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# THE OTHER FELLOW



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# OTHER: FELLOW.



ROBERT LEIGHTON





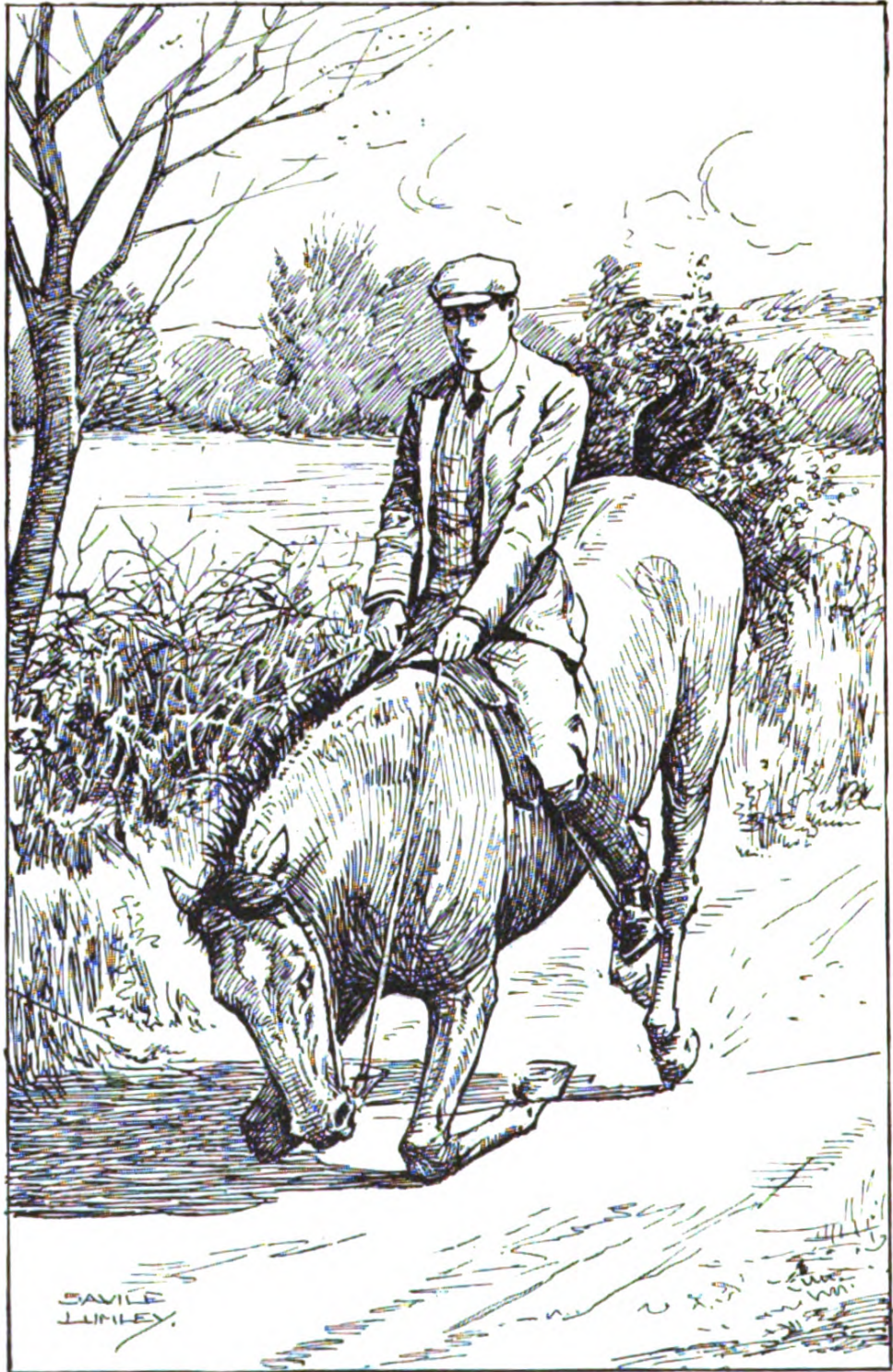
**THE OTHER FELLOW**











SOMETHING CAUSED HIM TO STUMBLE AND GO DOWN  
ON HIS KNEES.

*Frontispiece.*

*See page 111.*

# THE OTHER FELLOW

OF THE HILL FROM THE COLONIES

ROBERT LILGTON

LONDON: ANDREW MELROSE

1900

LONDON

ANDREW MELROSE

1, POSEY SQUARE, E.C.





PLATE I  
FIG. 1  
A. 1911. 111.

# THE OTHER FELLOW

OR

THE HEIR FROM THE COLONIES

BY

ROBERT LEIGHTON

AUTHOR OF

"THE PILOTS OF POMONA" "THE HAUNTED SHIP" ETC.

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAVILE LUMLEY*

LONDON:

ANDREW MELROSE

16 PILGRIM STREET, E.C.



OTHER BOOKS

BY

THE SAME AUTHOR

---

IN THE GRIP OF THE CORSAIR.

UNDER THE FOEMAN'S FLAG.

THE SPLENDID STRANGER.

THE HAUNTED SHIP.

FIGHTING FEARFUL ODDS.

IN THE LAND OF JU-JU.

HURRAH! FOR THE SPANISH MAIN.

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LONDON :

ANDREW MELROSE, 16 PILGRIM STREET, E.C.

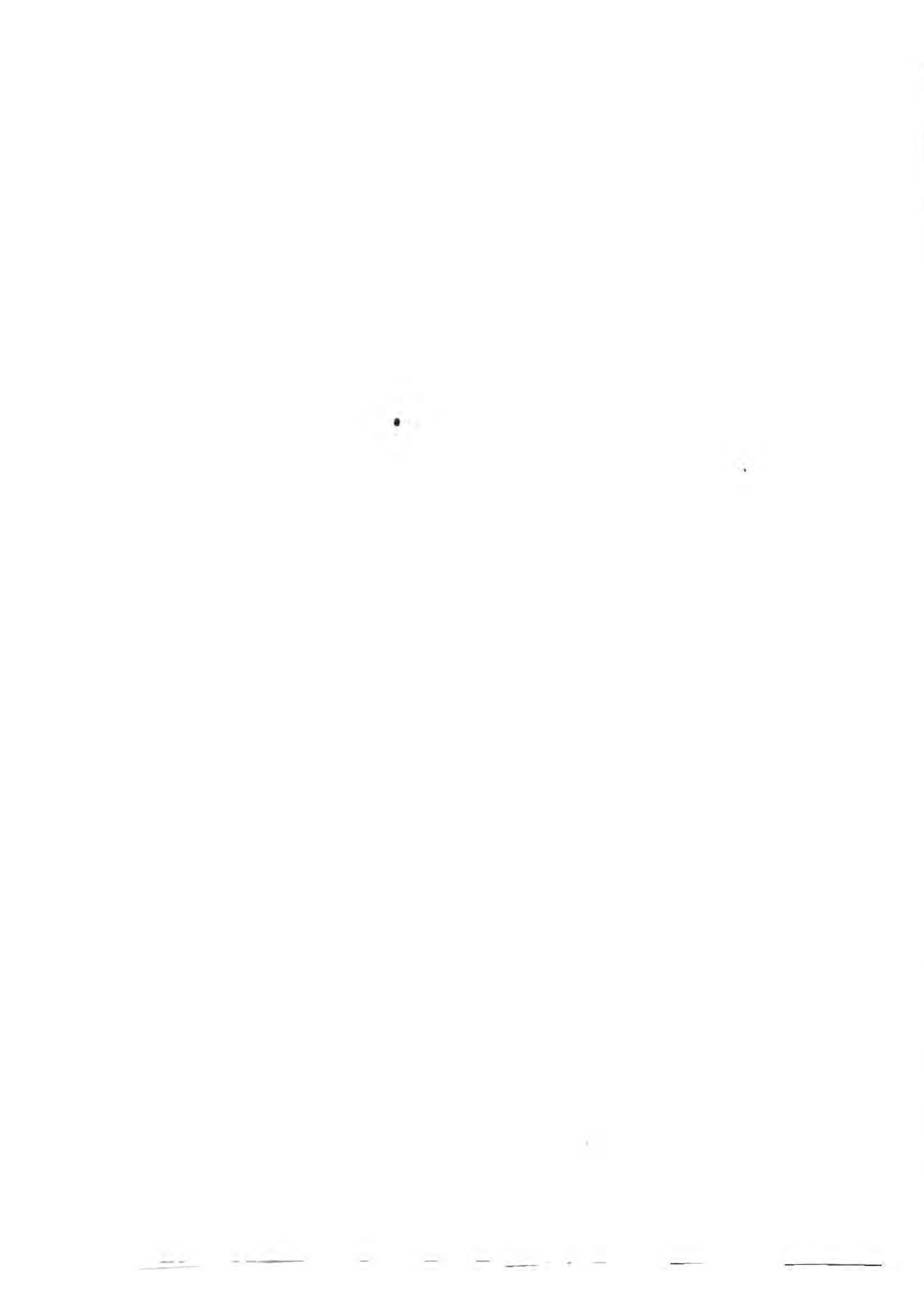


TO  
MAX J. PEMBERTON.

MY DEAR PEMBERTON,

In your enthusiasm for the literature of youth, you once suggested to me the writing of a story which should occupy a middle place between the ordinary book of schoolboy adventure and the mature novel for grown-up readers. Here is an attempt to fulfil your suggestion. The story deals with the serious subject of a crime and its detection; but it is still a book about boys, designed for boys' reading. If the narrative meets with your appreciation, I shall be glad to have inscribed the volume with your name.

ROBERT LEIGHTON.





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# THE OTHER FELLOW



## CHAPTER I.

### THE STRANGER AT THE GATE.

OUR young host and classmate, Roy Thornleigh, and my fellow-guest, Austin Pride, were walking on in front of me along the lane towards Barracombe Manor, swinging their clanking skates at their sides and talking animatedly. The crimson, wintry sun was setting dully behind the black trees, between whose bare branches one could get a glint of the grey sea and the red-tiled roofs of the village.

“Do you know,” Austin Pride was saying, when I overtook them and went in between them, “I never quite realised it before, but if you are the only son, Roy, and the title of baronet descends, as you say, from father to son, the same as the title of a peer, then you will be Sir Roy Thornleigh when your father dies.”

It was just like little Pride to admit that he did



not know the difference between an inherited baronetcy and a created knighthood. He might have gathered from a hundred indications about the Manor that Sir Brian Thornleigh was something more dignified and important than a mere knight. But then, Pride had not long come home from Jamaica, and perhaps it was not to be expected that a fellow who had spent his boyhood in the West Indies should apprehend these distinctions of rank.

“Well, yes,” responded Thornleigh, “the title and estates will come to me eventually, I suppose. But that, I hope, won’t be for a good long time yet. I don’t want my father to die, you may be sure.” He glanced aside at me as I joined them. “Hullo, Saint,” he nodded, “I thought you’d lost yourself. What have you lagged behind for?”

“I’ve just been having a last try at the outside edge,” I answered, dropping into step with him. “And then I was delayed unfastening my skates. It’s a beastly shame this thaw has come on. We shall have no skating to-morrow, I’m afraid. Did you hurt your head when you fell, old chap?”

He looked at me sharply.

“You’re always finding out awkward things,” he smiled. “You ought to have been nicknamed something else than Post Scriptum; yours are not after-thoughts. How did you know I’d had a fall?”

They called me Post Scriptum at school, my initials being P. S., standing for Percival Saintsbury.

"I knew, because your coat has sloppy snow on it," I answered, "and the back of your cap is wet. What's Pride been saying about your being heir to the title?"

Pride moved away from the hedge, and took the outside of the path, thus placing Roy between us. He never liked me to have the favourite position.

"I thought you once told me you'd an elder brother," he said, resuming his broken conversation with Roy Thornleigh.

"So I had," returned Roy. "But he's dead, you know. He died in Canada, six or seven months ago—had an accident of some sort on a cattle ranch where he was working. He was five years older than I, and would have been just twenty-one now, if he'd lived. Indeed, I believe it was his birthday the day before yesterday."

Pride walked on in silence a few strides, trying to keep in step with us—which wasn't very easy, seeing that he was such a little chap. Then he remarked, as if fishing for more information concerning Roy's dead brother—

"Seems rather queer, the son of a rich baronet working on a cattle ranch!"

Roy made no response. He was always uncommunicative on this subject, and not without cause; for, so far as I understood, Wilfred Thornleigh had not been a brother to be proud of. Roy, indeed, was more than a bit ashamed of him, seeming to think

that Wilfred's delinquencies reflected some discredit upon himself.

"Why did he go out to Canada, and not up to Oxford or Cambridge?" Austin Pride pursued.

Thornleigh seemed to wince under the awkward question. To change a subject which I knew to be painful to him, I interposed with the idle remark—

"Rather a rummy walk that sailor chap has, going in front of us, hasn't he? Do you see how he gives his right heel a sharp twist inward, just after he lifts his foot from the ground? And hasn't he got enormous feet, eh? His footmarks are twice the size of any of ours!"

