered capable of such a thing, and put himself into the hands of Messrs. Lacey, a London firm of solicitors. It was by their advice that a reward of a thousand pounds was offered to anyone who should find the will, or should give such information as would lead to its discovery.

It was the publication of this reward which attracted Quarles's attention.

"A thousand pounds, Wigan," he remarked. "Shall we go for it?"

I laughed; I thought he was joking.

"You are not busy, are you; you could give the time?" he queried.

"It is hardly in my line, is it?"

"Money is in everybody's line," he returned. "A thousand divided by three is three hundred and thirty-three pounds six shillings and eight pence. Zena shall go with us. Let's get Bradshaw."

Two days later we were in Boston, comfortably housed at an old-fashioned hostelry called the Heron. Before leaving London I had got the outline of the case, and a few hours in Boston enabled me to fill in the details of the story as I have set it down here.

We had a small sitting-room at the Heron, as crammed full of furniture as the room in Chelsea was empty.

"Who could really think in a room like this?" said Quarles.

"I don't know whether it's the fault of the room," I answered, "but I have no ideas at all about this affair."

Zena laughed.

"Oh! there are plenty of ideas to be had; the most obvious is that Mr. Frisby never made a will. That would be my verdict but for one fact: we have an eccentric to deal with."

Quarles looked at her fixedly.

"The man who could send ten thousand pounds to his nephew in the way he did would hardly be likely to leave any chance open of his ever getting a penny more," Zena said. "If he hadn't made a will before, I think he would have sat

down and made it the moment after drawing that check."

"The room doesn't affect her, Wigan," said the professor. "There's something in the argument, but I shall have to get a lonely walk before I can see anything clearly. An eccentric; yes, I think that is a point to bear in mind."

Quarles had his walk before breakfast next day, and afterward he and I called upon Mr. Giles. The solicitor was evidently not pleased to see us. Since the reward had been offered by Edward Oglethorpe he looked upon us as antagonists; but as the professor argued, in his most suave manner, the finding of the will, if it existed, must be a satisfaction to everybody, and might save immense trouble in the future. Possibly Mr. Giles did not perceive the cynicism in this argument.

"There is no will," he said with conviction.

"Do you imagine the servants' statement to be a fabrication, then?"

"No, but a man wants his signature witnessed to other documents besides a will. The fact that servants witnessed this document, whatever it was, suggests a careless and haphazard way of doing business, a tendency to leave things to the last moment. I believe Mr. Frisby was that kind of man, and he would be quite likely to put off making his will until it was too late."

"It is possible," said Quarles.

"Probable, sir, almost a certainty. If there is a will I shall be more surprised than I have been at anything in my professional career."

"Naturally, your conviction greatly impresses me," said Quarles.

"Why, sir, his manner on his deathbed confirms my view," the solicitor went on. "He was speechless, practically unconscious, yet undoubtedly troubled about something. He had left his will too late, sir; that was the trouble, depend upon it."

"Your client—I think you act for Mr. Morton—will profit by the omission. I suppose there is no doubt whatever that, if a will were found, he would not be mentioned in it. He had already received his money, I understand."

"I have grave doubts on the subject," Giles answered. "If Mr. Frisby had ever sat down to make a will, I am inclined to think he would have repented of the way

in which he had treated his nephew. Personally, if a will exists, I should not be surprised to find my client residuary legatee."

"Our friend Giles has missed his vocation, Wigan," said Quarles, as he walked back to the Heron, where he had ordered a carriage to drive us over to the Towers; "he should have turned his hand to writing romances instead of writing obscure English in legal documents."

"I have no doubt he will do exceedingly well if no will is found," I answered.

"No doubt. A mean man, Wigan, one who cannot help resenting the success of others. He does not forget that James Frisby was once a clerk in his father's office."

"Still, it seems to me there is a great deal of force in what he says," I remarked.

"It would interest me more to know what he really thinks," Quarles returned.

The Towers, exteriorly, was a barrack of a place, deriving its name from two square excrescences at either end of its long façade. Within it was a treasure house. Furniture, pictures, china, silver, books, all were good. The taste displayed was cosmopolitan, even bizarre. Not in a single room was there any attempt at uniformity, nor any fixed plan of decoration. Jacobean furniture, Georgian, examples of Sheraton, Heppelwhite, and other English worthies in the art, rubbed shoulders with the work of the master makers of Italy and France, and were crowded together with marvelous specimens from the East, from India and Japan. The paintings were of many schools; the china, as a private collection, would be hard to beat; much of the silver was unique, and rare books shared shelf room with the modern productions of the printers' and binders' arts.

"An eccentric, Wigan," said Quarles, glancing rapidly around him. "Zena was right in emphasizing that fact. We must bear it in mind."

Before leaving town I had taken the precaution of seeing Messrs. Lacey, the solicitors, and in consequence Edward Oglethorpe was prepared for our visit and welcomed it. His appearance went to confirm the reports we had heard of him. He was an upstanding, straightforward young Englishman of the best type, one with whom it seemed impossible to associate any kind of meanness.

The professor came to the point at once.

"May I take it, Mr. Oglethorpe, you have no reason to suspect that Frisby Morton

has had anything to do with the disappearance of this will?"

"The idea never suggested itself to me until he accused me of making such a statement, then——"

"Quite naturally a doubt was raised in your mind," said Quarles. "Did it ever occur to you that Mr. Frisby had treated his nephew badly?"

"No; I knew he did not care for him, but I also knew he had given him ten thousand pounds. Only since his death have I known of the letter he sent with that check. I was, therefore, not aware that he intended to leave him out of his will."

"You feel confident there was a will?"

"Mr. Frisby told me I was his heir, and I took it for granted there was a will. I never saw, I do not think he actually told me he had made it. As it is, of course, I naturally have doubts whether it ever was made."

Quarles nodded.

"I cannot explain what my adopted father was to me," Oglethorpe went on, "nor how keenly I feel his death. The question of his wealth never troubled me. I was too happy and contented with him to give a thought to what my future would be without him. You can understand how hateful this business, this quarreling about his money, is to me."

"I can, I can," said Quarles, with ready sympathy, and with a few dexterous questions he set Oglethorpe talking about the dead man. Never surely has a man had his virtues treated more lovingly or his faults so little remembered. To illustrate some reminiscence of his adopted father, Oglethorpe led us from room to room to show us some cabinet or picture. It seemed to me, as I looked round, that there were a thousand places where a will might be securely hidden, and my sympathy went out to this young fellow who stood to lose what there could be no doubt he was intended to possess.

We came presently to the old man's sanctum. Quarles had not asked to see it. He had followed Oglethorpe, content to listen to him, and only asking a short question at intervals. He seemed to grow keener in this room.

"Was he here a great deal?" the professor asked, looking round.

"He did all his business here, and if he wanted to talk to me seriously we came in here. He always put down the check for my college expenses on this table with, 'There, my dear boy, don't spend it foolishly and don't get into debt'—always the same words. I can hear them now. It is a comfort to me to remember that I gave him no anxiety on that score."

"Of course this room has been searched very thoroughly?"

"The whole house has been searched from garret to cellar, but you are at liberty to look where you please."

"It would be superfluous labor, no doubt," Quarles answered. "Tell me, Mr. Oglethorpe, during this search were there any surprises? It seems certain that if a will exists it must be in an altogether unexpected place. Now were things generally found in unexpected places? For example, there is a safe in that corner, I see; did you by any chance find a pair of old slippers securely locked up in it?"

"There was nothing so eccentric as that," said Oglethorpe, "but certainly we did come across unexpected things. Some old pipes were locked in a cabinet in the drawing-room. We found a mass of worthless papers in that safe, while some valuable documents were under some old clothes at the bottom of a drawer in his bedroom. In that chest by the window, which a burglar would find difficult to pick, he had locked some fragments of a worthless china vase, and in this table drawer, which has no lock at all, he kept the few letters he had received from my mother. He looked upon them as one of the greatest treasures he possessed, yet anyone might have opened the drawer and read the letters. Yes, the dear old man was a little eccentric in that way."

"Kept his old clothes, useless papers, broken fragments. He did not like throwing things away."

"That is true."

"I suppose this room is much as he left it," said Quarles, picking up the waste-paper basket and turning over the papers in it.

"Yes; practically nothing has been moved or altered in the whole house. I had everything put back exactly where it was found. You notice that even the paper basket has not been emptied."

"May I open one or two drawers?" asked Quarles.

"You may search wherever you like," said Oglethorpe.

For a few minutes Quarles wandered round the room, opening a drawer here, a cabinet there, and apparently looking at the contents in a casual manner.

"I should like to see the room where Mr. Frisby died, if I may," he said presently.

We went upstairs, and with a slow glance round it, Quarles seemed to take in every item it contained and every corner that was in it. Here, too, he opened several drawers.

"He died in the evening, I understand," said the professor.

"Just before midnight," Oglethorpe returned.

"He was unconscious, wasn't he?"

"He could not speak, but I do not think he was altogether unconscious. I believe he knew me."

"It has been suggested that he appeared to have something on his mind," said Quarles.

"I think it was the light that troubled him, but whether he wanted more or less in the room we could not determine. We tried both without being able to satisfy him."

"Reviewing the circumstances of those last few hours, was there anything which might point to the cause of this trouble?"

"I do not think so," Oglethorpe answered. "He moved his hands continuously, but not in the least as if he were anxious to write. Such an idea did not occur to any of us. It was only afterward that we wondered whether he was troubled about his will."

"Who first started that idea?"

"I think it was Morton, but I am not sure."

"How did Mr. Frisby move his hands?"

"Like this, very slowly and feebly."

Oglethorpe held his hands before him an inch or two apart, the knuckles

uppermost. The left hand he tilted slowly forward and downward; the right upward and backward.

"You are quite sure that those were the exact movements?" said Quarles after watching him closely.

"Quite sure."

"They were the same the whole time? He did not vary them?"

"Not once."

Quarles turned and walked out of the room, and we followed him. He paused to examine a bronze figure standing on a pedestal on the landing.

"Do you intend to begin your search at once?" Oglethorpe asked.

The professor did not answer.

"You can do so when you like," Oglethorpe went on.

"No," said Quarles with a start. He was not really examining the bronze, he was lost in thought. "No, not at once. I must think it out first. To-morrow, perhaps. I cannot say for certain."

It was by no means a hopeful answer, and I wondered if Quarles had already made some discovery which entirely destroyed his theory. His questions and his insistency on certain points told me that he had some theory.

We had kept our carriage waiting.

"I'm going to walk, Wigan," said the professor. "I must be alone. That road looks pretty flat and uninteresting; I shall go that way. It's impossible to think in that room at the Heron. I may be some hours. By the way, you might try and find out if Frisby Morton is in Boston. I might want to see him."

I drove back to the Heron, and in the afternoon I made inquiries about Morton. I found that a rumor had already been circulated in the town that a great detective had come to the Towers, and there was some excitement as to the reason of his visit. Mr. Giles must surely have mentioned our call, I thought. I also heard that Frisby Morton had left for London by the mid-day train, and I wondered if there was any significance in the fact of his departure coinciding with Quarles's arrival.

The professor did not return to the Heron until late. He was tired and hungry, and would neither talk nor listen to me until he had made a square meal.

"I found a splendid spot to think in, Wigan," he said, when the three of us were in our sitting-room. "A disused gravel-pit. I shared it with a frog for a time, but he worried me so I took him by the leg and threw him out. I looked for him afterward with the intention of throwing him in again. I could not find him, but as I was turning away, would you believe it, he hopped in again of his own accord."

I was not in the mood for an Æsop fable, and with some impatience I told him the results of my inquiries that afternoon.

"Gone, has he? Business called him to town, I presume?"

"Perhaps his solicitor wanted him to be out of reach of questions," I suggested.

"Our friend Giles is quite capable of it," Quarles returned. "He has not impressed me; but to return to my frog. There were quite a number of places near that gravel-pit which would have suited him equally well; but no, he would get back to the pit. I cannot say he gave me an idea, but he helped to confirm one. The mind, be it frog's or man's, is certain to be biased by circumstances and environment. If you watched a frog through a period of time, apart from his actions necessary to life and well-being, you would find him doing certain other things, doing them to-day because he did them yesterday. He acquires a habit. Men do the same. The more curious these actions are, the more eccentric the individual becomes. You remember Zena warned us that we had to do with an eccentric in this affair, and therefore was inclined to believe in the existence of a will."

Zena nodded.

"She based her belief on one point. When Mr. Frisby gave his nephew such a large sum of money, disliking him as he did, he would take special care that he should never touch another penny. A strong argument. Besides, there was the testimony of the two servants who had witnessed their master's signature to some document. On the other side was the outstanding fact that no will was forthcoming. Men do not put off making their wills until too late. A man like Mr. Frisby, it might reasonably be argued, when making his will, would go to a solicitor. He had a very large fortune to dispose of; he wished to benefit a person who had no legal claim on him; he was particularly anxious that his nephew

should not get anything more. His early years in a lawyer's office would have shown him something of the pitfalls which await the amateur in legal matters. Further, there was the obvious distress of the dying man which might mean that he had neglected to make a will. On the whole, perhaps, the weight of evidence was against the existence of a will."

"He was eccentric," murmured Zena.

"And more than that—he had made a fortune," said Quarles. "Now, to make money a man usually requires to be business-like; and since he was smart enough to make money, he would probably be smart enough to see that it was disposed of as he wished. Rich and eccentric. In his case these two facts meant much. I came to the conclusion, Wigan, that there was a will. If I was right three possibilities existed. It might have been destroyed, it might have been stolen, or it was concealed in some unexpected place. That Mr. Frisby could destroy it by mistake was hardly worth consideration, but he might destroy it purposely either, as Giles hinted, because he felt he had treated his nephew badly, or because he was dissatisfied with his adopted son. There is nothing to suggest that his feelings toward either of these persons had changed in the least. I think Oglethorpe's conversation to-day bears that out, Wigan."

"Certainly," I answered.

"It might have been stolen. Such a theft could only profit one person—Frisby Morton, and incidentally, of course, Mr. Giles, since he would be able to run up a handsome bill of costs and secure a wealthy client. We may not like Mr. Giles, but I do not think he would do anything illegal. What we hear of Frisby Morton does not tend to prepossess us in his favor. Having worried his uncle a great deal, he was quickly upon the scene when he heard that no will had been found. He knew of the signing of a document from one of the witnesses. There is a possibility that his conversation with the servant might have given him an idea where the document was placed afterward. Further, Mr. Morton was almost suspiciously ready to resent all gossip concerning himself, and at once attributed it to Edward Oglethorpe. At the same time, it must be remembered that he was Mr. Frisby's only living relative, that, in a sense, young Oglethorpe was an interloper, that at least he might expect something substantial from his uncle. He got it, and appears not to have troubled his uncle any more. When Mr. Frisby died, apparently intestate, it was only natural he should come forward; in his peculiar position it was natural he should resent the gossip. Any man would. Oglethorpe was nothing to him. From his point of view he had got more right to

the fortune than Oglethorpe, and if chance was to give him his rights so much the better."

"But he would probably have acted in the same way if he had stolen the will," I said.

"True, but I have not ended my argument," said Quarles. "What opportunity had he for stealing it? He was an unwelcome visitor at the Towers, and does not appear to have stayed there during his uncle's lifetime. An accomplice is possible, but not probable. However, we cannot altogether dismiss Frisby Morton from our calculations, that is why I asked you to find out whether he was in Boston, Wigan."

"And he left when you came, perhaps because you came."

"At the instigation of friend Giles?" asked Quarles.

"Possibly."

"Let us examine the third proposition before we apply for a warrant," said Quarles. "The will may have been hidden. If so, it must be in an unexpected place, all the likely places having been looked into. We must try and look into the mind of an eccentric. For a moment let us take any ordinary man, and you will find that he exhibits certain peculiarities. He is a creature of sequences, and he goes on repeating himself. He will continue to wear the same kind of clothes, even though the fashion changes. He will always put certain things into a certain pocket. He will arrange his papers, not in the best way, but in the way he has always arranged them. He can only write on a certain kind of paper with a particular make of pen. Such habits as these are acquired by quite an ordinary man, and no one thinks much about them. Now take a man not quite so ordinary. He gets a mania for storing up useless odds and ends, dislikes destroying anything, touches every second post he passes in his walks, lives on one meal a day, perhaps, or becomes a vegetarian. We say of this man that he is rather eccentric. In short, we notice him because he exaggerates our own peculiarities. Man repeats himself, that is the point. He does a thing his way, not yours. Now take a really eccentric man—Mr. Frisby. We may speak of specific peculiarities in his case, Wigan. He accumulated useless papers and locked them up. He left valuable papers in an open drawer. Broken fragments he carefully concealed in a chest; letters which he treasured he left where anyone might find them. Even if he did destroy a paper he did not tear it up, he twisted it up. Some men invariably tear paper across and across, others crumple it into a ball. Mr. Frisby

twisted it. You remember my looking into the paper basket. There were no torn pieces in it, nor crumpled; they were all twisted. A small thing, but significant. I looked into several drawers, you remember. In one was a duster, not just thrown in as you would do, but twisted up. In his bedroom an old alpaca coat had been thrown into a drawer, twisted up. Twisting was a habit of his. How it was acquired I cannot say, but I should guess that in Australia the act of twisting or turning something was a necessary part of his day's work. I have known many sailors acquire the habit. This habit, I argued, might help us in our search. The will was not under lock and key, Mr. Frisby did not keep his valuables like that; unless the search was incomplete it was not lying in an unlocked drawer. Was it twisted up somewhere?"

"His hands," I said excitedly, moving my own as I had seen Oglethorpe move his.

"Exactly, Wigan, twisting, and more. You are making the motion correctly, I was careful to ascertain that. It is the action of unscrewing. The will was screwed into something, and the dying man was trying to make them understand that something had to be unscrewed."

"What is that something, dear?" asked Zena.

"They thought it was the light that troubled him," Quarles went on. "We'll go to the Towers to-morrow, Wigan, and I think we shall find some candelabrum, or, more likely, some old silver candlestick which unscrews. If we do not, I think we shall have to get an interview with Frisby Morton somehow. That is why I wanted to know if he were in Boston. You see, there was a riddle to read, and a bare possibility exists that Morton has read it already."

I thought this most unlikely, but the fact that Quarles had conceived the possibility showed how exceedingly careful he was of details. The will, a very short one, leaving everything to Edward Oglethorpe, was found in an old silver candlestick, which stood, as a rule, on a table in Mr. Frisby's dressing-room.

It was a heavy candlestick which unscrewed just below the cup which held the candle, and the will was in the hollow stem.

Christopher Quarles insisted on dividing the reward into three parts. Zena certainly had had a definite conviction about the affair from the first, so perhaps earned her share; but I am very sure I did nothing to deserve mine.

CHAPTER XIV
THE CASE OF THE MURDERED FINANCIER

The division of the thousand-pound reward made the three of us inclined for frivolity and pleasure. I happened to have little to do, so we made several excursions and visited many theaters. Relaxation is good, but one may have too much of it; certainly it was not the best training for the next case I was called upon to investigate.

I remember a man of many convictions once telling me that he rather enjoyed picking oakum, a proof that one may become used to anything. In the course of my career I have become accustomed to ghastly sights, yet when I entered that room in Hampstead a feeling of nausea seized me which had something of fear in it. Without attempting any close observation, I went out and sent a line to Christopher Quarles, asking him to come to me at once.

It was chiefly my desire for companionship in my investigations which made me do so, I think; still, it may be that subconsciously I realized that this was a case for the professor. The force of contrast, too, may have had something to do with my attitude. Two nights ago, the professor, Zena, and I had been to the opera, mainly to see a Hungarian dancer who had recently caused a sensation. She was a very beautiful woman, and her dancing, which was illustrative of abstract ideas, was impressive, if bizarre. Quarles had pointed out a man in a box who seemed literally absorbed in the performance, and said he was a wealthy German named Seligmann, who was financially interested in the opera season.

This morning Seligmann was dead, lying limply in a deep arm-chair in the study of his home in Hampstead. Owing to some misunderstanding I had arrived before the doctor who had been sent for, and, as I have said, the sight nauseated me. Downward, through his neck, a stiletto had been driven, a death-dealing blow delivered from behind, apparently, but besides this his face and throat were torn as though some great bird had attacked him with powerful talons. The description is inadequate, perhaps, but it was too terrible a sight to enlarge upon.

Quarles and the doctor arrived at the same time, and the three of us entered the room together. After looking at the dead man for a few moments, Quarles stood apart while the doctor made his examination, but I noticed that his eyes were particularly alive behind his round goggles.

The doctor was puzzled.

"The stiletto killed him," he said, slowly, looking at me, "but these other wounds —the sudden explosion of some vessel might have caused them, but there are no fragments. It almost looks as if the flesh had been torn by a rake. He has been dead some hours."

"Yesterday was Sunday," I replied, "and this room was not opened."

"That accounts for the time," he said. "The work of a madman, perhaps. Murder, undoubtedly."

When the doctor had gone, after he had superintended the removal of the dead man to a small room off the hall, Quarles moved to the writing-table.

"Glad you sent for me, Wigan. What has the wife to say? He was married, I suppose? There is a feminine note about the house."

"Mrs. Seligmann is away," I answered, "and as yet I have only interviewed the man who found his master. He was inclined to be hysterical. Two women-servants had a day off yesterday, and are not expected back until this morning."

"Dead many hours," said Quarles; "was probably lying here yesterday, and we saw him on Saturday. I don't think he left the house before the fall of the curtain."

"No, I think not."

"He couldn't have got here before midnight, then," said Quarles. "That helps us to the time of the murder. It would be a late hour for a visitor, and I see no card lying about."

"My dear professor, visitors of this sort do not leave their cards."

"Look at this pen on the blotting-pad, Wigan; it might have been just put down— put down, not dropped from paralyzed fingers, nor from a hand raised in self-defense. It was used, probably, to make these meaningless lines and curves upon the pad. A man engaged in a serious conversation might draw them as he talked.

That chair there was pushed back by the doctor, but it was close to the table, just where a visitor would sit to talk to a man seated at the table. Now mark, the dead man is found in an arm-chair removed from the table, yet his cigar was put carefully into the ash tray, half smoked, you see, and the ash not knocked off. Oh, yes, Mr. Seligmann had a visitor of whom he had no fear, and who might reasonably have left a card."

"He would be careful not to leave it lying about after the murder," I said.

"It wasn't a man, I fancy, but a woman. Had it been a man, the glasses on the tray yonder would probably have been used. Besides, if criminals were always as careful as you suggest, there are few detectives who would be able to hunt them down. The very essence of your profession is looking for mistakes."

Quarles turned to examine the French window.

"The window was found closed," I said, "but there is little significance in that. If pulled to from the outside it fastens itself.

"And cannot be opened from the outside, I observe," said Quarles. "How about the garden door, yonder?"

The house was a corner one. There was a small square of garden, and in the high wall was a door, an exit into a side road.

"It was locked," I answered.

"So, unless the retreating person had a key, he would have to climb the wall," the professor remarked. "That would require some agility."