Thornleigh glanced first at the stranger's footprints on the thawed ground and then at the stranger himself.

"Yes," he agreed. "He wouldn't do for a soldier, eh? My brother Wilfred had a walk like that, and no amount of training could get him out of it. What's the fellow staring in at our lodge gates for so inquisitively, I wonder?"

The man in advance of us had stopped, and stood looking through the ornamental iron bars towards the mansion at the top of the avenue. Many people paused thus in passing, no doubt to envy the fortunate folk who lived in such a splendid place.

"Perhaps he's spying round to see what he can nick," suggested Pride, rather unwarrantably, I thought. "I heard old Crabtree telling Mr. Gedling

this morning that there'd been a strange man prowling about the grounds in the night—a burglar, he said it was.”

Roy laughed.

“A burglary would certainly add zest to the holidays,” said he. “But Crabtree’s a muff with his alarms. He’s always hearing unaccountable noises in the night, and disturbing the household by flinging open his bedroom window to discover imaginary poachers and thieves. What time was it when he saw the chap?”

“Somewhere about midnight,” answered Pride. “The butler saw him disappear among the dark bushes.”

“Midnight?” repeated Roy in surprise. “Oh, that’s different. I fancied it might be at four o’clock in the morning, because at that time I was outside in the grounds myself, and it was bright moonlight. It’s a good thing that Crabtree didn’t let off his blunderbuss at me, as he did once at an innocent fisherman who had been leaving a basket of fresh mackerel on the kitchen doorstep.”

I thought it curious that a boy of sixteen should be out at such an hour.

“Why on earth were you in the grounds at that time of the morning?” I questioned him.

“Well,” he explained, “two of my terrier pups were yelping most awfully, so I put on my dressing-gown and slippers and went out to the kennel. I

found Scorcher lying across the neck of Betsy, nearly choking the life out of her. And Kelpie had got his hind legs and half of his body in the milk trough, and was all wet and cold."

"I wonder at your keeping the little brutes outside on winter nights," remarked Austin Pride. "There's lots of room in the house, isn't there?"

"Yes," Roy nodded; "there's the gunroom, where Wilfred used to keep his dogs. But if I kept mine there, they'd make too much row altogether, while father's so ill in the room just above. Besides, I'm training them to be outdoor dogs, and you can't begin to harden them too soon."

The stranger in front of us was still peering yearningly through the iron rails of the lodge gates, as if he had some desire to enter, yet was afraid to do so. His face was averted from us, but I could see he was a young man. His seedy pea-jacket was too baggy to have been made to fit his somewhat slim, athletic figure, and his clumsy sea-boots were obviously too large for him. It occurred to me, as I casually looked at him, that there was something of intentional disguise about him. What looked like a gold ring on the little finger of his left hand glinted in the fading light as he clutched at the rails and stared eagerly up the avenue. On hearing our near approach, he glanced towards us for an instant, started guiltily, and pursued his way onward, walking more quickly than before, and with less of an impediment in



his stride. It was a stride which, I thought, did not seem natural to him in its exaggerated seaman's lurch. Indeed, I came at once to the conclusion that he was not a seaman.

"He looks like a poor wretch of a tramp, searching for something to eat," suggested Roy Thornleigh pityingly, as the stranger put on pace and disappeared round a turn in the lane. "Let's call him back and give him a few coppers."

He thrust his hand into his jacket pocket, where he was in the careless habit of keeping his loose change. But instead of money, he brought out a bundle of unopened letters.

"Jee-oo-piter!" he exclaimed in consternation. "I forgot all about these letters! I took them from the postman three days ago, to save him the walk up the avenue, and I clean forgot to deliver them! I hope there's nothing important in them." He glanced hurriedly at the various superscriptions. "All for Sir Brian Thornleigh," he decided. "Tradesmen's bills, I guess, and begging appeals for charity. I must take them up to the house at once, anyhow."

"Here comes Tony Middlewick. Give them to him to take," suggested Austin Pride.

Tony Middlewick was the page boy at Barracombe Manor, and he was tearing up the lane behind us on his bicycle. Roy stopped him, and handed him the bundle of letters.

"Give these to Mr. Gedling, Tony," he requested;



and he led the way up the drive, thinking no more of the hungry tramp.

We dropped our wet skates at the kitchen door as we went round to the back of the great mansion to have a look at Roy's Skye terrier pups, and watch them feeding. There were six of them, and two were rickety in their front legs, requiring a lot of attention, which their young master lavished upon them, giving them all sorts of dainty nourishment, such as, I doubt not, the poor wanderer whom we had seen at the gates would have been glad of. But then Sir Brian Thornleigh was exceedingly wealthy, and the money spent upon this litter of puppies was never even calculated. The luxury of the whole house, indeed, was astonishing to a boy like myself, who had been brought up in a home where every shilling was counted.

Austin Pride and I had been invited here to spend the Christmas holidays quietly, and to keep Roy company in his loneliness. Apart from his Aunt Mary, who had no great love for boys, there was no one in the house but Roy and his father, and an army of servants; and Sir Brian was an invalid, confined to his room with some mysterious complaint, necessitating his being kept in absolute quiet, and with the apartment darkened for the sake of his eyes, which had recently undergone an operation.

We had not seen very much of Sir Brian, excepting on Christmas Day, when, with Dr. Partridge's

permission, he came downstairs to dinner, and made a brave effort to enjoy our boyish fun. He was a very handsome, soldierly-looking man, with grey hair which contrasted markedly with his black moustache. I thought him just a trifle too sternly military at first, but when Miss Thornleigh left the table, and he had lighted a cigar, his sternness fell from him like a cloak, and he told us no end of good stories about his pranks at Eton and his life in India.

On the other days of our visit his illness somewhat interfered with our pleasures, especially when we wanted to be noisy, and had to repress ourselves, or else go out of the house, where it didn't matter. But then Roy had warned us not to expect high jinks and noisy parties, and we were prepared to pass rather a slow holiday. Little did we anticipate, when we accepted Roy's invitation, in what a strange and complicated tragedy we were to be involved!

## CHAPTER II.

WILFRED THORNLEIGH.

**I**T was already dark before we quitted the shed that was called a kennel, and Miss Thornleigh was sitting at the head of the tea-table, rigidly straight-backed and severe of countenance, awaiting our tardy arrival in the oak-furnished dining-room.

“You are late,” she observed sourly to Roy, regarding him reproachfully through her gold-rimmed spectacles. “I was almost on the point of sending out to discover if you had all fallen in through the ice. It is ridiculous to go skating in a thaw.” She took the cosy from the teapot. “It has come to something,” she complained, “when I am left to take tea in solitude. Even Mr. Gedling has not come down. Where is he? Do you know?”

Mr. Gedling was Sir Brian’s secretary, and he was accustomed to take his meals with the family. Miss Thornleigh professed to enjoy his intellectual conversation as much as she disliked the conversation of mere schoolboys, who, as she said, had not an idea in their heads.

Roy glanced impatiently at the teacups which his aunt was filling with slow deliberation.

"He is reading to father, I suppose," he responded, taking a slice of bread-and-butter from the plate which I passed to him. "Some letters came, and perhaps they have to be answered before post-time."

"It is rather an unusual hour for letters to arrive," remarked Miss Thornleigh, with a sniff. "Surely the Post Office people cannot pretend that the pressure of Christmas has extended into the New Year!"

At this moment Crabtree entered with a dish of hot tea-cakes. His hand trembled visibly as he laid the plate down on the polished oak table, where no one could reach it, and his thin, clean-shaven face showed inward agitation. He heaved a deep sigh, which everyone heard.

"Whatever is the matter with you, Crabtree?" questioned Miss Thornleigh, eyeing him reprovingly over the rims of her spectacles. If looks could freeze, that glance of hers would have been invaluable on Barracombe Lake.

Crabtree coughed nervously, took up the dish of tea-cakes, and again laid it down an inch or two nearer to Austin Pride, who was more regardful of his empty plate than of the perturbed butler.

"If you please, ma'am," stammered Crabtree, "something strange—something most awful strange—'ave 'appened. I could never 'ave believed it! Sir Brian, ma'am, 'e 'ave just 'ad a letter, ma'am——"

"I am sure there is nothing very awful in that," frigidly remarked Miss Thornleigh, as she poised the sugar-tongs above one of the cups of tea which she was so slowly dispensing.

The butler went a hesitating step towards her. He was obviously agitated.

"It's a letter from Master Wilfred, ma'am," he faltered.

Miss Thornleigh dropped the sugar-tongs with a clatter upon the silver tray. Her eyes opened wider behind the spectacles, and she gripped the edge of the table with her thin, heavily-ringed fingers.

"What!" she cried aloud. "A letter from *Wilfred!* Good gracious, Crabtree, are you mad?"

Crabtree caught at his collar as if it were choking him.

"I'm no more mad than you are yourself, ma'am," he dared to say. "I seen the letter with my own eyes, and 'eard Mr. Gedling a-readin' of it."

Roy Thornleigh's face had become suddenly as white as the lace-trimmed tea-cloth. He leaned eagerly across the table towards the butler.

"What do you mean, Crabtree?" he demanded to know. "This isn't the first of April, mind you."

The butler drew himself upright with a start, and looked confusedly from Roy to Miss Thornleigh, and back again to Roy.

"It was when I took Sir Brian's tea up to 'is room just now, Master Roy," he answered. "Mr. Gedlin'

was a-readin' of the letter. They was your brother Wilfred's words 'e read, sir, written three days ago from Barnstaple, and a-askin' of 'is father to send a carriage to meet 'im and fetch 'im 'ome."

"Three days ago!" exclaimed Miss Thornleigh incredulously. "It wouldn't take even three hours for a letter to come from Barnstaple. I don't believe a word of it! Wilfred Thornleigh is dead and buried, and the letter is some impudent forgery."

Roy Thornleigh's face turned to burning red, yet he said nothing to his aunt to explain how the letter in question had been delayed.

"Where is Mr. Gedling?" Miss Thornleigh asked.

"Gone out, ma'am," the butler told her,—“gone to send a telegram to Barnstaple, and to order the carriage.”

The astonishing news which told him that he was not the heir to the baronetcy had a marked effect upon my young host. He stared vacantly before him at the yellow silk shade of the table-lamp; his pale lips twitched nervously, and I heard him murmur the words to himself—

"Wilfred—*alive!*—impossible!"

I do not know why it was, but my thoughts at that moment flew back to him whom we had seen staring in at the lodge gates, and to what Roy had said of him, "My brother Wilfred had a walk like that." Was it possible that that young fellow in the sailor's clothes was Wilfred Thornleigh himself, and that the



report of his accidental death in Canada was untrue? Or was the newly-arrived letter indeed an impudent forgery, as Miss Thornleigh had proclaimed it to be?

Quickly finishing his tea, Roy rose and walked unsteadily to the door.

"You had better not disturb your father now," cautioned Miss Thornleigh. "He will be too agitated over this most unexpected news to see anyone at present."

"I am going to find Mr. Gedling," Roy turned back to say. And he shot a glance in my direction, beckoning me to accompany him.

Excusing myself to his aunt, I left the table and followed him into the hall. Pride also chose to relieve Miss Thornleigh of his presence. I repeat, she was not partial to boys.

Roy ran upstairs while I waited in front of the hall clock, and he was longer in returning than I had expected him to be. I wondered what was keeping him, and if he had intended that I should follow him upstairs. In the meantime, Austin Pride had taken up his cap and strolled out through the porch, turning abruptly in the direction of the stables.

"I'm going down to the village," Roy said, as he joined me at the hall door. "Come along. We needn't wait for Pride."

Roy was strangely uncommunicative as we walked down the carriage drive. Probably he was thinking, as I was, of his brother, who had been counted as



dead, and who was now about to return to the home from which, five years ago, he had run away to hide his disgrace.

One night, months before, in the quiet of the study which we shared at school, Roy had confided to me some facts about this brother of his, and the facts came back to my memory now with a new meaning. Wilfred Thornleigh had always been wild and ungovernable as a boy, full of deceit and cunning and untruthfulness; making companions of the stablemen and grooms, and acquiring from them the perilous habit of gambling. He took this habit to school with him, and led his class-fellows into the same dangerous pursuit. Betting and cheating brought about the complaints of parents whose sons were mysteriously losing their pocket-money, and then followed his summary dismissal. His father, who then held brevet rank as Major in the Guards, and had not yet inherited the baronetcy, considered the boy not good enough for military service, or promising enough for the University, so sent him into a commercial office in Bristol to earn his own living.

Here Wilfred Thornleigh's gambling propensities were even more energetically indulged in. He lost money heavily, got deeply into debt, and finally forged his employer's signature on a bank cheque. His crime was discovered, as in the circumstances it was bound to be, and, in dread of certain punishment, he escaped abroad just in time to avoid arrest. Nothing

was heard of him for many months, but at length he wrote to his father from Canada, begging for help. In response to repeated appeals, money was again and again sent out to him. For three years this continued. "Father sent him no end of money," Roy had told me.