"The person who committed so savage a murder would be likely to have sufficient strength for that," I said.

"Quite so," Quarles returned thoughtfully, crossing to a leather-covered sofa and looking at it carefully.

"Shall we interview the servants?" he said, after a pause.

The man who had found his master that morning was calmer now, and told us a coherent story. Mr. Seligmann had arrived home just before midnight on Saturday. They had expected him earlier in the evening. As he entered the study, he said he was returning to Maidenhead as soon as he had looked through his letters. He had a cottage on the river, where he and Mrs. Seligmann had been for

the past two or three weeks, and the master had paid these flying visits to Hampstead more than once. The man had gone to bed after taking in the tray with the glasses. It was his custom to put two or three glasses on the tray. There was no one with Mr. Seligmann. The study had not been opened on Sunday. When he entered it this morning his master was dead in the chair, and the man had immediately sent for the police. He had also telegraphed to Mrs. Seligmann.

"Was it usual not to open the room when Mr. Seligmann was away?" I asked.

"On Sundays, yes. Other days it would be opened."

"It wasn't necessary for you to sit up until your master had gone?"

"No. He constantly left his motor in the side road and went out through the garden. He had a key of the door."

"Was the electric light on in the hall on Sunday morning?"

"No; but I didn't switch it off on Saturday. I left it because two of the servants were finishing some work in the kitchen—hat trimming. They were having the Sunday off. They ought to be back directly."

"You supposed the motor was waiting in the side road ready to take your master to Maidenhead," said Quarles. "Would it be in charge of a chauffeur?"

"Yes, sir."

"When your master left by the garden was it not thought advisable to see that the study window was securely fastened? I see there are shutters."

"Yes, but I have never seen them closed. The master often sat up late after we had all gone to bed, and he never shut them. I suppose he considered the high garden wall sufficient protection."

"Did anyone come to see your master that night?"

"No."

In this particular the man was wrong. When, a few minutes later, the two women servants returned, one of them—the housemaid—said she had answered a ring at the bell after the man servant had gone to bed. It was a young lady. She gave no name, but said that Mr. Seligmann was expecting her. This was true, for the master had had her shown in at once.

"He told me not to wait. He would show her out himself."

"What was the lady like?" I asked.

"Rather tall and well dressed. She wore a veil, so I could not see her face very clearly."

"Was she alone?" asked Quarles.

"Yes."

"Quite alone?" the professor insisted. "She didn't turn to speak to anyone as she entered the house?"

"No."

"Did you switch off the light in the hall?"

"I may have done. I do not remember."

"So late a visitor surprised you, of course?"

"Only because the master was to be in the house so short a time. He has a great deal to do with professional people, so we often get late visitors—after the theaters are over. The mistress——"

She stopped. There was the soft purring of a motor at the front door, and a moment later the sharp ring of a bell.

"That is the mistress," she said.

The door was opened, and a woman came in swiftly, young, beautiful, and, even in her agitated movements, full of grace.

"Tell me! Tell me!" she said, turning toward Quarles and myself, as if a man's strength were necessary to her just then. Quarles told her with a gentleness which I had not often seen in him.

"I must see him," she said.

We tried to dissuade her, but she insisted, so we went with her. The dead man lay on a sofa, a handkerchief over his face. His wife lifted the covering herself and for a moment stood motionless. Then she swayed and would have fallen had I not caught her. My touch seemed to strengthen her, and, with a low cry, she

rushed out of the room.

From the moment she had entered the house I had been trying to remember where I had seen her before. Perhaps it was some involuntary movement as she left the room which made me remember. She was the famous Hungarian dancer we had seen on Saturday at the opera.

"Did you know she was Seligmann's wife, professor?"

"No," he answered, almost as if his ignorance annoyed him.

"I'm going back to Chelsea. He had a visitor, you see, Wigan, and a woman. There is nothing more to say at present. I dare say you will be able to see Mrs. Seligmann presently; ask her two things: Did she expect her husband to join her at Maidenhead in the small hours of Sunday morning? Does she know of any woman, a singer possibly, who has been worrying her husband to get her an engagement?"

The importance of finding the woman who had visited Seligmann was obvious, but it seemed impossible that a woman could have accomplished so savage a murder. Seligmann was a powerful man and would not prove an easy victim. Evidently the professor did not believe her solely responsible by the precise way in which he had asked the housemaid whether the woman was alone.

In the afternoon I saw Mrs. Seligmann for a few moments. She told me that she and her husband had come to town together on Saturday. He had arranged to go to Hampstead after the opera, not to keep any particular appointment as far as she knew, and she had expected him to come on to Maidenhead afterward. She had gone back there after the opera. People constantly asked him to help them, but she could not conceive who her husband's visitor that night was.

In answer to my question how her husband intended to get to Maidenhead, she said by taxi. He often did so after sending her off in the motor.

When I left her I visited the nearest cab rank, and had confirmation of her statement. A driver told me he had taken Mr. Seligmann to Maidenhead once or twice. Seligmann would stop and tell him if he were on the rank at a certain time there would be a good job for him. He has also been to the house to call for him sometimes. On Saturday he had not seen him, nor could I find any other driver who had. Of course, he might have engaged a taxi elsewhere, but, as it was not his habit to do so, the presumption was that he had not intended to go to

Maidenhead that night.

Quarles had talked about criminals' mistakes, but I did not expect a murderer to be so careless as to hire a cab in the immediate neighborhood. I found, however, that three drivers had been engaged by solitary women that night. The description of the first woman did not correspond with the housemaid's, the second was not late enough to be Seligmann's visitor, but the third seemed worth attention. She had been driven to Chelsea, to a block of flats called River Mansions, and, interviewing the hall-porter later in the afternoon, I found that a Miss Wickham, who shared a flat there with a lady named Ross, had come home early on Sunday morning. She might be a singer, but the man thought she was an actress.

"Is she in now?" I asked.

"No; both ladies went away on Sunday morning. They often go either Saturday or Sunday, and come back some time on Monday. You might find them later in the evening. There's nothing wrong, is there?" he added, as though the respectability of the Mansions was a matter of concern to him.

"Why should you think so?"

"I'm old-fashioned, I suppose, and I expect to hear queer things about theatrical folk; besides, there's a friend of Miss Wickham's been here three times to-day, and he seemed worried at not finding her."

"Oh, you mean Mr. Rowton," I said, and the porter fell into the trap.

"No, I don't know him. This was Mr. Marsh—the Honorable Percival Marsh."

"He's been, has he?" I said, keeping up the deception to allay the man's suspicions. "I must try and see him."

"He lives in Jermyn Street, you know."

"Yes; I shall go there."

But I did not go to Jermyn Street at once; I went to see Quarles.

"I'm perplexed, Wigan," said the professor before I could utter a word. "I've seen a man with a stiletto driven into his neck, yet, as soon as I begin to think of the murderer, something seems to tell me it wasn't murder."

I smiled at his foolishness and told him what I had done.

"What time to-day did this Mr. Marsh first go to River Mansions?" Quarles asked when I had finished.

"The porter didn't say."

"They're not expensive flats, are they?"

"No."

"You've got on the trail cleverly, but you haven't proved it murder yet," he said. "The first question Zena asked me was whether I was certain the stiletto wasn't a hatpin."

"There might be a pair, and so it would be a clew," explained Zena.

"It was too much of a weapon for a hatpin," I said.

"Exactly my answer," said Quarles, "and Zena went and fetched that thing lying on the writing-table. That came from Norway and is a hatpin, though you might not think it."

It was indeed a fearsome looking weapon, and a deadly stroke might be dealt with it.

"I'm perplexed, Wigan," the professor went on. "I'm a man in a wood and can't find my way out. That is literal rather than a figure of speech. In my endeavor to get out and look for a murderer I seem to keep on hurting myself against the trunks and branches of trees, and out of the darkness about me wild animals seem to roar with laughter at my idea of murder. What do you make of it?"

"You have been reading some ancient mythology, dear," said Zena, "and I expect the great god Pan has got on your nerves. Didn't a solemn voice from the Ionian Sea proclaim him to be dead? Perhaps he isn't."

Quarles looked at her and nodded.

"Come out of the wood, professor," I said, "and we'll go and interview Marsh in Jermyn Street."

Knowing him as I did, I had no doubt that he had formed a theory, and, until he had found whether there were any facts to support it, was pleased to play the fool. I was rather angry, but showing annoyance served no useful purpose with him. He was keen enough when we found Percival Marsh at home.

There are scores like Percival Marsh in London; no great harm in them, certainly no great good; chiefly idlers, always spendthrifts, who may end by settling down into decent citizens or may go completely to the devil. It was quite evident he took us for duns when we entered, but there was no mistaking his concern when I told him we had come to talk about Miss Wickham.

"I called upon her this afternoon," I said. "She was not at home. You will not be surprised, since I hear you have been there several times to-day."

"Why did you call upon her?"

"To ask why she went to see Mr. Seligmann, of Hampstead, on Saturday night."

"Did she go there?"

"Your manner tells me that you know she did, and your anxiety about her to-day convinces me that you have seen some account of the Hampstead tragedy."

"I do not know that she went there, but she knew Seligmann. I think that accounts for my anxiety."

"And for some reason you think it within the bounds of possibility that Miss Wickham may have attacked him. I may tell you that I do not believe she is responsible for the murder."

He did not answer.

Quarles, who had been gazing round the room, apparently uninterested in the conversation, turned suddenly.

"Evidently you don't agree with my friend, Mr. Marsh. You are not quite sure that Miss Wickham is innocent. It is a painful subject. May I ask if you are engaged to Miss Wickham?"

"Really, you——"

"I quite understand," said Quarles. "I am man of the world enough to understand the desirability of keeping such things secret. Family reasons. Her position and yours are so different. It would be awkward if such an engagement were to mean the stoppage of supplies. The head of the family has to be thought of. Peers do not always go to the stage for their wives."

"Sir, you overstep the limits of our short acquaintance," said Marsh with some

dignity.

"Let me tell you, sir, that you treat the affair far too cavalierly. It looks as if Mr. Seligmann had been killed by a man rather than by a woman. You couldn't have read of the murder till this afternoon, yet you went to River Mansions this morning."

"What are you attempting to suggest?" Marsh asked, his face pale, either with fear or anger.

"I suggest that you know why Miss Wickham went to Mr. Seligmann and that it was upon some matter which concerned yourself."

"Do you know Seligmann?" Marsh asked.

"I know a great deal about him."

"Then you know that he was a different man, according to his company. You may only have seen the decent side of him, but he was a blood-sucker of the worst description."

"So he had you in his money-lending hands, had he?"

"He had. Morally, I had paid my debt, but a legal quibble kept me in his power, and he refused to give up certain papers of mine."

"Which you had no right to part with, I presume," said Quarles.

"Miss Wickham said she had some influence with Seligmann," Marsh went on, taking no notice of the professor's remark, "and said she would try and get the papers back."

"What price was she to pay for them?"

"Price!"

"You didn't expect Seligmann to give them up for nothing?"

"He wanted her to go on tour, I believe, instead of bringing her out in town, as he had half promised to do."

"It was natural perhaps that your future wife should be willing to make a sacrifice for your sake."

"It was hardly a sacrifice. She is not good enough for the London stage. Besides, I am not engaged to her. Friendship is——"

"I warrant she considers herself engaged to you."

"I cannot help that."

"Of course not," said the professor, "but you were glad enough to get the papers. May I look at the envelope they came in?"

"I destroyed it," Marsh replied to my utter astonishment.

"That is a pity. If Miss Wickham says she did not get those papers, it will be awkward for you. Could you swear the writing on the envelope was hers?"