Sir Brian, with his soldier's rigid sense of honour, had repaid the sum which his son had stolen, and even gone so far as to offer his help in bringing Wilfred to the law's just punishment; but the boy's employers had withdrawn the warrant for his arrest, and the father, while withholding his forgiveness, continued to send help in generous measure.

Suddenly the demands ceased. Sir Brian wrote to his son in vain, cabled to him with no result, advertised for him—even offered a reward for information concerning him. Then, after a long interval, a letter arrived from a person in Manitoba, intimating that Wilfred Thornleigh had met with a fatal accident in an encounter with a mad bull. The missing heir was dead and buried, it said, and the writer claimed the reward, which was duly forwarded to him.

And now had come the astonishing, inexplicable intelligence, that Wilfred Thornleigh was still alive and in England, close to his father's home!

"Do you credit this strange news?" I questioned Roy.

He answered with a dubious head-shake.

"I must see Gedling, and know exactly what was

in that letter before I make up my mind," he said, halting at a side path that led into the shrubbery and across the fields. "I shall find him on the way to the village. But," he added confusedly, "you might go down to the lodge and see if he's there, will you?"

What he expected me to do if I should see his father's secretary at the lodge he did not say, and he was off before I could question him, leaving me perplexed.

The avenue was dark under its bare, overhanging branches, that dripped dismally on the moist gravel. I walked slowly, thinking still of Roy's brother, and his strange, unexpected return. Why had he thought it necessary to request that a carriage should be sent to fetch him from Barnstaple? Unless he was ill or infirm, the distance was not so great that he could not have walked it. And if he did not wish to walk—if he had a particular purpose in desiring to come by a conveyance—there was always the coach, which passed the very gates of Barracombe Manor.

I reflected that the letter asking for the carriage to be sent was already three days old. Had Wilfred resolved to wait in Barnstaple until the brougham should come for him? Perhaps so. Perhaps he had determined to adopt this method of testing his father's forgiveness. But if that were the case, then, in the circumstance that the carriage had not been sent for him, he must surely have abandoned all hope

of a kindly welcome home. Roy's neglect to deliver the letter was certainly most unfortunate.

And yet, so far as I knew, Wilfred Thornleigh had voyaged all the way from Canada in the expectation of being received with forgiveness. Was it likely that he would give up all thoughts of returning home simply because his letter had provoked no immediate response? I thought it much more probable that he would make the journey on foot, and boldly enter his home, and I wondered at Sir Brian supposing that there was any use in despatching a telegram or a carriage after so long a delay.

But then, I concluded, Wilfred Thornleigh had not yet arrived in Barracombe, and no doubt there was something in his letter which had prompted Sir Brian to send the carriage and the telegram. It was therefore very natural that Roy should want at once to see and question Mr. Gedling, who had read the letter, and could explain everything that Roy desired to know.

When I got down to the lodge, I found that the door was shut. There was no light in the latticed windows—not even the reflected flickering of a fire. I knocked, but no one answered. I knocked again, and there was no response. It was clear that Mr. Gedling was not here.

There was no use in my going on to the village. I should probably miss Roy Thornleigh, for he had gone and would probably return by the path across

the fields. I resolved to go back to the house and finish a book that I was reading.

I had walked some fifty yards up the avenue, when I was arrested by hearing the sound of hurried footsteps far in among the trees. I listened. The snapping of hard twigs caught my ear; then I thought I heard voices in angry altercation, followed by a call for help. My heart beat quicker with vague apprehension. Leaving the gravelled drive, I leapt the fence and plunged in among the trees. At the roots of one of them I was startled by a hare, struggling to free its torn foot from a snare that some poacher had set. I stopped, and was liberating the animal, when, a few yards beyond me, in the dark shadows, there was a stealthy movement among the shrubs, the hasty snapping of twigs and the beating of feet on the soft ground, as if some person were running away. Something impelled me to give chase, and I started off. But I had not gone many strides before a dark figure, darker than the black bushes, appeared in front of me and almost flung me to the ground, as I clutched at an arm.

“Who are you?” I cried. “What are you up to, here?” I held tight to the struggling arm.

It was Roy Thornleigh’s voice that answered me. I released his arm.

“Saintsbury!” he panted, staggering back. “Is that you? Why are you here? Go away! Something awful has happened!”



My foot trod upon something soft.

“What is it?” I gasped.

I heard him open his silver match-box. “Look!” he exclaimed, in a voice hardly above a whisper. He struck a wax match, and held it with shaking fingers, bending down to shed its flickering light upon the ghastly thing that my foot had touched. Bit by bit the tiny flame revealed what lay there, terribly silent and ominously still—first, a seaman’s grimy white guernsey, stained wet with blood, and then upward along the inert body to a livid, wounded young face, half hidden in dank and withered bracken.

I drew back in horror. Even by that dim, uncertain light, I recognised the coarse pea-jacket, the clumsy sea-boots, and the tattered peaked cap of the stranger we had seen looking in at the lodge gates—the unknown tramp whose walk so curiously resembled the walk of Wilfred Thornleigh! My glance lingered for an instant on the gold ring that he wore on the little finger of his left hand. It was an uncommon-looking ring, of curious foreign design. I was bending to look more closely at his face, when the light went out.

“He is dead—quite dead!” murmured Roy, in a trembling voice that was awful to hear. And the extinguished match dropped from his fingers and hissed on the moist ground at his feet.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE SIGN OF GEMINI.

**R**OY took out another match from his silver box, but his hands trembled so violently that he dropped it. He was unaccountably agitated. I took the box from him and struck a light, and held it aloft.

The dead youth was lying on his back, with his right arm outstretched from the shoulder, the fist tightly clenched. From what I could see of his face, which was disfigured by a cut across the nose, I judged him to be about twenty-one years of age. His lips were apart under a slight, fair moustache, and I saw that one of his front teeth was broken. He seemed to have been engaged in a severe struggle with his assailant, for his clothing was disarranged, and he had many injuries; but the immediate cause of his death was evident in the dark crimson stain which had its centre in a ragged hole in his grimy knitted guernsey of yellow-white wool.

“It’s a queer sort of accident,” Roy Thornleigh faltered nervously.

“Accident!” I repeated, looking up into his

terrified face. "Oh no, this was no accident." I threw the burnt-out match aside into the brambles. "Give me another," I asked; but Thornleigh had pocketed his silver box, and did not seem disposed to continue the grim examination. I stood up.

"One of us ought to run for a doctor," I suggested. "Does Dr. Partridge live far away?"

Roy answered with unexpected alacrity.

"I will go and fetch him," he volunteered.

It occurred to me that he was remarkably eager to quit this scene of tragedy. What did he know concerning this young man's death? How had he chanced to be here, on this spot, when he had told me he was going to the village, which was in an opposite direction? Against my will, I began to have vague suspicions. Yet I did not dare to detain and interrogate him. What right had I, his guest, to question him?

He went quickly through the bushes, and presently I heard his retreating footsteps along the path that made a short cut to the main road.

He had taken his match-box with him, and I was left in the darkness, alone with the body. In the oppressive silence, which was broken only by the whispering of the night wind in the bare tree tops, a feeling of dread stole over me—a dread that there was more in this business than was apparent. I could do nothing. It would require a wiser head than mine to get to the root of this hideous crime.

I did not touch the thing that lay at my feet. I understood that in a case of death by violence, such as this, it was of first importance that nothing should be disturbed until a qualified medical man, or the police, should examine into every detail as to the position of the body, and search for such evidence as might be afforded by broken twigs or the marks of feet. That this was a crime, and not an accident or a case of self-destruction, I was already firmly convinced by what I had seen. If I had a light, I reflected, I might be able, while waiting for Dr. Partridge, to make some helpful discoveries. I might even find the weapon with which the fatal act had been committed.

I remembered that the gamekeeper's cottage was near—nearer than the porter's lodge or the Manor House. I could run there and get a lighted lantern or a candle, and be back again in a very few minutes. Perhaps, also, I might find the gamekeeper himself, and bring him to give help. I stood listening. Thornleigh's footsteps along the plantation path could no longer be heard. Instead, there came the crunching sound of carriage wheels on gravel, and the steady beat of a horse's hoofs. Probably it was Sir Brian's brougham being driven to Barnstaple. Assuring myself that the body might safely be left, I made my way through the undergrowth of withered ferns and tangled brambles to a narrow track that led to the cottage.

There was a light in the window. I lifted the latch of the door and rushed within excitedly, without knocking. The gamekeeper was in the little room, rolling up his shirt sleeves, and standing with his back towards me near the sink, as if he were about to wash his hands. His cap was on a corner of the table.

"Thew!" I cried, "give me a lantern—quick! There's a fellow lying dead in the plantation!"

He turned his head, eyeing me askance.

"Dead, did you say?" he inquired very coolly, as if my announcement were a common one in his experience. "Who might the fellow be?" He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, and stood facing me—a tall, soldierly man. His bare arms were very muscular, and covered with red hair.

I shook my head, unconsciously taking up his cap as I answered haltingly, "I—I don't know. A tramp, I believe."

Thew nodded. He had a contempt for tramps and poachers.

"There've been a lot of that sort hangin' round lately," he remarked slowly. His keen eyes were fixed upon my hands as I put down his cap. He leaned forward and caught at my right wrist, drawing it closer under the lamp-light. I saw with horror that my fingers were stained red, and I instinctively snatched my hand away, wiping it on my handkerchief.

“You’d best ha’ let en lie there,” he warned me. “It beant for the likes o’ you to ha’ aught to do wi’ vagabond tramps. Leave he where he be, and I’ll look arter en by and by, when I go my rounds. I’ve only just woke up.” He signed towards the sofa, to indicate that he had been asleep there.

“You have not been asleep for a long time,” I contradicted. “You’ve just been out in the plantation.” For an instant I wondered if it had been he whom I had heard running guiltily away.

“What!” he cried indignantly.

“There’s wet mud on your boots,” I declared, “and yet they have not dirtied the sofa, as they must have done if you had been lying there. And your cap, here, is warm from your head.”

He frowned angrily, but promptly recovered his composure, and responded—

“Yes, I forgot. I’d just been out to the well to fetch some water in. And you’m wantin’ a lantern, eh?”

He crossed to the dresser and took down a small electric hand-lamp, such as I had seen used by Roy Thornleigh in the kennel.

“There you are!” he said, switching on the clear light, and accompanying me to the door, as if he were in a hurry to get rid of me. “That be better than candle or lantern. I shall come along arter ’ee when I’ve washed.”

The bright light illumined the moist ground and the dripping trees as I went back through the plantation, flashing the penetrating rays from side to side. Very soon, I was again standing over the ghastly body of the dead tramp, directing the electric light upon his prostrate form, and shrinking from the fearful sight. To my great consternation, I observed that the body had been rudely disturbed from the position in which I had left it.

What did this mean? It seemed impossible that anyone could have been here in my brief absence; yet there was no mistaking the fact, that since I had gone away the pockets had been rifled, and that even the gold ring had been removed from the little finger of the left hand, where I had seen it not a quarter of an hour before, when Roy Thornleigh had held the lighted match.

Going down on my knees, I timidly examined the cold left hand—examined it intently. Most assuredly it was not the hand of a seaman. It was soft and delicate, and of good shape, and the nails had been carefully trimmed. On the little finger I plainly distinguished the depressed mark of the tight-fitting ring, with a slight abrasion on the first knuckle. It had been an unusually wide ring, and of peculiar design. My mental impression of it was that there were some letters or figures engraved in relief on the broad gold band. I did not suppose it to be of such value as to induce anyone to resort to violence in



order to gain possession of it; but nevertheless it had obviously been stolen.

I bent down lower, and searched the ground where the hand had at first rested, and there, as I had half expected, I discovered that the weight of the hand had impressed the design of a small section of the ring on the soft earth—not very distinct, it is true, but sufficiently so to indicate the nature of the design, for at one point I made out one of the twelve Arabic signs of the zodiac—the sign of Gemini.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BARONET'S HEIR.

THE disappearance of the ring may not seem to have afforded a significant clue to the mystery of this young man's death. I did not regard the circumstance as important. Nevertheless, it appeared to me that if that little band of gold had been stolen, as assuredly it had been, then the person who had taken it from the dead hand could be none other than the individual who had caused the poor fellow's death, and that to find the thief would at the same time mean the finding of the assassin.

While yet I was looking at the dead youth's marred and disfigured face, and wondering how one so evidently of good position in the world had come to be dressed in such shabby clothes, and wandering, as it were, homeless and hungry, I was startled by hearing footsteps approaching hurriedly from two separate directions. I waved the electric lamp and whistled, as a signal. From one direction came Roy Thornleigh, accompanied by Dr. Partridge; from the other, Thew

the gamekeeper strode quickly, with Austin Pride at his heels.

Pride ran up to me, and, clutching at my arm, looked down at the thing upon which the light was shining.

"It's that tramp—the tramp we saw staring in at the lodge gates!" he declared, drawing back into the shadow.

Thew snatched the electric lamp from my hold.

"Stand back, and let's 'ave a look at he," he commanded, going round the body, and in the process stamping out all the footprints that might have helped in the work of identifying the escaped criminal. "Strikes me I've seen the chap afore," he said, with a curt nod towards Dr. Partridge, who now knelt down to make an expert examination of the victim. "He be one of them poacher vagabonds that have been prowlin' round the last night or two, though you'd hardly expect a foreign-goin' sailorman to know how to set a snare."