"They could have come from no one else."

"And you think she murdered Seligmann to get them?"

"I am not to be trapped into admitting anything of the sort."

"As you will, Mr. Marsh. For my part, I expect this affair will open Miss Wickham's eyes to your—your true worth."

And Quarles took up his hat and walked out of the room. I followed him. In the street he took off his glasses and put them in his pocket. They were the same he had worn that morning—a pair he did not often use.

"The Honorable Percival Marsh is a worm," he remarked.

"Now for Miss Wickham," said I.

"There is no necessity to see her," said Quarles. "I dare say it is true what this worm says. She went to offer her talent cheap to Seligmann on condition that he would give her the papers. I can guess what happened. They talked over the bargain, but Seligmann refused to do what she wanted, and was able, probably, to show her that Marsh was a worthless scoundrel. Unless something of this sort had happened she would have written to Marsh to tell him she had been unsuccessful. I have little doubt Seligmann treated her in a fatherly manner, and then let her out through the garden, perhaps because he found the light in the hall was out. He returned to find—I am not sure yet what it was he found in his study, but nothing to alarm him, I am sure. To-morrow we will go to Maidenhead, Wigan, and see what servants are at the cottage."

At noon next day we were in Maidenhead.

There was a yard and coach house somewhat removed from the house, and a chauffeur was cleaning a car. In the corner of the yard lay a large dog of the boar-hound type, but I have never seen one quite like it before.

"Is that dog savage?" Quarles asked.

"He doesn't like strangers, as a rule," said the man, "but he's ill."

"Foreign breed of dog, eh?" said Quarles, entering the yard.

"Came from Russia."

The professor looked puzzled. It was evident that something interfered with his theory.

"Sorry to disturb you," he went on, "but we've come to ask a few questions about the awful circumstances of your master's death."

"You're right, it is awful," said the man. "The mistress will go mad, that's what she'll do. I shouldn't have been surprised if she'd chucked herself out of the car as we came down this morning."

"She has returned to the cottage, then? I suppose it was you who drove her up yesterday?"

"Yes, and on Saturday I drove them both up as far as Colnbrook, and then something went wrong with the car. They had to go on by train."

"How did she arrive home on Sunday morning, then?"

"In a taxi."

"And what did she do on Sunday?"

"Had out the punt and went up to Boulter's, where she would be certain to meet a lot of friends. I dare say you know the mistress is a famous dancer. That kind of people are a bit unconventional."

"Do you happen to know the Honorable Percival Marsh?" asked Quarles.

"Yes. He's been here, but not lately. The mistress lunches with him in town sometimes. She seems to think more of him than I do. There's nothing in it. I've

heard her laugh at him with the master."

"Is that the only dog about the place?" said Quarles.

"Yes. He's a pet; usually goes up to the opera with the mistress. He went on Saturday, and came back like that on Sunday. He snapped at her in a frightened way when she came in here in the morning and got a hiding for it. I was afraid he'd go for her."

Quarles gave a short exclamation underneath his breath, and then he said in rather an agitated way: "Well go in and see Mrs. Seligmann, Wigan." And as we left the yard he went on: "You must make the servant show us in to her mistress without announcing us. We must take Mrs. Seligmann unawares."

The servant proved difficult to persuade, and I had to explain who I was before she yielded. Mrs. Seligmann sprang from the sofa as we entered. She looked wild, almost mad, as the chauffeur had said, but she recognized us and forced herself to welcome us.

"What are you here for?" she said, and I started. There was the suggestion of a snarl in her voice.

"We believe your husband was murdered by Percival Marsh," said Quarles quietly.

"It's a lie!" she shrieked.

"How comes it, then, that he has those papers which were in your husband's possession?"

In a moment she had hurled herself upon the professor, and had snapped at the hand which he threw out to protect himself. Her strength was awful, and all the time we were struggling with her she fought with her nails and teeth, and growled like an infuriated animal. Her clothes were partly torn from her in the struggle, and—but it was too ghastly to enlarge upon. She was an animal in the form of a beautiful woman. The house was quickly roused, and we had to have the chauffeur's help before we could bind her securely. Then I telephoned to Maidenhead for the police.

"I thought a dog had helped, Wigan; that was my theory," said Quarles as we went back to town. "I noted that a dog had trodden on the polished skirting near the study sofa. Miss Wickham might have had a dog, that is why I questioned the

housemaid so closely to make sure she entered the house quite alone. When we were brought in contact with Marsh I suspected Mrs. Seligmann. Those glasses I wear sometimes are curious, acting like opera-glasses, and they enabled me to see a portrait of Mrs. Seligmann standing back on a corner table, and, moreover, that it was signed. Marsh evidently knew her well; was in love with her, perhaps, and she with him. My saying that he had first been to River Mansions in the morning was guesswork, but by his not denying it, the fact was established that the papers must have come into his possession, or why should he have gone there? He must have known that Miss Wickham usually went away on Saturday or Sunday and did not return till late on Monday. I argued that Mrs. Seligmann might have sent them, and that Marsh suspected this, hence his visit to Miss Wickham to make certain. It may be true that he did not know she was going to Seligmann on Saturday night, and if he heard from the porter that she had left town on Saturday afternoon he would know that the papers could not have come from her. He would hear from the porter that she had returned in the small hours of Sunday morning, and when, later in the day, he read of the murder he would not know what to think. It is also possible, Wigan, that Seligmann expected his wife to call for him that night. That their motor had broken down on the way up to town makes it even probable. I went to Maidenhead to see if Mrs. Seligmann had a dog, a savage brute who would attack at her command, savage but small. The great brute in the yard did not fit my theory. God knows I didn't suspect the real truth. Strange that I should have felt that I was in a forest, stranger still that Zena should speak of Pan. I don't explain, Wigan, I can't, but it has happened—a return of the human to wild and awful atavism. She meant to kill, to rid herself of the man who was in her way. The human in her used the stiletto or hatpin, the animal in her used claws. She will be called mad, and so she is in one sense, but not in another; nor was it murder in the true sense of the word. The wild wolf does not murder; he kills because he must. Even the dog recognized an enemy of whom he was afraid. The beast was not ill, but cowed, and snapped at her as you heard the chauffeur say. Had she had her way with me to-day, I should have looked like poor Seligmann."

Arriving in town I found that Miss Wickham had communicated with the police and had given an account of her visit to Hampstead, which closely corresponded with Quarles's idea. She had gone at that hour because she was anxious on Marsh's account, and it was the only time Seligmann could see her unless she waited another week. He was very kind, and had told her that Marsh was a scoundrel. He was attempting to make love to his wife, he declared, who laughed at him, and was quite in agreement with her husband when he said he would

presently punish him by using the papers he held. He was expecting his wife to call for him that night in a taxi. She came, and killed him.

I am thankful to say that a fortnight after her arrest Mrs. Seligmann died.

CHAPTER XV
THE STRANGE AFFAIR OF THE FLORENTINE CHEST

Only the other day, in a turning off Finsbury Pavement, there was demolished one of those anachronisms which used to be met with more frequently in London, an old house sandwiched in between immense blocks of buildings, a relic of the past holding its own against the commercial necessities and rush of modern civilization. It was connected with a very strange case Quarles and I had to deal with not long after the Seligmann affair.

The house looked absurdly small in the midst of its surroundings, but had once been a desirable residence, probably standing in its own gardens. Now it was almost flush with the street, dingy to look at, yet substantial. The door, set back in a porch, had two windows on either side of it, and there were four windows in the story above it. A brass plate on the door had engraved upon it "Mr. Portman," and it would appear that the bare fact of such a gentleman's existence was considered sufficient information to give to the world, since there was nothing to show what was his calling in life, nor what hours he was prepared to transact business.

As a matter of fact, he not only did his business in the old house, but lived there.

The room on the right of the hall was the living room. On the left was a small apartment, with windows of frosted glass, which was occupied during certain hours of the day by his only clerk, a cadaverous and unintellectual looking youth, whose chief work in life seemed to be the cutting of his initials into various parts of the cheap furniture which the room contained. Behind this office, but not connected with it, was Mr. Portman's business room, to which no one penetrated unless conducted thither by the cadaverous youth. Behind the living room, down a passage, was the kitchen, where Mrs. Eccles, the housekeeper, passed her days. A girl occasionally came in to help her, otherwise she was solely responsible for her master's comfort.

One November afternoon Mr. Portman returned to his house shortly after four o'clock. He stood in the doorway of the small room for a few moments, giving instructions to his clerk, and then went to his own room, closing the door after him. A little later Mrs. Eccles took him some tea on a tray, which she did every afternoon when he was at home. He talked to her for some minutes about a friend who was coming to dinner with him on the following evening, giving her such particular orders that he evidently wished to entertain this friend particularly well. Soon after five Mrs. Eccles returned to fetch the tray. The door was locked then, and Mr. Portman called out to her that he was busy, but was going out shortly, when she could have the tray.

It was nearly six when she went to the room again. Mr. Portman had gone out, but evidently did not expect to be long, as he had left the gas burning, only turning it low. She had not heard him go, but the clerk said Mr. Portman had come out of his room at a quarter to six, had paused in the passage outside to say, "I shall not be long, but you needn't wait, good night," and had then gone out, closing the front door quietly behind him.

He did not return that night. For five days Mrs. Eccles waited, and then, growing alarmed, gave information to the police.

These were the bare facts of the case when it came into my hands, but I was told that my investigations might possibly throw some light on two or three cases which had puzzled the authorities in recent years.

Mr. Portman was a money-lender, and had so long called himself Portman for business purposes that possibly he had almost forgotten his real name himself. Since for years he had transacted his business unmolested, it was probable that the evil reports which had been circulated concerning him from time to time were grossly exaggerated; but the fact remained that the police authorities had taken considerable trouble to collect items concerning Portman's career, and had kept an eye upon him. Complaints about him had reached them, but those who borrow money are easily critical of those who lend, and there had never been sufficient warrant for taking any action. If, as happened at intervals, Portman had to appear in the witness-box, he came through the ordeal fairly well. He might show that he was bent on getting his pound of flesh, but he was always careful to have the law on his side. He was legally honest—that was his attitude; he could not afford to be generous when a large percentage of his clients would certainly cheat him if they had the chance.

Portman's business room at the back of the house was large, but dark and depressing, its two windows, which were heavily barred, looking on to the blank wall of a warehouse. A large desk and a safe gave it a business aspect, but the room was crowded with costly furniture which fancy might suppose had once belonged to some unfortunate debtor who had been unable to satisfy Mr. Portman's demands. Some good pictures hung upon the walls, and in a recess opposite the door stood an old chest heavily clamped with iron. The key, which might have hung at the waist of a medieval jailer, so huge was it, was in the lock, which was evidently out of order. When I turned the key the lid would not open. Looking through the drawers in the desk, I found several letters which showed that Mr. Portman's business was often with well-known people—men one would not expect to find associated with him in any way—and the sums involved were often so large that only a rich man could deal with them.

Mrs. Eccles answered my questions without any hesitation. Whatever the world might think of Mr. Portman, she appeared to have a genuine affection for him. She had noticed no change in him recently; he had appeared to her to be in his usual health and spirits.

"When you went for the tray and found the door locked, did you think he had anyone with him?" I asked.

"I didn't hear anyone, but I can't say I listened. It was not the first time I had found the door locked and been told to go back presently for the tray."

"A friend was to dine with him on the following night. Did the friend come?"

"No."

"What was his name?"

"Mr. Portman did not mention it."

"Did you prepare the dinner?"

"No."

"Why not?" I asked. "You did not communicate with the police until five days later, so you must have been expecting your master to return."