"This man was not a sailor," I denied.

"Look at the clothes of en," retorted the gamekeeper.

"They are the clothes of a fisherman, not of a deep-sea sailor," I told him.

The doctor glanced up at me.

"How do you make that out, Saintsbury?" he questioned.

"Why, sir," I answered, "there's a flavour of fish

about him, and there are some fish scales clinging to the welts of his boots and the seams of his trousers."

Dr. Partridge examined a tiny silvery speck on the youth's knee.

"Yes," he agreed, "they are herring scales. But, fisher or seaman, he is beyond our help. This is a case for the coroner, not for a medical man. Have you found the weapon—a long-bladed knife of some sort?"

"No," I answered, and was surprised to see the gamekeeper's keen eyes fixed upon me in undisguised suspicion. He drew me aside.

"I shall be bound to say I seen the blood on your hands when you came into my cottage just now," he said pointedly. "But, of course, being as you'm the young master's friend—well, I shall leave it at that when the coroner do question me."

I met his accusing glance.

"What do you mean?" I cried. "Do you imagine that *I* have had anything to do with this?"

He gave an unpleasant laugh. "This beant no time for argifying," he sneered, turning away.

Dr. Partridge had risen to his feet, and was flashing the lamp-rays into our faces.

"Does no one of you know how this happened?" he asked.

I glanced at Roy Thornleigh, expecting him to supply the answer. But Roy only shook his head. The gamekeeper moved uneasily, seeming to ignore

the doctor's interrogation. Austin Pride stepped forward, and said—

“It was a quarrel of some sort. I heard it going on. But I was afraid to go near, and I went away. Afterwards, I saw a fellow running from somewhere here about. He nearly knocked me down.”

“Ah!” nodded the doctor. “And should you recognise him again?”

“I think so,” returned Pride, glancing in my direction.

Dr. Partridge had already searched the dead youth's pockets, but found them empty.

“Have you ever seen this young man before?” he questioned me.

I replied by telling him how we had observed the tramp peering in at the gates, to which Thornleigh and Pride both added that they too had seen him, and were certain of this being the same person.

I confess that I was somewhat surprised that Roy Thornleigh did not volunteer fuller information than this. He had watched Dr. Partridge making his close scrutiny of the poor fellow's features,—opening the eyes, disclosing the teeth, turning back the hair from the white forehead, inspecting the suspiciously soft hands,—yet Roy betrayed no sign of recognition, nor seemed for an instant to question the possibility of the tramp being more than a mere stranger. Dr. Partridge himself, too, who had been the Thornleighs' physician for years, and knew each member of the family, was

apparently unconscious of any lingering likeness between this supposed vagrant and the erring son who had run away five years before, and who was expected to return to his home this very night. Yet I—I who had never consciously set eyes upon Wilfred Thornleigh—had already privately surmised that this was he.

It is true I had no tangible evidence to bring me to this instinctive conclusion; I had nothing to support my vague theory excepting Roy's chance remark that there was a similarity between this tramp's way of walking and that of his brother—this, and my knowledge of Wilfred's delayed message from Barnstaple.

I sincerely, devoutly, hoped that I was wrong. But, arguing the possibilities in my mind, it appeared to me that my surmise was not wholly ridiculous. What were the circumstances, as far as I knew them? Wilfred Thornleigh, the disgraced and presumably dead son and heir of the wealthy baronet, had written to his father to announce that he was coming home. He had written from a town barely half a dozen miles distant. Sir Brian Thornleigh had not doubted the genuineness of the letter, or he would not have despatched his carriage to Barnstaple. Now, I asked myself, why had Wilfred Thornleigh requested that a carriage should be sent for him? Clearly, because he was too poor to afford a conveyance on his own account. It was obvious that he was poor. In the circumstances, a person having money at his command would





“ DOES NO ONE OF YOU KNOW HOW THIS HAPPENED ? ”  
HE ASKED.—*Page 30.*





first have telegraphed to announce his arrival in England, and then have driven home in a hired vehicle. Wilfred Thornleigh, however, had sent his message by the cheaper, slower medium of the penny post, and had waited in Barnstaple for the expected response.

He had not anticipated that his letter would be accidentally delayed in transit. And so I argued, receiving no reply, he had inferred that his father had resolved still to ignore him, still to withhold his forgiveness. He had therefore decided to tramp to Barracombe, and to take careful observation of his chances before making bold to go up to the front door and cast himself, like the prodigal son, on his father's mercy. How it happened that he was dressed in fisherman's attire I did not pause to explain. The point was immaterial to a theory which fitted in with the facts as they were presented to me. Yes, surely this was Wilfred Thornleigh!

But how had the poor hopeless wanderer come by his tragic death?

As I tried to solve this problem, a fearful thought forced itself upon my mind—an unworthy thought, I own; but I could not lightly dismiss it.

My companion, Roy Thornleigh, had heard the announcement of Wilfred's impending return. With all his many admirable qualities, Roy was ambitious. He had long set his heart upon succeeding to the baronetcy and to the ownership of the rich Barracombe

estates. But the unlooked-for home-coming of his elder brother struck a blow at his hopes, and flung him back to the position of a dependent younger son. However unworthy Wilfred had been, he would yet be accounted and legally recognised as the heir, and would ultimately enter into the enjoyment of his heritage. And now his claims had been frustrated by this grim tragedy on the very threshold of his home! Whose hand had stayed him? That was the fearful question which perplexed me.

The one person above all others to whose interest it was that Wilfred Thornleigh should not come back, was his younger brother, Roy. Had Roy Thornleigh been mad enough to prevent that return by shedding his brother's blood? My brain whirled at the terrible thought. It was not to be credited. It was surely impossible. Yet I remembered with what consternation Roy had heard of the letter from Barnstaple. I remembered his strange silence as we walked together down the avenue; his unaccountable breaking away from me on the pretext of going to the village, when in truth he was going in an opposite direction. I remembered the voices I had heard in altercation among the trees, and I could almost believe now that one of those voices was his own. It was he, and he alone, whom I had encountered on the very scene of the crime, and I had found him suspiciously haggard, agitated, and trembling. Were not these circumstances ample reason for my doubts?

They were, I acknowledge, unworthy doubts, unworthy suspicions for one boy to cherish against another, who was his bosom friend. And I ought to have stifled them. But yet——

My self-questionings were broken in upon by Dr. Partridge.

“We must have him taken up to the house,” he decided, turning to Roy Thornleigh. And Roy’s response might almost have seemed to support my theory of his possible guilt.

“No, no!” he cried hoarsely. Not to the house! He must not be taken there. There’s a shed near Thew’s cottage. That is the place.”

The gamekeeper heard this proposal, and offered an excited objection to it.

“I don’t want no corpses harboured on my premises,” he complained, “and me all alone in the cottage. I couldn’t rest in my bed.”

“The premises are not yours, Thew,” Roy Thornleigh reminded him. He turned to Dr. Partridge. “Let it be carried to the shed,” he ordered.

“Very well,” acquiesced the doctor. “Thew and I can manage, if we can get a hurdle to serve as a stretcher. But first I will ask one of you boys to run up to the house and let Sir Brian know that I shall be with him in half an hour. Saintsbury,” he added, “you might go, will you?”

He had been on his way to Barracombe Manor when Roy met him on the road. It was usual for

him to visit his patient at this time in the evening, as well as in the forenoon.

Pride and the doctor remained by the side of the body, the gamekeeper went in search of a hurdle, while Roy Thornleigh strolled in among the trees in the direction of the plantation path. I momentarily wondered what his intention might be. It was not until he gave his evidence at the inquest that I learned why it was that he thus went apart from the others.

I found my way out to the avenue, and walked quickly towards the great house, whose lighted windows shone cheerfully into the outer gloom of the wintry evening. Just as I reached the turn of the drive where it sweeps round the lawn in front of the mansion, the hall door was opened, and a man came out. As he passed me and greeted me with a "Good evening, sir," I observed that he wore something red under his open jacket—a muffler or waistcoat. He had the general appearance of a farm labourer, and I thought it rather queer that one of his kind should have come out from the front hall instead of from the kitchen entrance.

Tony Middlewick, who had shown the man out, held the door ajar, watching him. As I entered, I asked—

"Who is that rough-looking customer that's just gone out, Tony?"

Tony glanced inward, and I was considerably sur-

prised to observe Miss Thornleigh and Mr. Gedling standing near the fireplace with a tall, shabbily dressed young fellow, whose somewhat weary but aristocratic face was lighted by the glow from the flaming logs on the open hearth.

“——so very unfortunate that you had to walk,” Miss Thornleigh was saying, with a cordiality that was not quite spontaneous. “You must be tired. Crabtree will show you to your room, and take up a cup of tea to you. Dinner is at seven o’clock.”

He bowed to her awkwardly, and turned away as if in confusion towards the stairs. Miss Thornleigh looked in dismay at the footmarks made by his muddy boots on the rich carpet.

I touched Tony’s elbow in giving him my cap. “Who is that?” I asked in an undertone.

Tony made a peculiar grimace. He was always unduly familiar.

“It’s Master Roy’s brother, sir,” he answered,—“Master Wilfred, jus’ come ’ome from Cannida. And ’e’s going to hoccupy your bedroom.”

I started, astonished, and looked in wondering perplexity at the young fellow as he followed the butler up the wide baronial staircase.

“Wilfred!” I repeated to myself. “*That* is Wilfred Thornleigh! Then who and what is that other one—the one lying dead in the plantation?”



## CHAPTER V.

### THE BARNSTAPLE LETTER.

I WAS pleased rather than otherwise that Miss Thornleigh retired at once into the drawing-room, thus relieving me from the inconvenient necessity of informing her of what had happened in the plantation. She was one of those excitable women who make a great fuss when anything goes wrong, and who demand a categorical explanation of every unpleasant circumstance, without being able in any way to help in smoothing a difficulty; and I did not want to be subjected to her useless questionings.

Mr. Gedling had left the hall, and was following the butler and Wilfred Thornleigh up the softly-carpeted stairs. I went after him.

“If you are going up to Sir Brian, Mr. Gedling,” I said to him, “would you please let him know that Dr. Partridge has been detained, and that he will be here in about half an hour?”

The secretary paused and looked back at me over his shoulder. A dark-haired, sallow-faced, clean-shaven man he was, on the younger side of thirty.

He had been Roy's tutor before Sir Brian retained him as amanuensis. Roy did not like him. I often wondered why. I myself had a sort of instinctive dislike of him, and without having any actual reason, I distrusted him. He struck me from the first as being double-faced, and I felt almost sure that his conversations at table were not sincere; he seemed to assume an air of intellectuality merely for the sake of maintaining the good graces of Miss Thornleigh. But my chief objection to him was that, while posing as a well-born gentleman, he lacked the breeding and politeness of one.

"Quite extraordinary for Dr. Partridge to be late," he remarked lightly. "He is usually so punctual. A case of sudden illness, perhaps? Where did you see him?"

I put my hand on his arm to delay his further ascent of the stairs.

"Down in the plantation," I answered. "He is looking after a person who has been killed there—a poor tramp or poacher."

"Killed!" echoed Mr. Gedling in horror. "Do you mean shot—by the gamekeeper?"

"No, not shot," I answered, wondering at his readiness in casting suspicion on the gamekeeper. "Come into my room presently, and I will tell you about it. But you had better not say anything of the affair to Sir Brian. It would only excite him. Dr. Partridge will tell him, if necessary."

For the moment, I had forgotten what Tony Middlewick had said of the bedroom I had hitherto occupied being relinquished to Wilfred Thornleigh. It was known by the household as "Master Wilfred's room," and all its original furniture had been retained—his bookshelf, with his few school prizes and cribs, his model yacht and cricket bats and tennis rackets, his writing-desk and sock cupboard. Very little had been altered, except in the process of an annual spring cleaning. He would find everything almost exactly as he had left it. Crabtree was even now conducting him into the room just as if he had been a total stranger, although I should have thought that, in spite of five years' absence, he would have been able to find his way to it blindfolded.

Mr. Gedling crossed the spacious landing, that was lighted by a tall silver lamp which stood on the centre table. As he passed this table the secretary caught sight of a letter that lay upon its polished mahogany top. He paused as if to take the letter in his hand, but only touched it, giving it a flick with his fingers that made it spin round, and leaving it there, while he turned silently into Sir Brian's darkened room, closing the door behind him.

Waiting there until the butler should reappear and tell me what room I was now to occupy, I approached the table to turn down the lamp wick, which was burning too high and sending a fine thread of black smoke against the glass chimney. I had the curiosity

to glance at the letter, and was interested to discover that it was the one written by Wilfred Thornleigh from Barnstaple. The paper was of poor quality and without any heading. The handwriting was boyish and slovenly. I could read it from where I stood, and even now I recollect what was written, almost word for word.

“BARNSTAPLE, *January 3rd.*

“TO SIR BRIAN THORNLEIGH, Bart., M.P.

“DEAR SIR,—You will be surprised to know that I am in England once more, and on my way to Barracombe. I wish I might say with confidence that I am on my way home; but I do not intend to return without your consent, nor am I sure that you will receive me as your son, even when I tell you that I come back determined to be worthy of you and to live an honourable life in the future. Whether you forgive me or disown me, however, I trust that you will not refuse to see me, and allow me to prove to you by spoken words how sincerely penitent I am for having caused you so much sorrow and disgraced the name I bear.

“Dear father, I am no longer a thoughtless boy, but am altered in many ways. I am sorry for my past sins, and I crave you to pardon me and recognise me as your son, for the sake of my dear dead mother. If I may see you to-morrow, I will ask you to telegraph to me, care of Post Office, Barnstaple, and to send a carriage to meet me, for I am spending my last penny

on a postage stamp for this letter, and am what the lads in Canada call stony broke. I am hoping yet to recover my belongings, but most of them have gone down with the cattle boat in which I crossed from Montreal for Bristol, she having run upon the rocks at Hartland Point in the storm three nights ago. You may have read about the wreck in the newspapers. Luckily, I was able to save myself by clinging to a bullock that carried me ashore.

“Hoping this will find you in good health, and with love to Aunt Mary and Roy, I am, dear sir, your affectionate son,

“WILFRED THORNLEIGH.”

I had read to the end of this penitent epistle when the door of Wilfred Thornleigh’s room was opened. Crabtree came out, and—seeing me waiting, beckoned me to him, as he entered the room adjoining.

“Miss Thornleigh thought as ’ow you wouldn’t mind movin’ into the next room, sir,” he said, lighting a pair of candles, “bein’ as Master Wilfred ’ave come ’ome and ought to ’ave the other one. I’ve shifted all your things—leastways, I think I’ve brought them all in.”

I found a can of hot water in the wash-basin. There were blood-stains on my right hand and cuff that had to be washed off. I could well understand the gamekeeper’s suspicions. Yet when I entered the cottage I had not touched the body of the dead tramp.

I could only conclude that the blood had come from the wounded hare that I had liberated from the snare.

That snare had been set by some poacher. Could it be that the tramp had set it? Was he, after all, no more than a common poacher? Somehow, his importance had diminished in my estimation now that I had cause to believe that he was not Wilfred Thornleigh; although I, of course, realised only too surely that whoever and whatever he was, his precious life had been taken, and that his unknown assailant was no less guilty than if the victim had been generally known to be as highly placed in the social world as I had at first believed him to be.

I was thinking of the crime while I washed, and was preparing to change my clothes for dinner. Opening drawer after drawer, I found that Crabtree had neglected to bring in my clean linen. It was still in Wilfred Thornleigh's room. Throwing on my dressing-gown, I went to his door and knocked.

"May I come in?" I asked.

I heard him move across the floor before he answered, "Yes, certainly." And when I entered he was standing with his back to the candle-light, facing me. He had taken off his jacket and vest, and his rather coarse flannel shirt was open at the neck. His sleeves were rolled up above his elbows, and he was drying his hands.

"I'm afraid Crabtree has left some of my things



here," I said, approaching the chest of drawers and passing him, so that in watching me he had to turn and face the light. He stared at me inquiringly.

"You are not—not my brother Roy?" he questioned awkwardly, and, I thought, also uneasily. It seemed to me rather odd that he should fancy even for a moment that I was Roy; we were so different, and Roy had not changed a bit in all the three years that I had known him.

"No," I returned; "I am Roy's chum. My name is Percy Saintsbury. We are schoolfellows. He will be in soon, I expect."

He turned to the dressing-table and took up the cup of tea which the butler had brought, and drank it slowly. As he put it back, the empty cup trembled, ever so slightly, against the edge of the saucer. He was evidently excessively nervous as to his reception on coming back to the home from which he had been absent for so long, and for so discreditable a cause.

"Will you excuse me opening one of your dressing-table drawers to get a clean collar?" I asked, going nearer to him.

He moved aside, and I caught sight of his bare, strong left arm, observing that there were indigo marks upon it; but he took it away so quickly that I had not time to see whether the marks represented a fanciful design or, as I rather believed, the initials of his name.

"I wish I might borrow a collar from someone,"

he said bashfully. "My own wardrobe has gone clean to bits, and I haven't a thing to wear except what I have on." He glanced in the direction of a very shabby leather bag that was on a chair at the foot of the bed, and then strode towards it and pressed it open. As he did so, I noticed that his left sleeve came unrolled. "This is everything that I saved from the wreck," he went on, plunging his hand into the bag. He threw a bundle of papers on the bed. "That's a lot of my father's letters," he smiled; "nearly all of them had remittances in them. And here's a pair of Indian moccasins that I brought home for Roy, though I don't suppose they'll fit him; and a bead purse for aunt. Most of my clothes went down in my trunk that was in the cabin when the ship struck, and there were lots of other things as well. But this good old bag was on the end of my bunk, and I'd just time to save it."

I went nearer to him.

"Rather a difficult job to get ashore with a heavy bag like that, wasn't it?" I casually remarked. "But I suppose you hung it on the horns of the bullock?"

He looked at me blankly.

"The bullock!" he echoed in a curiously vacant tone, as if he did not understand my reference.

"Yes," I reminded him, "the bullock that swam to shore with you."

He gave a short, awkward laugh.

“Oh yes, yes, of course,” he returned vaguely, closing the bag with a sharp snap. “How did you get to know about it?”

He had tripped me here. How indeed should I know by what means he had landed from the wreck? But, after all, it was no great wrong that I had done in reading his letter.

“Well,” I admitted, “I read about it in the letter you wrote to your father from Barnstaple. I saw the letter lying on the landing table just now, and I ventured to look at it. I suppose Mr. Gedling has left it there for Roy to read. It was all through Roy that your father didn’t get it sooner, you know. He shoved it in his pocket with a lot of others, and forgot all about it until just before tea-time this evening. That’s how it happened that the carriage wasn’t sent for you, and you had to walk all the way from Barnstaple.”

He went back to the dressing-table and took up a comb and brush.

“I didn’t walk all the way,” he told me. “I got a lift in a gipsy’s caravan, and”—he hesitated—“and the carriage passed me outside on the road. Did you put this clean collar here for me to wear?”

“Yes, if it will fit you,” I nodded; “and the shirt too. And you’ll find a choice of neckties and cuff links in the left-hand drawer.”

“I suppose I ought to shave,” he resumed, looking into the mirror meditatively and rubbing his chin,

which was certainly in need of attention. "But I've got no razor. I hope Aunt Mary will excuse me. Thank you so much."

I returned to my own room and finished dressing, thinking as I did so of this tall young heir from the Colonies, who had come home so unexpectedly. It was rather awkward that Roy was not in the house to receive him; awkward, too, that Wilfred had arrived on the top of that awful occurrence down in the plantation—that crime whose happening had so disturbed my own nerves, and would soon set the whole household astir with excitement.

If the thing had not been so terrible, I could almost have laughed at myself for my mistake in having supposed that the unfortunate young man who was lying dead down there was Wilfred Thornleigh. But his apparent age and my knowledge that Wilfred was expected, combined with what Roy had remarked about the stranger's manner of walking, had caused me to jump to the conclusion. Roy and Dr. Partridge had not been similarly deceived; but then they had both been familiar with Wilfred Thornleigh before he left home five years before, and even though five years' absence and the transition from youth to manhood were calculated to alter the features and disguise his resemblance to his former self, yet it was obvious now that they had not had even an instant's fleeting suspicion that the dead tramp might be Wilfred.

When I opened the bedroom door again, gently and noiselessly, so as not to disturb Sir Brian, I was considerably taken aback by observing Wilfred Thornleigh leaning over the landing table reading his own letter that I had left there—reading it absorbedly, as if he had never seen it before, and were hurriedly mastering its contents.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WHAT I FOUND IN THE KENNEL.

HE laid the letter down again precisely as he had found it, and crossed the landing to examine the prints that were hung upon the oak panelled walls.

“We might as well go down and wait in the billiard-room,” I suggested. “I don’t suppose Sir Brian will see you until after dinner, at all events, and I think I hear Roy coming in. He has been down in the plantation, where a young fellow has been killed.”

He shrank visibly. “Killed!” he echoed in a strange, hollow whisper. “How?”

I uttered the one awful word—“Murdered!”

I thought that his face grew paler in the lamp-light, and that his eyes regarded me furtively.

“How horrible!” he muttered, with a catch in his breath as he turned away. “Was Roy there when it happened?”

“No,” I answered. “No one saw it done.”

I stood at the top of the stairs to let him go down



a couple of steps in advance of me. Now that he had washed and brushed himself up a bit, he looked much more presentable than he had done when I saw him first in the front hall. Perhaps it was his rough suit of brown tweed that still gave him the appearance of a backwoodsman unaccustomed to the refinements of an English country mansion. I noticed that he had exchanged his thick, heavy boots for the pair of moccasins that he had taken out of his bag.

“It must feel awfully odd to you, coming back here after so long an absence,” I remarked, as we went down. “But I suppose you don’t find much difference in things?”

He answered carelessly, “No; everything is pretty much as I expected.”

After this remark of his, it seemed strange that, when he reached the foot of the stairs, he should turn to the left, instead of to the right, in search of the billiard-room.

“That’s the way to the kitchen,” I reminded him, and he turned sharply.

In the back hall he paused to look at the portrait of a soldier, painted by Mr. Pettie.

“Awfully fine-looking chap, that,” he commented. “Anyone in particular?”

“Anyone in particular!” I repeated, astonished at his singular lapse of memory. “Why, that’s Sir Brian Thornleigh. That’s your own father!”

His face went as red as the soldier's tunic.

"Ah, so it is!" he nodded, with sudden recollection. "It must have been painted recently—since I left home."

"On the contrary," I assured him, "it was done quite ten years ago, when your father was only a captain." At which he knitted his brows in vexation, and moved abruptly away.

Miss Thornleigh, hearing us speaking, I suppose, came out from the blue drawing-room, and accompanied us into the billiard-room, where a bright fire was burning. I judged that after so prolonged a separation she and her nephew might wish to talk together privately, so I presently withdrew.

Tony Middlewick was coming down the servants' stairs carrying two pairs of boots, one pair being my own.

"Has the doctor come in yet?" I asked him.

"Yes, sir," he replied; "'e've jus' gone up to the master's room, lookin' as surly as anythink."

"Whose boots are those?" I inquired, indicating the pair that was not mine.

"Mr. Wilfred's, sir," the page answered, holding them nearer to me, "and ain't they dirty? You'd think they 'adn't been polished for a month."

They were certainly not very clean. The mud on them, indeed, was extraordinary, in view of the fact that the roads had been hard with frost until after three o'clock in the afternoon, when the thaw came

on; considering also that Wilfred Thornleigh had done the latter half of his journey in the shelter of a gipsy's caravan. But perhaps he had approached the house by way of the short cut across the ploughed fields, instead of coming up the avenue.

Tony held the boots with their soles uppermost. I paid curious regard to the right boot, expecting that the sole would reveal signs of the owner's peculiar walk, which would necessarily wear out the leather unevenly. But there were no such indications here, and I concluded that either Roy had exaggerated his brother's twist of the foot, or else that Wilfred had outgrown his faulty method of walking.

I found Mr. Gedling in the front hall buttoning up his overcoat. The outer door was open, and rain was pelting heavily on the gravel and against the windows.

"The doctor has just been telling us about that awful affair down in the plantation," he said, selecting an umbrella from the stand, and coming nearer to me. "I am just off to the constabulary to give information. The police ought to have been informed at once, before the criminal had time to get away. I shall bring Inspector Blower back with me to take preliminary evidence, and you had better prepare a statement for him. You're an important witness."

"Roy Thornleigh ought to be a yet more important witness," I hinted. "He was on the spot before I was. Do you know where he is, Mr. Gedling?"

“Looking after those wretched puppies of his, I suspect,” returned the secretary. “He came back with Dr. Partridge and young Pride, I believe; but I haven’t seen him since lunch-time.”

I glanced at the hall clock as Mr. Gedling went out. It wanted about ten minutes to seven, and Miss Thornleigh was most particular about the punctuality of all meals. If Roy was out at the kennel, instead of getting ready for dinner, he would be late. I decided to go out by the back way and look for him. I wanted to see him before dinner, not only to learn from him what had been done at the gamekeeper’s shed, but also in order that I might hear his account of himself, and so clear my mind wholly and finally of the haunting suspicion that he was keeping a terrible secret.

Now that Wilfred Thornleigh had come home—now that I had seen him in the flesh and spoken with him—my half-formed belief that Roy had at least had a strong motive for committing the horrible crime was happily removed. I had been manifestly wrong in supposing that the young man whom we had seen looking in at the gate—he who was now lying cold and lifeless in the gamekeeper’s hut—was Wilfred Thornleigh. Roy could not possibly have made such a stupid blunder as I had made; it could not have been a case of mistaken identity. Therefore Roy was obviously innocent of the crime of which, for one torturing hour, I had privately suspected him—

the crime of having frustrated the inconvenient return of his brother by taking that brother's life.