"It's difficult to say exactly what I expected," Mrs. Eccles answered, "but I never thought about preparing the dinner. When he didn't return I began to think

something was wrong, because I've never known him to be away even for a night without letting me know."

"Why didn't you give information sooner?"

"Sooner? Why, I keep on asking myself whether I've done right in giving it at all. The master might walk in at any moment, and I don't know what he'd say if he did."

The clerk seemed to think that Mr. Portman had been worried recently. He had had several pieces of business which the youth said had not progressed too smoothly. He knew practically nothing about these various items of business, but he gave me the names of half a dozen people who had called upon Mr. Portman during the past week or two.

"He was close, you know," the youth went on; "didn't give much away about his doings."

"Then why do you think he has been worried recently?" I asked.

"He's been snappy with me," was the answer; "but by the way he spoke the other night when he went out I thought everything must have come right."

A further investigation of Mr. Portman's room resulted in a curious find. Under a bookcase, which was raised a few inches from the floor, I discovered a key—the key of the safe. How it had come there, whether it was a duplicate or the one Mr. Portman carried, it was impossible to decide.

Apparently the safe had not been opened, for a drawer therein contained a large sum in gold and notes, and there was not the slightest indication that any of the papers had been touched. It was quite evident, however, that a number of people would profit by Portman's death, especially if he should die suddenly and leave no one to carry on his business; and this was precisely what had happened. Not a relative or friend had come forward to lay claim to anything, and many of his debtors were likely to go free. Among these was Lord Stanford, one of the names the clerk had given me as recent visitors, and I went to see him, only to find that he had left England the day after Portman's disappearance. He had gone to Africa, and that was all I could discover.

Another man who had called upon Portman recently, and whom I went to see, was a Mr. Isaacson. From him I obtained an interesting piece of information. He had seen Portman in Finsbury Pavement on the evening of his disappearance. He

must have met him some ten minutes after he had left his house.

"I stopped to speak to him, but he was in a hurry, and did not stop," said Isaacson.

"I suppose you were not due to dine with him on the following evening?" I said.

"Dine with him? No, I have never had that honor. I do not think you quite appreciate Mr. Portman's position. I lend money in a small way, there are many like me, and if, as occasionally happens, business comes to us which is too large for us to deal with, we go to Mr. Portman. The business is carried through in our names, but Mr. Portman is the real creditor."

In his own way Mr. Portman was a man of importance, and a man of mystery. There was nothing to suggest he was dead, and it was quite possible that some crooked business had kept him from home unexpectedly.

I chanced to go and see Christopher Quarles one evening when I got to this point in my investigations, and he at once began to ask questions about the Finsbury affair. I had not intended to enlist his help. I was quite satisfied with the progress I had made, but he was so keen about the mystery that I told the whole story to him and Zena.

"You seem very interested," I said, when I had finished.

"I am. Mr. Portman has been talked about before now, and I remember I once had a theory about him."

"Does the present affair help to confirm that theory?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It might be interesting to know why Lord Stanford has gone abroad," he said.

"That is exactly the line I am following," I returned.

"I should like to know something about the man who was coming to dinner and did not come," said Zena. "It is curious that he should have heard so quickly of Mr. Portman's death, and more curious still that he should make no inquiries."

"Lord Stanford may be able to tell us something about him," I said.

"Zena makes a point, Wigan," said Quarles. "It is rather a complicated puzzle. Of course, Portman may not be dead, but if he is alive why should he run the risk of

a police search among his papers? He would know that such an investigation would be likely to do him harm. He would hardly run such a risk. Since Mr. Isaacson saw him in Finsbury Pavement he has vanished completely. He left the gas burning in his room, therefore he did not expect to be out long. He was hurrying, according to Mr. Isaacson, presumably to keep an appointment. Now, if he is dead, it looks like a premeditated thing, because there is no body. It is easy enough to murder; it is the most difficult thing in the world to hide the victim successfully. If a sudden crime is committed, and the murderer has his wits about him, the body will probably be found under circumstances likely to throw suspicion on anyone but the right man; but a premeditated crime usually means the disappearance of the body if in any way it can be managed. So we get a kind of theory which may carry us a long way, and the further we go we shall be the more convinced, I fancy, that many other theories are just as likely to be right."

"Portman may not be dead," I said.

"For the reasons I have given I think we may presume that he is," Quarles answered. "The difficulty of the case arises from the fact that so many people stand to profit by his death."

"Stanford, for instance," said I.

"And Isaacson, perhaps," he returned, "and a score of others. As far as Stanford is concerned, he is a young man with expectations, but with little money at present. He is probably in the hands of other money-lenders besides Portman; he is a fool no doubt, but one would not expect him to be a murderer."

"Given certain conditions, you cannot tell what a man will do."

"True, Wigan, but I do not find the required conditions. Don't let me influence you. Something may be learned from Stanford, but that would not be my line of attack."

"What would yours be?"

"I should like to talk to Mrs. Eccles and the clerk."

When Quarles solved a case his explanation was usually so clear that one could only marvel that the salient points had not been apparent to everybody from the first; when he was considering the difficulties it seemed impossible that the mystery could ever be solved. As I listened to him I felt that his help was

necessary in this affair.

"Why not come with me to Finsbury?" I said.

"I will to-morrow," he answered. "By the way, Wigan, wasn't it foggy on the night of Portman's disappearance?"

"It was, dear," said Zena. "Don't you remember, I went to see some people at Highgate that day and was late for dinner?"

Quarles nodded and changed the conversation; he had done with the affair until to-morrow.

When I met him next morning, wrapped in a heavy cloak, for it was cold, I could not help thinking that he looked the very last man in the world to solve an intricate mystery. He was the kind of old gentleman who would annoy everybody by asking foolish questions and telling stories which had grown hoary with age.

"I'm a simple old fool, Wigan, that's my character," he said, guessing my thoughts; "and, if you can look annoyed with me and show irritability, so much the better. Where does Isaacson live? I should like to see him first."

I found it quite easy to be irritable. When we called on Isaacson, Quarles asked him the most ridiculous questions which certainly had nothing whatever to do with Portman, but in a vague way concerned the theory and honesty of money-lending.

"Was Mr. Portman a Jew?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"I seem to remember seeing him without glasses," said Quarles. "I thought Jews always wore glasses."

"We are usually short-sighted," said Isaacson, touching his spectacles, "I am myself. Mr. Portman worked in glasses always, but if you met him in the street you would probably see him without them."

"Ah, you are remembering that he did not wear them the night you met him in Finsbury Pavement," said Quarles, "that is probably why he did not see you."

"He happened to be wearing them that night," Isaacson returned. "I believe he

did see me, but was in too much of a hurry to stop."

"Rude, very rude," remarked Quarles.

"Small men have to put up with many things from big ones," said Isaacson humbly.

The professor treated him to a short dissertation on the equality of man, and then we left.

"Honest, I think, so far as he goes," said Quarles, "but he is desperately afraid of being drawn too deeply into this affair. He couldn't afford to be questioned too closely about his business, Wigan."

It had been thought advisable to keep the clerk at his post for the present, and he was quite ignorant of the fact that he was watched both during his business and leisure hours. His own importance rather impressed him at this time, and Quarles soon succeeded in making him talkative, but, as far as I could see, very little of what he said was worth particular note.

"I think Mr. Portman would have been wise if he had confided more in you," said Quarles, after talking to him for some time.

"I think so, too," the youth answered.

"He never did, I suppose?"

"No—no, I cannot say he ever did."

"When he came in that afternoon he stood in the doorway there and talked to you?"

"He was telling me about some papers he would want in the morning. Very snappy he was, I can tell you."

"The weather, possibly. It was foggy and unpleasant."

"He was usually unpleasant, no matter what the weather was. He paid me fairly well, or I shouldn't have stayed with him as I have done."

"Yet, when he went out later that evening, he stopped in the doorway to say good night."

"He did, and you might have knocked me down with a feather," said the youth.

"I don't remember his ever doing such a thing before. I'd put some letters which had come during the afternoon on his table, and the news in them must have been good. He'd had some worrying business on hand, I know."

"That would certainly account for his cordiality," said Quarles. "Really, I sympathize with you. Practically, I suppose, you have little to do but answer the door when the bell rings."

"If the office bell rings I pull this catch," the youth said, "and the client walks in. The front door has a spring on it and closes itself. Sometimes a fool will ring the office bell when it's Mrs. Eccles he wants, and that's annoying."

"Very," laughed the professor. "Did any clients call that day?"

"No. A chap wanting to sell some patent office files came and wasted my time for a quarter of an hour; swore that the governor had seen him two or three months ago and told him to call. A rotten patent it was, too."

"He showed them to you?"

"Had a bag full of them. Wanted me to buy the beastly things. I had to be rude to him to get rid of him."

"Did you go to the door with him?"

"Not much!" the youth answered. "I just pulled this catch and told him he would find the door open, and the sooner he got out of it the better. He would have liked to borrow a bob or two, I fancy, but I wasn't parting."

"Did you tell Mr. Portman he had called?"

"I never worried him with callers of that sort."

Then Quarles became impressive.

"I suppose you have no idea where Mr. Portman is? To your knowledge nothing has happened which would account for his absence?"

"Nothing. If you want my opinion—I should say he's dead, had an accident, most likely, and no papers on him to say who he was."

"One more question," said Quarles, "in strict confidence, mind. Is Mrs. Eccles honest?"

"As daylight," was the prompt reply. "Would she have put the police on this business if she hadn't been?"

"I never thought of that," said Quarles humbly. "Your brain is young and mine is old."

"Makes a difference, no doubt," said the youth.

"And my memory is like a sieve," the professor went on. "I've already forgotten whether this file seller was a clean-shaven chap or wore a beard."

"Don't worry about that," said the youth, "because I didn't describe him. He was an old chap with a gray beard, and had lost most of his teeth, I should think, by the way he talked."

"Poor fellow. Poor fellow! I expect I should have been fool enough to give him a bob."

"I expect you would," laughed the youth, in his superior wisdom.

With Mrs. Eccles Quarles's method was still foolish. For some time he did not mention Mr. Portman, and so silly was he that I should not have been surprised had the woman been less respectful in her manner. But he set her talking as he had set the clerk talking, and she was presently explaining that the guest her master was expecting to dine with him must have been of considerable importance, because the preparations were elaborate.

"He's never given such a dinner before," said Mrs. Eccles, "and I suggested that with such preparation he might have asked other guests."

"And the wine?" asked Quarles.

"He said he would look after that himself."

"Very natural," answered the professor. "You've been with Mr. Portman many years, haven't you?"

"Fourteen or more."

"So long! I wonder if you remember a young friend of mine who used to come here, I think. Ten or eleven years ago it must be. He squinted and had red hair."

"I do remember him," said Mrs. Eccles. "He came here to dine once, I recollect. I believe Mr. Portman said he was going abroad. I know he dined here, and I do

not think I saw him again."

Quarles nodded.

"I believe he did leave the country; some said in disgrace. I wonder who it was that was going to dine with Mr. Portman that night."

"The master didn't say. All he said was an old friend."

"A young man might be called an old friend," said Quarles.

"Oh, he couldn't be young," said Mrs. Eccles, "because the master said he had known him when he was a young man."

"That is interesting," said Quarles. "Shall we go and look at Mr. Portman's room, Wigan?"

When we closed the door Quarles stood in the center of the room and looked slowly round it.

"Was that screen standing there when you first entered the room, Wigan?"

"Yes."

"Where did you find the safe key?"

"Under that bookshelf."

He went to the safe and walked slowly from it to the door, flicking his hand as he went. Then he looked out of the windows.