I went out by the covered way that led to the old tool-shed used by Roy as a kennel. There was a light shining through the half-open door, and I entered. Roy was within. He was not at the moment attending to his puppies, but was busily engaged in a farther corner of the shed. I could almost have believed that he was hiding something, for he gave a perceptible start when I spoke to him. My slippered feet had made no noise as I approached.

"You'll be late for dinner, old chap," I said. "It's close on seven o'clock. Leave the pups until afterwards. Do you know that your brother Wilfred has arrived?"

"What!" I shall not soon forget the expression of amazed incredulity that came into his pale face as he shouted the word.

"He is in the house—in the billiard-room with your aunt," I informed him.

He stared at me wildly for an instant, with flashing eyes. "I don't believe you!" he retorted. "It's impossible!" He quitted the shed abruptly, leaving the electric lamp alight.

Its rays shone athwart the shed and illumined the opposite corner, in which I had discovered my friend concealing something under a stretch of old sacking. I had the curiosity to take the lamp nearer and turn back the sack. There I found a long, formidable-looking

knife. It was just such an instrument as I believed to have been used down yonder in the plantation—just such a weapon as Dr. Partridge had told us to look for. I took it in my hand, but no close examination was necessary, for I saw with a pang of horror that its long, sharp-pointed blade was stained with newly-shed blood.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BROTHERS' MEETING.

I HAD often seen that same knife before, but had never known it to be taken down from its place above the mantelpiece in Roy Thornleigh's bedroom. It had hung there as a trophy, with an old flintlock pistol, a South Sea war club, a Zulu assegai, a Highland claymore, and other interesting relics such as a boy loves to adorn the walls of his den with.

It was more like a dagger than a knife. The haft was made of carved ivory, which was yellow with age. The blade, which was of highly tempered steel, was long and narrow, tapering to a fine point, and the edge of it was exceedingly sharp. And now it was smeared with blood. Was it—could it possibly be—the blood of the unfortunate tramp? I dared not think so.

Yet what did it mean? Why was it here? Roy, as I remembered, had gone upstairs before we went out. Had he gone to his bedroom to take down this weapon with the intention of using it? Had he divined that the tramp was his brother, and

gone out to lie in wait for him? Such brutal premeditation was horrible to imagine. Yet I had seen him hiding the knife behind the screen of sack-cloth here in the kennel. I could even fancy that the ivory haft was still warm from his hand. I touched the blade with the point of a finger. The blood had certainly not been there very long, for it was still moist and bright in colour.

Oh, why—why had he gone out? Why had he sullied his hands by participating in this terrible crime—even to the extent of shielding the actual criminal by concealing the weapon?

I put back the knife where I had found it, and covered it up. Roy was my friend, my close companion. I was his guest in his home. I could not betray him. I must share his awful secret, cost what it might.

Turning off the light of the little lamp, I left the kennel and went back into the house, into the billiard-room, where I found Miss Thornleigh and her nephew seated together on the couch near the fire, he with one foot on the brass fender, a hand extended to the warmth; she sitting prim and demure as usual, with her heavily-ringed fingers clasped on the lap of her black satin gown. Austin Pride was at the table, noisily knocking about the billiard balls.

I strolled into the farther window-seat and took up a newspaper, in which I found a very brief account of the wreck of the steamship *Winnipeg*, on Hartland

Point. Bound from Montreal for Bristol with cattle, she had run upon the rocks in a westerly gale, and become a complete wreck. All hands, it seemed, had been rescued. A lifeboat had gone out, but most of the survivors had been taken off in the steamer's own boats and landed at the little haven of Clovelly. No passengers had been on board, or, at least, none was mentioned in the report, and I accordingly surmised that Wilfred Thornleigh had worked his passage home, possibly in some capacity in the cabin, for although he was poorly dressed, yet his appearance was such that I could not think he had acted as cattleman, and as surely he had not worked as a seaman, or his hands would have betrayed rough usage.

From where I sat, I overheard him telling his aunt about a bear hunt in the Rocky Mountains, of which he was himself the undaunted hero. This subject was possibly suggested by the fact that there was a beautiful bearskin rug in front of the fire, near which he was sitting. Miss Thornleigh did not seem to be listening to him with great attention; indeed, I detected her in a covert yawn. Nor was this surprising, for he was not an adept at telling a story dramatically.

He had killed the bear when Crabtree came in to announce that dinner was served, and it was at this juncture that Roy entered, looking strangely haggard, as if his secret were weighing upon his mind.

He had hastily washed his hands and face, and

given a brush to his hair; but although he had put on a black jacket and his patent leather slippers, yet he had not changed his collar, as I knew by the slight smear of mud that was upon it, only partially hidden by his necktie.

"Ah, here is Roy at last!" observed Miss Thornleigh, rising.

Wilfred rose also, restlessly fingering his moustache, and regarding his younger brother with curious intentness. They were at opposite sides of the billiard-table. Neither moved round to meet the other at closer quarters, and they could not reach across so wide a space to shake hands. There was not even the semblance of a smile on Roy's thin, pale lips. He simply nodded, and said, rather coldly, I considered—

"Hullo, Wil! Come back home, have you?" He caught at a billiard ball and spun it across the green table, making a cannon that he would have been proud of had he struck the ball with a cue.

"You don't seem much surprised?" nodded Wilfred, as he turned to follow his aunt and Austin Pride into the dining-room.

"I'm only surprised to see you so much changed," returned Roy, as they came together at the door. "I don't think I should have known you if I'd met you unexpectedly. You've grown darker. And how tall you are!"

"You are just the same," rejoined Wilfred, again

intently scrutinising his brother's face. As he passed the butler, I noticed that he gave his right foot the peculiar twist which Roy had remarked upon in connection with the tramp.

Wilfred sat at his aunt's right side. I was at her left, facing him and Roy. They did not look like brothers, although their complexions were somewhat alike, both being dark. Roy was very much the more refined and aristocratic. But then, one had to make allowances for Wilfred. Life on a Canadian cattle ranch was not calculated to give him gentle manners or a delicate skin, and I opined that it was his long sojourn among rough men which had caused him to neglect those little graces of behaviour at the table which are inculcated in almost all English public schools, and are certainly drilled into us by Dr. Trevelyan, at whose school Wilfred in his time had been a boarder. He took his soup from the point of his spoon, bit his bread instead of breaking it, rested his wrists on the edge of the table with his knife and fork held upright, and drank with his mouth full.

Miss Thornleigh was quick to notice these lapses, and they obviously irritated her.

"I suppose, Wilfred, that in Canada you have not been accustomed to dining in what we should call polite society," she said, almost bitterly, when he was rude enough to touch a chicken bone with his fingers. "I trust you have not forgotten *all* that Mrs. Trevelyan taught you."

He blushed deeply, and looked at his aunt as if he would ask who on earth Mrs. Trevelyan might be. I could almost have supposed that he had lost his memory as well as his polite manners. A curious blank expression came into his face whenever anyone outside his father's family happened to be mentioned. And this was noticeably the case when Roy said to him—

“Of course you heard that Tom Bowden has got the V.C., didn't you?”

Wilfred repeated his old schoolfellow's name absently, questioningly.

“Bowden! The V.C.! Indeed?” he ruminated. I felt sure that he had no clear remembrance of Tom, and that he was even doubtful as to the significance of a V.C.

“Yes,” resumed Roy, “he did awfully well in the war. I suppose some of your Canadian chums went to South Africa, didn't they? I wonder you didn't go too. You could have gone, if you'd only been in the North-West Mounted Police.”

Wilfred was evidently on surer ground here.

“I tried to join once,” he remarked, “but my French was rocky.”

“Your French!” interposed Miss Thornleigh in surprise. “But you used to be so good at French!”

“About the only thing he ever *was* good at in the way of scholarship,” murmured Roy. At which his brother smiled grimly.



There was an uncomfortable restraint in our conversation. Miss Thornleigh did not disguise her annoyance at her newly returned nephew's unpolished manners, and I think also she was not over-much pleased at his allowing the butler so frequently to fill his wineglass. She spoke very little. Some grown-up people are negatively awkward and unsympathetic in the company of boys, but Miss Thornleigh was a positive wet blanket, and you couldn't talk freely and naturally in her presence. Austin Pride certainly tried his level best, in his own priggish way, to come up to her conversational standard; but Roy was peculiarly silent. As for Wilfred Thornleigh, as he drank more and more claret he became talkative, it is true, and said a good deal about Canada; but nothing that he told us was particularly enlightening, and all of it was wearisome.

We were near the end of dinner, when there was a ring at the hall door bell.

"Whoever can that be at this time in the evening?" cried Miss Thornleigh.

Roy looked down at the pattern of his fruit plate as if it were unfamiliar. Wilfred and Pride were both silent.

"I expect it's the police," I said, forgetting that Miss Thornleigh had not yet been told of what had happened in the plantation.

"The police!" she ejaculated. "Good gracious! What could the police want here?"

I avoided looking at Roy. Instead, I glanced at his brother, and was astonished to see an awful ashen pallor come into his face. His lips twitched, he drew his hands from the table to hide their trembling. He was manifestly alarmed. Did he imagine that the police were on his track for that long past crime of his—the crime of the forged cheque?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### “A REGULAR CORKER.”

THERE was a tense silence in the dining-room. In the outer hall a man's gruff voice spoke. Then we heard heavy footsteps going in the direction of the library. Presently the butler reappeared.

“If you please, ma'am, it's Inspector Blower,” he announced mysteriously to his mistress. “He do ask to see the young gentlemen in the libr'y. Mr. Gedlin' 'ave come in with 'im. It's about a poacher that were killed dead in the plantation this evenin'. I've to go up and ask the doctor to go in first.”

Miss Thornleigh stood up, and all of us followed her example. Her countenance showed sudden consternation. She was assailing Crabtree with questions, when Roy intervened.

“All right, Crabtree,” he said authoritatively. “Don't make a song about it. Tell Blower to let us know when he is ready, and we will come to him. We shall be in the billiard-room.” He looked sideways at his brother. “You used to be a good player, Wil,” he went on. “Do you care for a game? I

daresay Saintsbury will take you on. Won't you, Saint?”

His voice was a trifle strained and unnatural. He was himself a much more skilful player than I, and I did not quite understand his reason for putting me forward to play, unless, as I guessed, he didn't want to betray his own nervousness.

“Just as you like,” I agreed.

“I'm afraid I'm rather out of practice,” demurred Wilfred somewhat languidly; “and besides, I'm tired.”

Miss Thornleigh went at once to the library to gather what she could of gossip about the crime, not supposing that we three boys might have told her much more than Inspector Blower yet knew. The four of us turned into the billiard-room, and Wilfred Thornleigh strode at once to the shelf near the fireplace where Sir Brian's cigars and cigarettes were kept. He selected a very large cigar and proceeded to light it. When Tony Middlewick came in with coffee, he asked also for a liqueur.

“Don't you fellows smoke?” he asked, holding the open cigar-box towards us with a generosity which indicated that he was beginning to feel himself perfectly at home. We all declined. “What! not even cigarettes?” he questioned. “No,” we each replied in his turn. He went to the rack and took out a cue, and chalked its tip with the air of one who was certainly no novice.

“What’s all this about the police and the poacher?” he lightly inquired, addressing Roy. “Saintsbury hinted something about it before we came down to dinner, but he didn’t tell me how it had happened.”

Roy answered, “There’s a poor fellow been done to death down in the plantation. It’s not certain that he’s a poacher, though. He looked more like a fisherman. Anyhow, he is dead, and I suppose Inspector Blower has come to get information.”

“Has the person that did it been arrested?” Wilfred asked, taking a billiard ball out of the pocket nearest him.

Roy had gone to the top of the table to put the red ball in its place. Austin Pride answered for him.

“No,” said he; “the fellow has escaped.”

“There used to be a lot of poaching done here, years ago,” observed Wilfred; which was a safe observation to make concerning an estate in which game was plentiful. “Who’s the head gamekeeper now—the same fellow that was here before I went away?”

“What! Roberts?” returned Roy. “No. Roberts was turned off four years ago. It’s a pensioner out of father’s regiment who has the job now—a man named Thew.”

Wilfred seemed to be relieved at this information. I called to mind that Roy had once told me how his

brother and the dismissed keeper had quarrelled over some gambling affair.

“Do you remember how Roberts caught the gipsy that time, Roy?” Wilfred asked. “The gipsy was making off with a sackful of pheasants, you know.”

“Pheasants!” repeated Roy dubiously. “I didn’t know that we ever had as many pheasants on the estate as would fill a basket, let alone a sack. They must have been partridges, surely?”

Wilfred was quick to correct the slip that he had made. “Well, perhaps it was partridges,” he admitted. “And the gipsy got three months’ hard labour.”

He strolled to the mantelpiece where he had left his liqueur, and emptied the glass.

“Talking of gipsies,” interposed Austin Pride, “I saw a caravan of them going along the road when we were skating on the lake. I wonder if the dead poacher was a gipsy!”

Wilfred seemed to catch the remark with suddenly awakened interest. He returned to the table.

“More likely it was a gipsy who killed the poacher,” he declared. “Gipsies will do anything.”

Roy seized upon this theory with surprising alacrity. He did not know that I had found his bloodstained knife.

“I do believe it was so!” he said eagerly. “Nothing more likely than that it was the gipsies that did it!”



Wilfred had taken the first stroke. We had engaged to play a game of fifty up. I paused while levelling my cue, and glanced at him. His eyes were upon the red ball, which was on the brink of the top pocket, but I am pretty sure that it was not of the game that he was thinking. I played, and missed the ball by a hair's breadth. He showed not the slightest interest in my failure—scarcely seemed to have observed it.

“Those gipsies must have been the same who gave you a lift along the road,” I reminded him. “Did they stop to let you alight at the lodge gates?”

He gave a perceptible start, then shook his head, and bent over the table.

“It wasn't at the lodge gates that I alighted,” he explained, making a dexterous stroke and pocketing both my own ball and the red. “I came across the field track. But one of the gipsies carried my bag for me, and I daresay he went away through the plantation. Possibly the poacher was an enemy of his, and they may have had a row when they met. I don't suppose the poacher was worth robbing.”

This explanation of his having approached the Manor by way of the field track accounted for the mud which I had noticed on Wilfred Thornleigh's boots. It also cleared from my mind a trifling doubt as to the way in which the bag had been brought to the house. His hint, too, about the possibility of the gipsy having committed the crime was decidedly

valuable, dispelling for the moment my secret suspicion of Roy's complicity; for Roy could not possibly stultify himself by keeping the secret of a common vagabond. I resolved to mention it presently to Inspector Blower, who would, no doubt, institute a search for the gipsies and bring the offender speedily to justice. A heavy burden seemed to have been lifted from me. I breathed more freely, in the confident belief of Roy's absolute innocence. Perhaps, I reflected, I ought at once to hasten into the library and put the inspector in possession of this important clue!

But Wilfred Thornleigh was continuing the game with a brilliant break. He was an excellent player, and was scoring hand over hand. To leave him now, when I was being beaten, would look cowardly. He finished his break of eighteen points, which Tony Middlewick duly marked on the board, and I took my turn with better luck. Very soon I got level with my opponent, and seemed likely to beat him.

Roy was interested in a game which promised an exciting finish. I had made forty-seven to Wilfred's forty-five, and left the balls in a most difficult position, requiring most skilful play on his part. He contemplated the balls, hesitating. His own was against the cushion on the left side.

“ This is a regular corker ! ” he murmured. “ What am I to do ? ”

Roy went closer to the table and regarded the game critically.

“Why, you can manage it easily,” said he. “Play that tricky stroke that you used to do so well. Bob Ackroyd’s stroke, we used to call it. You can’t have forgotten it.”

Wilfred scratched his chin in embarrassment, and smoked vigorously at his cigar. It was evident to me that he had not a ghost of an idea what stroke it was that his brother was referring to. And yet, he had formerly excelled in it. His frequent lapses of memory were becoming almost amusing. How he proposed to extricate himself from his present difficulty without exposing his ignorance I could not imagine. Very opportunely, however, the butler came in and requested me and Roy and Pride to go into the library, and Wilfred thus escaped an awkward predicament.

He did not offer to accompany us into the library, preferring, as he said, to go up to his room and unpack his things. Before he left the room, he provided himself with two or three cigars.

At the library door Mr. Gedling detained me, first allowing Roy and Pride to pass into the room.

“Saintsbury,” he said, “Dr. Partridge would like you to go down to the plantation with him and Blower. Have you got your boots on? It’s raining hard.”

“What about the statement you told me to prepare?” I asked.

“That can wait until afterwards,” he replied. “Blower is in a hurry.”

I returned to the billiard-room to ask Tony Middlewick to bring my boots. But Tony was not there. I waited some minutes, not liking to ring the bell, and then decided to get another pair from my bedroom. I went upstairs softly, as usual, on Sir Brian's account. With the instinct of habit, I was about to enter the chamber that I had already occupied for over a fortnight. The door was ajar. I pushed it farther open, and before I realised my error and drew back with an apology for my intrusion, I had seen something which thrilled me with wonder.

Wilfred Thornleigh was within, standing at the chest of drawers, upon which there was a lighted candle. He was excitedly trying to pull a gold ring off the little finger of his left hand. The door creaked, and instantly the light was extinguished. I had caught but a glimpse of the ring, but I could almost have sworn that it was the same that I had already seen twice that night—the ring with the Arabic signs of the zodiac.

## CHAPTER IX.

### IN THE GAMEKEEPER'S SHED.

PROBABLY it was the draught caused by my opening of the door which extinguished the candle. A newly lighted candle is easily blown out by a slight breath. I could not suppose that Wilfred had purposely extinguished the light.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said, excusing myself for coming in upon him without warning. "I came to the wrong door."

"Please come in, Saintsbury," he said in a friendly tone, striking a match. He re-lighted the candle, and then I saw that there was no ring either on his finger or in his hand. How I could have made that mistake about the ring I do not know, for a mistake I was persuaded it was, when he quietly asked me to fasten his cuff link for him. It had come undone, and everyone knows how difficult it is to put a link through the buttonhole with one hand. It was a gold cuff link, and I inferred that in the candle-light I had taken its sheen for that of the ring.

Having done what he wished of me, I withdrew

into my own room, where I put on a pair of boots in the dark.

"Do you know anything of the gipsies that Austin tells us about?" questioned Dr. Partridge of me, when I joined the group that had gathered in the hall—himself, Mr. Gedling, Miss Thornleigh, Blower, Roy, and Pride.

"I did not see them," I said, "but I believe they passed along the road a little before sunset, coming from Barnstaple way."

"From Barnstaple!" echoed Pride. "No, it was towards Barnstaple they were going."

I thought he must be in error. His information did not tally with that of Wilfred Thornleigh, but I made no comment. Dr. Partridge glanced at Inspector Blower.

"You had better have them followed up by a mounted constable," he suggested. Then he added, turning to Pride, "How many caravans had they?"

"Three," answered Pride. "They were all painted yellow, and were loaded with baskets and door-mats and things."

"Well," nodded the doctor, "they can easily be overtaken." Again he questioned Pride. "You said that you heard and saw someone running away through the plantation, and that he nearly knocked you down. Can you give Inspector Blower a description of the man?"



Austin Pride's hesitant answer was not enlightening.

"No," he said. "I can only say that he wore a cap and a jacket and that he was going quickly, as if he were afraid of being caught. He might have been a gipsy, or a poacher, or a schoolboy, for all that I could see of him in the dusk."

"Which way were 'e goin'?" inquired the police inspector.

"He was making for the footpath," Pride answered. "I don't know which way he turned when he got to it, except that it wasn't towards the avenue."

"Follow the gipsies," urged Dr. Partridge, addressing Blower.

Tony Middlewick brought two lighted bull's-eye lanterns for us, and I accompanied the doctor and the inspector outside. The rain had fallen to a fine drizzle, but the evergreens at the sides of the carriage-drive were heavy with wet, and as often as not we walked in single file to avoid the pools of water in the channels.

"I don't know if you have heard it, but it was a gipsy who carried Wilfred Thornleigh's bag up to the house," I told the doctor. "It's very likely that he went away through the plantation."

"Yes," he responded. "Roy gave us the information, and it's that same gipsy that we want to get hold of. Wilfred will identify him afterwards."

Near to the plantation path we came upon a

constable whom Blower had stationed there, and from him we learned that the gipsies had pulled up close to a place known as Coppinger's Copse, barely a mile away. They were evidently not afraid to remain in the neighbourhood, and if they had encamped for the night, then there was no great need to alarm them by an immediate raid upon them. The doctor, indeed, thought it better to delay. Accordingly, Inspector Blower and the constable accompanied us into the plantation.

We turned in among the bare wet trees to the place where the crime had been committed, and the police made search for any evidence or clue which might have been overlooked. But nothing new was discovered. The rain had obliterated all footmarks, and there remained scarcely a trace of the grim tragedy.

We went next to the gamekeeper's shed, outside of which a second constable had been posted. Dr. Partridge took the key from his pocket and unlocked and opened the door. As he and the inspector were entering, Thew joined us from his cottage. He was requested to bring warm water, a sponge, and a sheet. While he was absent, I interrogated the second constable as to what he knew concerning the gipsies. His report was a corroboration of his companion's.

"They be up along to Coppinger's Copse," he said. "Three vans there be of 'em."

“At what time did they halt there, do you suppose?” I asked.

“I allow ’twere nigh upon four o’clock,” he answered,—“just upon sunset.”

This, I calculated, would make it about half-past three when Austin Pride saw the caravans passing along the road, and in this case Wilfred Thornleigh must have alighted from the caravan at a quarter to four. Yet it was certainly after six o’clock when Wilfred had arrived at the Manor! There was a perplexing discrepancy here which required explanation. Where had Wilfred Thornleigh been, and what had he been doing, during those intervening hours?

“Tell me, constable,” I pursued, “where had those caravans come from?”

“I’m sure I dunno,” he answered. “Belike they come from Barnstaple, belike they come from Ilfracombe. ’Twere by way of Frog Lane they came, d’ye see? And Frog Lane do lead from allwheres.”

Of course I knew that Frog Lane was the only way by which the gipsies could reach the village or Coppinger’s Copse, but I understood that they were approaching along the main road when Austin Pride saw the caravans. Otherwise he could not have known that they were travelling towards and not from Barnstaple. The constable’s explanation, therefore, left me no wiser than I was before. The point was not important, perhaps; certainly it did not

appear to be so at that moment, for I did not then see that it had any direct bearing upon the crime that we were investigating. I was mainly interested in it for the reason that I was in some little doubt as to the movements of Wilfred Thornleigh. He had allowed us to believe that he had come direct from Barnstaple, and that he had come straight to the Manor from the gipsies' caravan. But if the caravans approached from a direction opposite from that of Barnstaple, and if Wilfred Thornleigh had alighted before sunset at the field footpath, then there remained a good deal that had yet to be accounted for.

Thew returned with a pail of warm water, and we entered the shed.

The body of the dead tramp was laid out, partly undressed, on a low bench. His clothes were of poor material, no better in quality than any ordinary Devonshire fisherman would wear. His socks, however, were of fine knitted wool, and for underclothing he had worn a suit of blue and white pyjamas trimmed with silk braid. Possibly he had not himself bought these garments when they were new, but I made the inward reflection that, as a rule, men of the poorer fisher class are not in the habit of wearing such luxurious sleeping suits. At school we estimated a boy's social position by whether he wore pyjamas or an ordinary nightgown, and judging him by this standard my impression was confirmed that this young man, this tramp or poacher as we called him, was

essentially a person of good class. His skin was fair and of delicate texture. I observed that even his dark brown hair was silky and clean, denoting an attention to the toilet which would hardly be expected of a vagrant such as he was supposed to be.

Dr. Partridge at once proceeded to wash the poor fellow's face that was so disfigured by a wound, and in doing so he again exposed his strong white teeth.

"Do you consider that that front tooth has just been broken, doctor," I asked, "or has it been done some time—for months or years?"

"Well," he meditated, "I should say it has been broken quite lately. The broken edge, you see, is still sharp. But it has not been broken to-night, if that is what you mean, or else the lip would probably be cut. I am more interested in this wound on the side of the nose." He drew the moist sponge gently across it. "See," he went on, "it has bled, but not much. It is an old wound that has been reopened by a blow."

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed beneath my breath.

The doctor glanced at me sharply.

"What is it?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing," I responded, with feigned composure. I was not sure, and I did not want to make rash suggestions; but as I looked upon that livid, dead face—at the smooth white forehead, with the hair turned back, at the well defined eyebrows and long

dark lashes—it occurred to me that this youth was incalculably more like Roy Thornleigh than was the young fellow who claimed to be Roy's brother. The resemblance, indeed, was most remarkable. I was surprised that Dr. Partridge did not detect it.



## CHAPTER X.

### GIPSY JOE.

“ I HAVE an idea, Saintsbury,” said Dr. Partridge, as we followed Inspector Blower and one of his constables down Frog Lane towards Coppinger’s Copse. “ The two police officers in front of us will alarm the gipsies and put them on their guard. I believe we should get much more out of them if either you or I were to question them. I have noticed that you are quick at observation. You have surprised me by your sharpness once or twice this evening. Should you care to undertake the work? Blower and his man will be near to see that no harm comes to you.”

I halted and turned my lantern light into his face.

“ Do you mean it ? ” I asked.

“ Decidedly I do,” said he. “ You’re not afraid, are you ? ”

“ Indeed, no,” I assured him. “ I am willing to interrogate them, and I think I understand all that you want to know.”

The doctor handed me his full cigarette case,

saying that I might find it useful. He told his plan to the two policemen, who agreed to it, and I went on into the copse to where a smoky wood fire marked the position of the encampment. The rain had ceased by this time, and the moon was struggling to penetrate the drifting clouds.