"No exit or entrance that way," he said. "There is only the door. Is that the chest that won't open?"

He turned the key and tried the lid. He could not lift it. He locked the chest, then unlocked it again, and hammered upon the lid with his fist.

"The bolts sound as if they worked properly," he said. "I think it's only that the lid has caught somehow."

We tackled it together, and, after several efforts, we succeeded in raising the lid. The chest was empty. Quarles examined it very closely without and within. We could not move it, it was too heavy, but the professor produced a magnifying glass and studied the marks on the wood. He measured the length and depth of

the chest, and shut it and opened it several times.

"Opens quite easily now, Wigan," he remarked.

Very carefully he had put two newspapers into it, and some odd bits of paper, which he took from his pocket.

"You see how I have placed them, Wigan, which way up the newspapers are, and the scraps of writing on this piece of paper? We'll set a trap," and he closed the chest and locked it. "This is an old house, and there may be a way into this room which we know nothing about. We shall see."

We left the room, but Quarles told me not to lock the door. He beckoned me to follow him to the kitchen.

"Mrs. Eccles, how long has your master had that oaken chest in his room?" he asked the housekeeper.

"It's been there all my time, sir."

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised if it is connected with your master's disappearance."

Mrs. Eccles's mouth slowly opened in astonishment.

"We shall be back in two hours, and then—then we shall know."

We left her and went to the office. The youth was cutting an initial on the corner of the table.

"Busy, I see," said Quarles. "I fancy Mr. Portman's disappearance has something to do with that old chest in his room."

"How can that be?"

"I don't know yet. We are going to make an important inquiry and shall be back in a couple of hours. We'll be careful to ring the office bell, not the house one."

As we turned to the front door Quarles caught my arm. He opened the door, letting it go so that it would close itself. For a few moments we remained motionless, then, creeping toward the office door, watched until the clerk's back was turned, and went quickly to Portman's room.

"It is very easy, Wigan," whispered the professor; "if for us, then also for others.

You see why I did not want you to lock the door of this room? Now we are in, we will lock it on the inside, and that screen will hide us."

"There is no question that Mr. Portman left the house," I said.

"Oh, no. Isaacson was quite definite, but I am trying to fit facts to my theory. I said we should be back in two hours, so we have about two hours to wait."

There was plenty of room behind the screen, but those two hours went slowly. I could not decide what theory the professor had got in his mind, but concluded that he was not so satisfied with the honesty of Mrs. Eccles and the cadaverous youth as I was. He had looked at his watch when we went behind the screen, and he allowed a full two hours to elapse before he would leave our hiding-place.

He walked straight to the chest and opened it. It was empty. All the papers had gone.

"Well, Wigan?"

I stared into the chest and did not answer.

"It looks like another way into this room, doesn't it"—and then he started—"or out of it. I hadn't thought of that. Wait."

He took an old envelope from his pocket, dropped it into the chest, and locked it. He waited a moment, then opened the chest again. The envelope had gone.

"I confess, Wigan, that this is a surprise," said Quarles. "I must go home and think. I believe—yes, I believe we have the clew. You must search Portman's papers for some reference to a business acquaintance, probably a foreigner. Perhaps Portman knows Italy—Florence. It might very likely be Florence. I fancy this chest had its home there. If you find any reference to a friend who is a Florentine, and can lay hands on him, you might question him closely about his movements on the day of Portman's disappearance."

"The first thing is to get this chest moved," I said.

"Let that wait for forty-eight hours," said Quarles. "We may have a more complete story by then. Give me until to-morrow night, then come and see me."

When I went to Chelsea the following night I was taken at once to the empty room. Zena was there. Quarles was standing by his table, on which was a rough plan, evidently a production of his own, and quite unintelligible without an

explanation.

"Of course you have not discovered anything yet, Wigan?"

"There has not been time," I answered.

"No, quite so," he said, motioning me to a seat. "But we have a fairly clear story, I think. Zena said, you remember, that she would like to know something about the man who was coming to dine with Portman that night. It was an important point, particularly so since the guest did not put in an appearance. You saw the importance of it, Wigan, because you asked Isaacson whether he was the expected guest. Now, Isaacson had seen Portman after he had left his house that night, but had not spoken to him. This fact suggested a question to my mind: was Isaacson telling the truth? There were two possibilities. Isaacson might have seen him, gone with him, and be responsible for his disappearance; or he might have been mistaken. The man he saw might not have been Portman. The second possibility was the one which appealed to me. The fact remained, however, that Isaacson knew him well, therefore the man he took to be Portman must have wished to be taken for Portman, I argued. This would account for his hurrying on without speaking, since a closer investigation might have betrayed him. I looked for some fact to support this theory. I found it in Isaacson's statement that Portman wore glasses in the street on this occasion, which was unusual, so unusual, mark you, that Isaacson noticed it. Now, if my theory were right, it seemed possible that after Mr. Portman entered his room that afternoon he never left it. That he was there when Mrs. Eccles took in the tea-tray there could be no doubt; but that it was Mr. Portman who answered through the locked door was another matter.

"Such a fantastic theory required strong support," the professor went on. "The clerk helped me. When he came into the house that afternoon and gave his clerk instructions about certain papers Mr. Portman was snappy, his usual self, in fact, and, incidentally, he proved that he had no intention of being away from the office on the following day; when he left the house he was quite different, genially wishing the clerk good night. Wigan, a man slightly overplaying his part would be likely to do that, especially as he wanted the clerk to be in a position to say that his master had gone out at a certain hour. He was bound to draw the clerk's attention to himself, so he did it with a cordial good night. Knowing that Mr. Portman wore glasses, he would also wear them, even in the street."

"But the clerk would have seen it was not Mr. Portman," I objected.

"That was a difficulty," said Quarles. "It was a foggy afternoon, we know, and would be dark in the passage, but hardly dark enough to deceive the clerk. Another difficulty was how a stranger could get into the house without being seen. Both difficulties vanished when the clerk told us of the man who called selling patent files. He had a bag, Wigan, containing more than samples of files, I warrant—means of disguise as well. We know how easy it is to let the front door slam and remain in the house. I think the file seller practiced the same trick we did. Even to going to Portman's room and hiding behind the screen. You see, the office windows are frosted, so the clerk cannot see whether anyone leaving the office passes into the street or not. If there is something fantastic in this theory, let me pursue it to the end. If I am right, one thing is certain: this file seller knew Portman well. He must have come prepared to make himself up like him. He was able to answer Mrs. Eccles when she knocked at the door and deceive her. Granted that he knew Mr. Portman well, we may assume that he was in some way associated with him in business. Only one man left that room, therefore, as things stand, we may assume that these two men were enemies who had once been friends. Here let me be imaginative for a moment. Mr. Portman was expecting a friend to dine with him on the following night, an important person, since the feast to be prepared was, according to Mrs. Eccles, somewhat elaborate. The sumptuousness of a feast may mean great friendship, but it may be used to hide intense enmity. You read such things in the history of the Medici of Florence. I believe, Wigan, that the feast was prepared for this same file seller, that the wine, which Mr. Portman was looking after himself, remember, would have proved unwholesome for the guest, who, distrusting Portman, came a day earlier and removed his enemy."

"A little imaginative," I said.

"Imagination bridges the intervals between facts," Quarles answered. "We get again to a fact—the iron-bound chest. It links the two men together. I have no doubt the file seller knew of its peculiar mechanism as well as Portman did. You could not open it, and, since the key was in the lock, no mystery about it, you naturally did not think it of much importance. When together we succeeded in opening it I found on the floor of it a tiny stain. I thought it was a blood stain, but I was not sure. At any rate, the measurements of the chest were such that a body might be pressed in it. Frankly, I admit I expected to see Portman's body when we raised the lid. For the sake of some documents—it is impossible to say what they were—I believed this file seller had murdered Portman, taken his key, opened the safe, taken the papers he wanted, thrust the body into the chest, and

had then departed in the character of his victim, flinging the safe key under the bookcase as he went. As there was no body I wondered whether Mrs. Eccles or the clerk, or both, were accomplices of the murderer; whether that chest might not conceal a secret entrance to the room. The idea did not fit my theory very well, but I laid a trap, and you know the result, Wigan. The action of shutting that chest opens the bottom of it, so that whatever is placed in it falls out as soon as the lid is closed and locked. I believe the body of Portman was in it and had got caught somehow—that was why you could not open it, why we could not open it until we had hammered it about, and by constant working upon the lid had released the body. I feel certain that chest had its home in Florence; that is why I suggest an Italian may be the criminal. He may have been long resident in England, of course; certainly he is a man who speaks English perfectly, or the clerk would have described him as a foreigner."

"But the body—where is it?" I asked.

"I've been to the British Museum to-day," said Quarles, taking up the rough sketch from his desk. "This is a copy of an old map of the Finsbury district, and here I find was one of the old plague pits. I believe Portman's house stands on this plot."

It was a very rough sketch, but, as I compared the place the professor had indicated with the old landmarks and their modern equivalents which he had marked, there could be little doubt that Quarles was right.

"I do not suppose that Portman's is the first body that has passed through that chest and slid down into some hole which was once a part of this pit," he went on. "I asked Mrs. Eccles about a squinting youth. He was a young fool with expectations, just such another as Lord Stanford. He was robbed right and left, and it is quite certain Portman, among others, made money out of him. He disappeared suddenly. It is possible Lord Stanford might have disappeared in a similar way had not his friends got him out of the country. Portman didn't have that chest fixed to the floor of his room for nothing. You may find the solution to more than one mystery, Wigan, when you move that chest."

Portman's body and the remains of at least three other bodies were found in the deep hole under the old house in Finsbury. How the hole had come there, or how Portman had discovered it, it was impossible to guess, but there could be little doubt that he had only been treated as he had treated others. And some six months afterward a man named Postini was knifed in Milan, and the inquiry into

his murder brought to light the fact that he had been closely connected with Portman. They had worked together in London, in Paris, and in Rome. At the time of Portman's death they had quarreled, and at that time Postini was in London. Among Portman's papers I found none relating to Postini; no doubt the Italian had taken them, for Portman's letter, asking him to dine and to become true friends again, was found among the Italian's papers.

There can be little doubt, I think, that Quarles was right. Portman intended to rid himself of the Italian after giving him a sumptuous feast, but Postini, wholly distrusting his former comrade, had come a day before his time, and been the murderer instead of the victim.

CHAPTER XVI
THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING FORTUNE

Whenever he had solved a case, if not to the world's satisfaction, to his own, Quarles seldom mentioned it again. He professed to think little of his achievement, a pose which I have no doubt concealed a considerable amount of satisfaction and self-complacency. Of the curious case connected with the Bryants, he was, however, rather proud; and, since it resulted in making things easier for Zena and me, I have every reason to be satisfied.

It began in a strange way. A simple looking old man, his clothes a size too large for him, walked into a large pawnbroker's one day, and, handing him a scarf-pin, asked how much could be given for it. The pin was no use to him. He didn't want to pawn it, but to sell it. The customer was requested to put a price upon his property, and, after some hesitation, he asked whether twenty pounds would be too much. The man in the shop went into a back room ostensibly to consult his superior, in reality to send for the police. It happened that a quantity of jewelry had been stolen from a well-known society lady a few weeks before, and pawnbrokers had had special notice of the fact; hence the firm's precaution. The simple old man had offered for twenty pounds a diamond that was worth at least twenty times that amount.

Being interested in the jewel robbery, I was naturally keen to know all that could be discovered about this simple old man, and I will give the story as I told it to Christopher Quarles after I had made the most minute inquiries.

The old man's name was Sims—James Sims—and for the last year he had resided with a niece, who was married and living at Fulham. Until twelve months ago he had been manservant to an old gentleman named Ottershaw, living at Norbiton, who he said had given him the pin. Mr. Ottershaw was a retired Indian servant, who chose to live a lonely life, and was evidently an erratic individual.

Although there was no direct evidence on the point, nothing to show that he had any income beyond his pension, nor any property beyond the old house at Norbiton which he had bought, the idea got abroad that he was an exceedingly wealthy man. Sims declared that he had never seen any evidence of great wealth. His master was aware of what was said, and used to chuckle about it, but he never in any way endorsed the story. At the same time he didn't deny it, and, indeed, fostered the idea to some extent by saying that he hoped to keep his anxious relatives waiting until he was a hundred.

These relatives consisted of two nephews and a niece, the children of Mr. Ottershaw's sister, who had been some years his senior. Both the nephews—George and Charles Bryant—were married; the niece was a spinster whose sole interest in life was foreign missions. The Bryants had money, just sufficient to obviate the necessity to work, and, so far as the two brothers were concerned, they were undoubtedly chiefly concerned in waiting for a dead man's shoes. Miss Bryant hoped to become rich for the sake of her missionary work. All of them were convinced of their uncle's wealth.

The old gentleman did not attain his century. He caught a chill, pneumonia set in, and in three days he was dead. Sims declared that about a month before his death his master had given him the pin with the remark: "You've been a good servant, Sims. This is a little gift in recognition of the fact. It's worth a few pounds, and should you outlive me and find yourself hard up, you can turn it into money." Sims had not found himself hard up, he had saved enough to live quietly upon, but his great-niece, of whom he was very fond, was going to be married, and he thought he would turn the pin into money as a nest egg for her.

Mr. Ottershaw's will was a curiosity. It began with a very straightforward statement that the testator was aware that his relatives had for long past been hoping for his death. No doubt they would have come to live with him had he allowed it, to see that his money did not go to strangers. "They have their reward," the will went on. "I leave all I am possessed of to George, Charles, and Mary Bryant in equal shares, without any restrictions whatever. But, since during my lifetime my nephews and niece have undoubtedly speculated concerning my wealth, I feel it would be a pity if my death were to rob them suddenly of so pleasant an occupation. Frankly, I would take what wealth I have with me if I could. This being impossible, I suppose, I have placed it in a safe place, so that, in order to find it, my relatives will still be able to speculate and exercise their ingenuity. For their guidance I may say that I deposited it in this place while alone in one of the rooms of my house at Norbiton, that I did not send it out of

the house, yet if the house is burnt down, or pulled down brick by brick, it will not be found."

The will then went on to provide that the house should not be sold for five years, nor anything taken out of it. During this period his nephews and niece were to have free access to it whenever they wished, or any person they might appoint could visit it. If they chose they could let it furnished for five years. They could burn it or pull it down if they liked, but if it were intact at the end of five years, it was to be sold, and the proceeds equally divided.

"These are the only conditions," the will concluded; "but, as I am doing so much for my relatives, I may just mention two things which I should like done, but they are in no way commands. On the finding of my wealth, if it is found, I should like ten per cent. of it given to a society or societies for the feeble-minded. And, as I have explained to my relatives more than once, I should like to be cremated, but I leave the decision to them. If cremation is considered too expensive, I must be buried in the usual way."

Although the house at Norbiton was still intact, I was told by George Bryant that during the last twelve months every nook and cranny had been searched without avail. He still believed that the wealth was hidden somewhere, but he had begun to doubt whether it would ever be found. Naturally, when he heard of Sims's attempt to sell a diamond pin, his hopes revived. His brother Charles had always thought that Sims knew something, but he himself had not thought so. Now the affair was on an entirely different footing.

When I had told my story in the empty room at Chelsea I think we were all three convinced that this was the toughest problem we had ever tackled.

"Did the relatives respect the old man's wish and have the body cremated?" Zena asked.

"No; he was buried in a cemetery at Kingston."

"Then they don't deserve to find the money, and I hope they won't."

"I do not like the relatives," I returned; "but in this matter there is something to be said for them. They have always been opposed to cremation, a fact which Mr. Ottershaw knew quite well, and, recognizing the contemptuous tone of the will, not unreasonably, I think, they decided that the wish was expressed only to annoy them, and that their uncle had no real desire to be cremated."

"One of your absurd questions," said Quarles.

"It seems to me I have never asked a more natural or a more sensible one," said Zena.

"I won't argue, my dear," Quarles returned. "I presume that paper you have there, Wigan, is a copy of the wording of the will?"

"Yes," and I handed it to him.

"Of course, you do not think Sims has any connection with this jewel robbery you have been engaged upon?"

"No; he would not be selling so valuable a stone for twenty pounds."

"And you have come to the conclusion that his story is a plain statement of facts?"

"I think so."

"You are not sure?"

"Well, one cannot close one's eyes to the possibility that he may dislike the Bryants as much as his master did, and may be keeping his master's secret," I answered.

"Or he may have learned the secret by chance," said Zena.

"He may," said the professor. "You questioned him upon that point, Wigan?"

"He says he knows nothing."

"What has become of the pin?"

"It is in the hands of the police at present, but will be handed back to him. There is no evidence whatever that he is not the rightful owner. The Bryants wanted to have him arrested."

Quarles spread out the paper, and began reading parts of the will in a slow, thoughtful manner.

"'Frankly I would take what wealth I have with me if I could.'" And Quarles repeated the sentence twice. "That might imply that there was no wealth to speak of; and, following this idea for a moment, the permission to burn the house or

pull it down might suggest a hope in the old man's mind that the frantic search for what did not exist would result in the destruction of even that which did—the house and furniture. The fact that he desires ten per cent. of the wealth, if it is found, to go to imbeciles rather favors this notion; and his wish to be cremated may be an attempt to make his relatives spend money upon him from whom they were destined to receive nothing."

"It would be a grim joke," I said.

"A madman's humor, perhaps," said Zena.

"He goes on: 'This being impossible, I suppose,' and then says he has hidden his wealth. He did not seem quite certain that he could not take it with him, did he?"

"You think——"

"No, no," said Quarles, "I haven't got as far as thinking anything definite yet. The will then explains in a riddle where the treasure is hidden. He was alone in a room. He didn't send the treasure out of the house. The statements are so deliberate that I am inclined to believe in a treasure of some sort."

"So am I," I answered, "because of the valuable pin he gave to his man."

"When was this will made?" asked Quarles.

"Nine years ago."

"Living as he did, he would hardly spend his pension," the professor went on. "Money would accumulate in nine years, and, since there is no evidence that he did anything else with it, we may assume that the hoard was periodically added to, and, therefore, he must have placed it where he could get at it without much difficulty."

For a moment Quarles studied the paper.

"I think we may take his statements literally," he went on; "so unless the treasure was very small, small enough to be concealed inside a brick, it seems obvious that it was not hidden in the walls of the house, or it would have been found in the process of pulling down."

"If we are to be quite literal, we must remember that he says brick by brick," I pointed out. "It might therefore be hidden in a brick."

"I have thought of that," Quarles returned; "but in pulling down bricks would get broken, especially a hollow brick, as this would be. I think we may take the words to mean only total demolition, and that there is no special significance in the expression 'brick by brick.' Burning does away with the idea that the treasure may be hidden in woodwork."

"If he put it under a ground floor room or under a cellar neither pulling down nor a fire would disclose it," said Zena.

"Every flag in the cellars has been taken up," I answered; "and all the ground underneath the house has been dug up."

"Is there a well?" she asked.

"No; that was the first thing I looked for when I came there."

"He says in a room," Quarles went on. "I don't think that means a cellar."

"Do you think the treasure was small in bulk and placed in his coffin?" said Zena eagerly, leaning forward in her chair as she asked the question.

"Certainly in that case he would be perfectly justified in saying that he didn't send it out of the house," said Quarles.

"It is most improbable," I said. "To begin with, Mr. Ottershaw wished to be cremated, so would hardly leave any such instructions. And, further, Sims saw him placed in his coffin, and says nothing was buried with the body."

"It is an interesting problem," said the professor; "but one does not feel very much inclined to help the Bryants."

"Then you have a theory?" I asked.

"I haven't got so far as theory; I am only rather keen to try my wits. There is a shadowy idea at the back of my brain which may be gone by morning. If it hasn't, we'll go and see Sims."

Next morning when I went to Chelsea, as I had arranged to do, I found Quarles waiting for me, and we went to Fulham together. Sims had two rooms in his niece's house, but took his meals with the family. We went into his sitting room and he was quite ready to talk about Mr. Ottershaw. I told him that Quarles was a gentleman who thought he could find the hidden money.

"I shall be very glad if he does," said Sims. "The Bryants will know then that I had nothing to do with it. Mr. Charles has been the worst; but since I tried to sell that pin Mr. George has been as bad."

"I take it you don't like the Bryants," said Quarles.

"I don't dislike them, only when they bother me."

"Your master didn't like them?"

"Didn't he? I never heard him say. He wasn't in the habit of saying much to anybody, not even to me."

"You were fond of him?"

"Loved him. He wasn't what you would call a lovable character, but I loved him, and he liked me. You see, him and me were born in the same neighborhood, five miles out of Worcester; and when he came back from India he came down there to see an old friend, since dead, and I happened to be there at the time out of a job. That's how we came together fifteen years ago."

"You didn't go at once to Norbiton?"

"Not until three years afterward."

"Where were you during those three years?"

"In several places, part of the time in Switzerland, and in Germany."

"Now about this treasure, Mr. Sims?"

"Bless you, sir, I don't believe in it."

"The will very distinctly mentions it."

"I know. I've heard such a lot about that will from the Bryants that I know it almost by heart. It was a joke, that's what I think. Why, Mr. Charles has asked me more than once whether I didn't slip it into his coffin."

"Mr. Ottershaw gave you no such instructions, I suppose," said Quarles.

"The only instructions he gave was that I was to lay him out, and to see him put into his coffin if he was buried, and, whatever happened, to see him decently carried out of the house. There was some talk of his being cremated, and I suppose the master didn't know how they would take him away then. No doubt he thought the Bryants would have a woman to lay him out, so he left a letter for me to show them. The master always did hate women."

"And you did this for him?"

"Gladly, and I helped the undertaker lift him into the coffin. I was there when he was screwed down, so were Mr. George and Mr. Charles. There was nothing but the body buried, nothing."

"The Bryants wouldn't have him cremated, I understand," said Quarles.

"And quite right, too," said Sims. "It's a heathenish custom, that's what I think."

"And you don't believe there was any large sum of money?"

"No, I don't. I should have seen some sign of it."

"Your master gave you a very valuable pin," said Quarles; "I don't suppose you had seen that before."

"It's true, I hadn't."

"There may have been other valuables where that came from."

"I don't think it," said Sims. "I don't believe the master himself knew it was so valuable."

As we walked up the Fulham Road I asked the professor what he thought of Sims.

"Simple—and honest, I fancy."

"You're not quite sure?"

"Not quite, but then I am not sure of anything in this affair yet. I suggest we go and see Mr. George Bryant. I want his permission to go over the house at Norbiton."

George Bryant lived at Wimbledon, and we found him at home. Much of our conversation went over old ground, and need not be repeated here; but the professor was evidently not very favorably impressed with Bryant. Nor did Bryant appear to think much of Quarles. He smiled contemptuously at some of his questions, and, when asked for permission to visit the house at Norbiton, he said he must consult his brother and sister.

"Except that I am keenly interested in the affair as a puzzle, I don't care one way or the other," said Quarles. "Whether you handle the money or not is immaterial to me, but I have a strong impression that I can find it."

"In that case, of course——"

"There are conditions," said Quarles, "and one or two more questions."

"I am willing to answer any questions."

"Did you often visit your uncle?"

"Only twice in ten years, and on each occasion he was not very well—a touch of gout, which was what made him so ill-tempered, I imagine. My brother Charles was with me on one occasion; my sister, I believe, never went there."

"Yet you all expected to profit by his death?"

"His letters certainly gave us to understand that we should, and so far the will was no surprise to us."

"Has the clause in the will which forbids the removal of anything from the house been observed?" Quarles asked.

"Most certainly."

"I mean with regard to trifling things."

"Nothing has been taken. Of course the will has been complied with."

"It wasn't with regard to Mr. Ottershaw's cremation."

"We did what we considered to be right, and I refuse to discuss that question. For my own part, I believe if James Sims could be forced to speak the mystery would be at an end. I cannot help feeling that the police have failed in their duty by not having him arrested."

"I daresay that is a question my friend Detective Wigan will refuse to discuss," said the professor. "Do you care to hear my conditions? You can talk them over with your brother and sister when you consider whether I shall be allowed to go over the house or not."

"I shall be glad to know your fee," said Bryant.

For a moment I thought that Quarles was going to lose his temper.

"I charge no fee," he said quietly, after a momentary pause; "but if the money is found through me, you must give ten per cent. for the benefit of imbeciles according to the wish of the deceased, and you must pay me ten per cent. That will leave eighty per cent. for you to divide."

"Preposterous!" Bryant exclaimed.

"As you like. Those are my conditions, and I must receive with the permission to visit the house a properly witnessed document, showing that the three of you agree to my terms."

"I am afraid you will wait in vain."

"It is your affair," said Quarles, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Remember I can find the money, and I believe I am the only man who can."

On our way back to town I asked Quarles whether he expected to get the permission.

"Certainly I do. George Bryant is too greedy for money to miss such a chance."

"And do you really mean that you can find the money?"

"At any rate, I mean the Bryants to pay heavily for it if I do."

Quarles was right. Three days later the permit and the required document arrived, and we went to Norbiton.

As I had visited the house already, I was prepared to act as guide to the professor, but he showed only a feeble interest in the house itself. The only room he examined with any minuteness was the bedroom Mr. Ottershaw had used, and he seemed mainly to be proving to his own satisfaction that certain possibilities which had occurred to him were not probabilities.

"There's a ten per cent. reward hanging to this, Wigan," he chuckled. "We're out

to make money on this occasion. Bryant seems to have spoken the truth. The place appears to be much as Mr. Ottershaw left it."

He had opened a cupboard in the bedroom, and took up two or three pairs of boots to look at.

"Large feet, hadn't he? Went in for comfort rather than elegance. I never saw uglier boots. But they are well made, nothing cheap about them."

"You don't expect to find the money in his boots, do you?"

"Never heard of hollow heels, Wigan?" he asked.

"You couldn't hide much money if every boot in the house had a hollow heel."

"No, true. I wasn't thinking of hollow heels particularly."

Then he took up a stout walking-stick which was standing in the corner of the cupboard, felt its weight, and walked across the room with it to try it.

"Nothing hollow about this, at any rate," he said, after examining the ferrule closely.

When we returned to the hall he was interested in the sticks in the stand.

"He was fond of stout ones, Wigan," laughed Quarles. "Well, I don't think there is much to interest us here."

Our inspection of the house had been of the most casual kind. We hadn't even looked into some of the rooms, and the odd corners and fireplaces to which I had given considerable attention on my former visit hardly received a passing glance from Quarles.

"Have you looked at everything you want to see?" I asked in astonishment.

"I think so. You said the cellars had been dug up, so they are of no interest, and I warrant the Bryants have already searched in every likely and unlikely place. What is the use of going over the same ground, or in examining cabinets and drawers for false backs and false bottoms, when others have done it for us?"

"What is your next move, then?"

"I think we may as well go back to Chelsea and talk about it."

I must admit that, in spite of my knowledge of Quarles, I thought he was beaten this time, and that he was using bluff to hide his disappointment. I thought he had gone to Norbiton with a fixed idea in his mind, only to discover that he had made a mistake. He would not discuss the affair on our way back to Chelsea; but when we reached the house, he called for Zena, and the three of us retired to the empty room.

"Well, dear, is the ten per cent. reward to make us rich beyond the dreams of avarice?" asked Zena.

"It is impossible to say."

"Then you haven't found the money?"

"We haven't counted it yet," was the answer. "Let as consider the points. The first is this: Nine years before his death Mr. Ottershaw made his will, frankly expressing a wish that he could take his money with him. Therefore, I think we may assume that he was not in love with his relatives, and was not delighted that his death should profit them. The next sentence in the will seems to express a doubt as to whether the treasure could be taken or not, and I suggest that something occurred about that time to make it appear feasible. So we get a riddle, and if it is to be read literally, as I believe it is meant to be, there can apparently be only one possible hiding-place—somewhere in the ground underneath the house. This is so obvious that one would hardly expect it to be the solution, and so there is particular significance in his statement that he didn't send it out of the house. He hid it, he says, when he was alone in one of the rooms. Let us suppose it was his bedroom. From there he certainly could not bury his treasure in the ground. We have decided that the hiding-place could not be in any part of the brickwork or in the woodwork, therefore we are driven to the conclusion that it was placed in some piece of furniture or some receptacle made for the purpose. Since I believe he thought it possible to take his wealth with him, the latter supposition seems to me the more probable."

"In banknotes a large sum would only occupy a small space," I said.

"I don't think the treasure was in money," said Quarles. "The fact that a diamond was given to Sims and not money suggests that the treasure was in precious stones. If he spent everything he could in this way, giving hard cash for a gem, and thus doing away with the necessity for inquiry and references, the lack of evidence regarding his wealth is partly explained. Great wealth can be sunk in a very small parcel of gems, and if he hoped to take his wealth with him it must be

small in bulk."

"So that it could be placed in his coffin, you mean," said Zena.

"Sims declares nothing was placed in his coffin," said Quarles; "he is most definite upon the point."

"And I have already pointed out that since he wished to be cremated Mr. Ottershaw would hardly make any such arrangement," I said.

"He may have wished to be cremated, but he may not have expected to be," said Quarles. "As a matter of fact, he left certain instructions which point to a doubt. Sims was to lay him out and see that he was decently cared for. So anxious was Mr. Ottershaw about this that he left a letter for Sims to show to the Bryants. This is a most significant fact."

"Then you suspect the man Sims," said Zena.

"We will go a step further before I answer that question. To-day, Wigan, we have made a curious discovery. All Mr. Ottershaw's walking-sticks were very stout ones, and that he really used them, not merely carried them, the condition of the ferrules proves. Moreover, there was a curious fact about his boots. They were large, the right one being a little larger than the other, and the right boot in every pair was the least trodden down—indeed, showed little wear either inside or out. I wonder if Sims could explain this?"

Zena was leaning forward, her eyes fixed upon the professor, and I was thinking of a boot with a hollow heel.

"Let's go back to the will for a moment," said Quarles. "Although Mr. Ottershaw desired to be cremated, he did not put it in the form of a condition, as he might reasonably have done. He even mentions the expense, and, in fact, gives his relatives quite a good excuse for not doing as he desires. It seems to me he didn't care much one way or the other, and that his object was to make the relatives suffer for their greed, and suffer all the more because he didn't actually leave the money away from them. It was Zena's absurd question, Wigan, and her anger that the Bryants had not carried out the old man's wish, which gave me the germ of a theory. I believe if they had had him cremated they would have found the treasure. He gave them a chance which they lost by burying him."

"Then you believe Sims carried out his master's wishes?" I said.

"I do."

"And managed to have the treasure buried with him?"

"I do not believe Sims knows anything about a treasure," said Quarles; "and I think he speaks the truth when he says that nothing but the body was buried. But Sims knew more about his master than anyone else. He could tell us something about their doings in Switzerland and Germany, for instance. He was very fond of his master, and was trusted by him."

"We want to know what happened just after Mr. Ottershaw's death," I said. "To know what occurred abroad will not help us much."

"I think it will," Quarles returned. "Supposing Mr. Ottershaw had an accident abroad which necessitated the amputation of his right leg, and supposing, in Germany perhaps, he got the very best artificial limb money could purchase?"

"A wooden leg!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, not of the old sort, but the very best the instrument makers could devise. Mr. Ottershaw became proud of that leg and told no one about it. Only his man knew. His right boot showed less sign of wear, because he helped that leg with a stout stick. The wooden foot would not stain the inside of a boot with moisture as a real foot does. When the Bryants went to see him he complained of gout, an excuse for not walking, and so giving them a chance of discovering the leg. Then came the idea of secreting the treasure, and I suggest that it consists of gems concealed in that wooden leg. He didn't want the leg removed after his death, so Sims laid him out. Probably the leg is fitted with a steel, fire-resisting receptacle which would have been found among the débris had the body been cremated."

"Then the treasure is buried with him," said Zena. "Will they open the grave?"

"I am not sure whether the old man succeeded in carrying his wealth with him after all," said Quarles. "Sims was fond of and sentimental about his master, and as we talked to him, Wigan, it seemed to me there was something he had no intention of telling us. He was particularly insistent that nothing but the body had been buried, and appeared almost morbidly anxious to tell nothing but the exact truth. To-morrow we will go to Fulham and ask him whether he removed the wooden leg before the coffin was screwed down."

Quarles's conjecture proved to be right. Sims had been sentimental about the leg because his master was so proud of it, and the night before the coffin was

fastened down had crept silently into the room and taken it off, placing a thick shawl rolled up under the shroud, so that the corpse would appear as it was before. It had not occurred to him at the time that his master was so anxious that the leg should be buried with him, but since that night he had wondered whether he had done wrong. The wooden leg was hidden in his bedroom. When he was told that it probably contained the treasure, his fear and amazement were almost painful to witness. He was evidently quite innocent of any idea of robbery.

Ingeniously concealed in the top part of the leg we found a steel cylinder, full of gems. Mr. Ottershaw must have made a lot of money while he was in India, for Quarles's ten per cent. of the value obtained for the jewels came to over twelve thousand pounds.

"Half of it goes to Zena as a wedding present," he said on the day he banked the money. "I shouldn't wait long if I were you, Wigan."

"But, grandfather, I——"

"My dear, I'm not always thinking only of myself. You have your life before you and I want you to be happy. My only condition is that there shall always be a place at your fireside for me."

The tears were in Zena's eyes as she kissed him, but she looked at me and I knew my waiting time was nearly over.

"Now I shall rest on my laurels, Wigan, and trouble no more about mysteries," said Quarles.

He meant it, but I very much doubt whether a ruling passion is so easily controlled. We shall see.

THE END

Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

In Chapter I, "It is obvivious that a man who possessed such stones" was changed to "It is obvious that a man who possessed such stones", and a period was changed to a comma after "several boarding-houses in Ossery Road".

In Chapter VI, quotation marks were deleted after "far more of a lover than a detective" and "I could swear to it".

In Chapter VII, a quotation mark was removed after "so much the better".

In Chapter XII, "a disposition to suspect Couldson" was changed to "a disposition to suspect Coulsdon".

In Chapter XIII, a quotation mark was added after "whether he was in Boston, Wigan", and "I had seen Oglethorp move his" was changed to "I had seen Oglethorpe move his".

In Chapter XIV, a period was added after "little significance in that".

In Chapter XVI, a single quote (') was changed to a double quote (") before "Well, one cannot close one's eyes", and "I haven't got as for as thinking anything definite yet" was changed to "I haven't got as far as thinking anything definite yet".

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