A dog barked, and continued barking until I drew close to the fire, when one of the gipsies quieted it with a curse. I strode along the footpath, and now that I had undertaken this detective mission I was at a loss to know how best it should be accomplished. I soon decided, however.

Three men stood about the fire, one of them attending to a pot that hung above it from a triangle of props.

"Got a pipe o' bacca, Joe?" I heard one of them say as I came abreast of them.

"Ain't got a scrap left," answered Joe, who was the man at the pot. "Our Rebecca's fetchin' some, though, from the pub down there. She ought to be back by now."

I left the footpath and boldly approached the fire. The three gipsies stared at me wonderingly. The dog growled.

"Would you oblige me with a light?" I asked, taking out a cigarette and stepping closer to the fire. One of the men moved aside, and I bent down, holding the cigarette between my fingers.

"'Ere, you won't get it that way," said Joe, and he

snatched a burning stick from the fire, knocked out the flame, and held the glowing end towards me.

“Thank you,” I said, blowing forth a jet of tobacco smoke, and coughing, for I was not accustomed to tobacco. “Not quite so cold to-night.”

“You ain’t got any more of them fags about you, young gentleman, ’ave you?” inquired one of the younger of the men, whom his companions called Seth.

The doctor’s cigarette case proved an open-sesame. I emptied it, and made a generous distribution.

“Have you come a long journey to-day?” I casually asked, watching them closely as they lighted each a cigarette.

“On’y from Ilfracombe,” answered Seth.

Ilfracombe! Then Austin Pride was right. They had not come from Barnstaple!

“Thought as ’e was the chap from Canada when I seen ’im comin’ into the firelight,” remarked Joe to the stewpot, as he meditatively cut up a Swedish turnip with a very long knife. “Enoch won’t get no supper if ’e don’t come back quick.”

“No,” added Seth. “Where ’e’ve got to I dunno.”

“Was it Enoch who carried the bag up to the big house yonder?” I ventured to ask.

Joe looked across at me, puffing at his cigarette.

“Whose bag?” he questioned.

“Why, the chap from Canada—the chap you gave a lift to.”

The three gipsies exchanged glances.

"Yes," said one. "That was Enoch. You ain't from the big 'ouse yourself, are you, Mister?"

I admitted that I was, and asked if Enoch had not come back again, to which they replied that they had seen nothing of him since he lifted the bag over the stile and went with it up the field path at about half-past six.

"Half-past six?" I repeated inquiringly.

"That were the time exactly," nodded Seth, with evident sincerity.

I made a quick mental calculation, and came to the conclusion that if the gipsies were speaking the truth, then Enoch could have had nothing to do with what had occurred in the plantation, for at that time Dr. Partridge was already on the spot examining the dead body. But were they indeed speaking the truth? I doubted it. From the moment when I had admitted that I was staying at Barracombe Manor all three of the gipsies seemed to eye me with suspicion, and to all my subsequent questions they gave evasive and unsatisfactory replies. All that I gained from them was the knowledge that one of their number was missing, and that he had last been seen on the Barracombe estate.

Could it be possible, I asked myself, that the ill-starred tramp and Enoch the gipsy were one and the same person? Appearances did not point to this possibility, and the question of time came in to

confound my calculations. The mystery was becoming more and more involved and perplexing. But the more difficult the problem grew, the more eagerly did I seek to solve it.

“What is Enoch’s age?” I inquired of Joe.

Joe looked at Seth, and Seth replied—

“Maybe a bit older than yourself,” said he. “Four-and-twenty, or thereabout.”

I nodded. “That would be about the age of the young fellow that was found dead in the plantation over there two or three hours ago,” I said, watching the effect of my words on their faces.

Had a thunderbolt fallen in their midst they could not have betrayed greater excitement. They spoke agitatedly among themselves in a language which I did not understand, but which I took to be Romany. The man named Joe was particularly vehement. I afterwards learned that he was Enoch’s father. He strode about in the firelight like a caged animal, tearing at his hair and beard.

“Who done it?” he demanded furiously, gripping at my shoulders and staring into my face with menace in his dark eyes. “Tell me the man as done it, and I’ll have the life of him!”

I wrested myself away from his iron fingers.

“Was Enoch tall?” I asked him. “Had he a small moustache, and brown hair, and a broken tooth? Had he soft white hands? And was he dressed as a fisherman?”

“Ay, he were all that!” Joe cried, although I did not believe that he had taken in the whole of my hurried description. “Soft white hands! He’d the hands of a gentleman that never done no work. Ay, and a broken tooth that I broke myself with this here fist! ’Tis Enoch, I’ll swear!”

“You had better come and have a look at him,” I proposed. “They’ve taken the body into the gamekeeper’s shed——”

“Gamekeeper!” he cried, pulling his rabbitskin cap down over his brows. “Ay, I’ll lay ’twas a gamekeeper done it.”

“Come!” I urged. “There’s a doctor and two policemen along the footpath here.”

Joe shrank back, eyeing me suspiciously.

“No, you don’t,” he muttered doggedly. “You don’t come over Joe Lee with chaff of that sort, young gen’leman. Joe weren’t born yesterday, not by a long sight. Just you clear out of this, smart—you and your policemen and your doctor and your cigarettes. Clear out, or I’ll set the dog on you, or else learn you the weight of this here fist!”

I thought that I had learnt enough already, and I beat a retreat to the place where Dr. Partridge and the two police officers were waiting.

I reported all that I had discovered, and the doctor suggested that nothing more could be done until the following morning, beyond posting a watch on the gamekeeper’s shed. Inspector Blower however,



considered the case more urgent, and would not agree to this waste of time. He accordingly went himself to the gipsy encampment, and succeeded in persuading Joe Lee to accompany us to the gamekeeper's shed.

As the sheet was drawn back to disclose the body, I observed his face attentively. Horror and a fearful apprehension were in his eyes. He clutched at the bench to support himself.

"Well," interrogated the doctor, "do you know him?"

The gipsy drew back with a deep sigh of relief. He shook his head.

"That ain't Enoch," he declared. "That ain't no son o' mine. No, I never seen he before—don't know him from Adam."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PRODIGAL'S CONFESSION.

I RETURNED alone up the avenue. On entering the hall, I was much surprised to see Wilfred Thornleigh and Mr. Gedling standing together at the foot of the staircase. They were engaged in earnest, mysterious conversation. There was something reproachful and authoritative in the secretary's voice, and Wilfred seemed to be defending himself.

"Anyhow, you've got to face it now, but I don't envy you the task," I heard Mr. Gedling say.

I coughed to make my presence known to them, and they separated abruptly, almost guiltily. I could have imagined that they were hatching some plot, but that I believed they were practically strangers to each other. As Wilfred went upstairs I thought I saw him glance at me with sharp, malicious scrutiny.

His expression was certainly not friendly. Mr. Gedling took a few steps in the direction of the library, which he used as his workroom; but, as if suddenly remembering why I had been out, he approached me.

"Anything fresh been discovered?" he casually asked. "Has the poacher been identified yet? Has the culprit been arrested?"

I shook my head.

"No," I answered, pausing at the fireplace and looking down into the ashes, where a fragment of notepaper with writing on it was slowly burning. I could not read the words without stooping, but it occurred to me that the writing was peculiarly like that which I had seen in Wilfred's letter from Barnstaple. "No," I repeated, "we've not discovered very much, except that the unfortunate fellow was not a gipsy, and not an ordinary tramp."

"Not a gipsy!" he echoed absently. "Was he supposed to be one? I thought he was understood to be a sailor. What does Dr. Partridge say about it? He ought to be able to tell."

"Dr. Partridge is reserving his opinion for the coroner," I returned coldly. "The inquest is to be held to-morrow, is it not?"

Mr. Gedling leaned his hand upon the mantelpiece, and presently I saw him put forth his foot and move the burning fragment of notepaper into the fuller heat of the glowing logs, where it caught flame and was consumed.

"It's as well that they should get it over and done with quickly," he remarked in a tone of relief. "Inquests are always a nuisance; but to have one taking place here in this house, disturbing everyone

and everything, is doubly a nuisance." He raised his head and added with pointed inquiry, "The police haven't seen anything of the gipsies, have they?"

Wondering why he should particularly desire the information, I replied—

"Yes; they have just been to the encampment in Coppinger's Copse, and one of the gipsies has viewed the body."

"Indeed!" There was surprise in the ejaculation. Mr. Gedling bit his lip, and then coughed unnaturally. He thumped his chest. "I'm afraid I've caught a nasty cold going out in the rain," he complained. "Good-night. I've got a lot of letters to write." He went into the library; but only a few moments afterwards, when I was drinking a glass of milk in the dining-room, I heard him come out again and go softly upstairs.

"Master Roy 'ave gone up to bed, sir," Crabtree informed me, when he came in to close the shutters and found me waiting.

This was the first time that Roy had gone up without me, and it looked as if he had purposely avoided me. Usually at bedtime Pride and I had gone into his room to have a last talk before retiring. But to-night I was left out in the cold, and I was sensible of a twinge of annoyance. When I went upstairs, Roy's door was closed. It was evident that he neither expected nor wanted me. Conscious

of a feeling of loneliness, I entered my own room and flung myself on the bed in the dark, trying to puzzle out the problem which was presented in the simultaneous home-coming of Wilfred Thornleigh and the tragic death of the nameless young stranger in the plantation. Was there any connection between these two events?

I was interrupted in my reflections by hearing someone moving about the landing. My door was open, and, looking out, I observed Mr. Gedling crossing to Sir Brian's room. Wilfred Thornleigh was following him. They entered, leaving the door ajar behind them. It may have been a mean act on my part, but I listened and heard what passed between the baronet and the returned prodigal.

"Well, Wilfred, you have come home, eh?" said Sir Brian, using almost the same cold words of greeting which Roy had used. "Sorry my impaired eyesight does not allow me to see you. I suppose you are a bit changed, eh? More of a man, eh? Well, I hope your rough life in Canada has done you good. Nothing like roughing it in the Colonies to knock the nonsense out of a youngster. Had enough of it, have you?"

"Yes, sir," came Wilfred's quietly-spoken reply. "I thought I might do better at home, if you'd give me one more chance."

"Ah! Your voice is altered," the baronet noticed. "I should hardly have recognised it. But of course





“ I SAW A MAN'S DARK FIGURE CROSSING THE LAWN AT A QUICK RUN.”—Page 102.





youngsters' voices do alter. Yours, I think, was not broken when I last heard it. What do you propose to do with yourself, eh? You will have to mend your ways a lot before you can expect me to do anything for you, you know—before you can expect me to forgive and forget your despicable conduct of five years ago. That takes a lot of forgiving, mind you."

"Despicable is a hard word," retorted Wilfred, with a choke in his voice.

"Nevertheless, it is the right word to use in the circumstances," rejoined Sir Brian. "If any young subaltern under me had done what you did, by George, he'd have been court-martialled and dismissed the service; he'd have been imprisoned—yes, even if he had been my own son."

Wilfred murmured something which I did not hear.

"But you forged the cheque," pursued Sir Brian warmly. "You stole your employer's money to pay your gambling debts. You acted like a common thief and sharper, and you ought to have been sent to jail for it. Your running away to Canada was an admission of your guilt. You were too great a coward to face the exposure. Yes, by George, a coward, that's what you were! Deny your guilt if you can. Deny it here and now!"

Silence followed this imperative command, this accusation that seemed to lash like a whip. But at last Wilfred spoke, falteringly and humbly.

“I cannot deny it, sir,” he confessed. “I did forge the cheque, I did embezzle the money and abscond. I was young, I was foolish, easily led astray. I had not a mother’s hand to guide me. But that is all past and done with, and I have come back determined to be worthy of you, and to live an honourable life in the future.” (Here he was quoting from the Barnstaple letter, which was now burnt to black ashes.)

“Come, come!” interrupted Sir Brian. “I don’t want any of the Prodigal Son business, and there’s not going to be any fatted calf, I promise you. Fatted calf, indeed! No, by George! It’s enough for the present that you admit your guilt. When you do that, there is some hope for you. And now, what’s the meaning of the letter I got from someone in Manitoba saying that you were dead—that you’d met with a fatal accident on a cattle ranch? What does it mean, eh? Tell me that! Was it some scoundrelly trick to diddle me out of the hundred pounds reward I offered for information about you?”

Wilfred had his answer ready.

“Mr. Gedling has shown me that letter,” he said, “and I have read it. I know nothing about it, and cannot understand who can have written it. I did not know that you had advertised for me until Mr. Gedling told me. I can only suppose that the fellow who was gored by the bull was someone else with the same name as myself.”

"H'm!" was Sir Brian's dubious comment. "Thornleigh is not exactly a common name, and I should have thought that 'Wilfred Thornleigh' was quite an unusual combination. It is rather queer, isn't it, that there should be two Wilfred Thornleighs both living on cattle ranches in Manitoba?"

"I have never lived in Manitoba, sir," came Wilfred's confident response; "only in Ontario and Quebec, although it is true I have worked among cattle, and have often been in danger from them."

"Perhaps it was your acquaintance with cattle that made you choose to come over in a cattle ship?" suggested Sir Brian.

"No," returned Wilfred. "I came over in the *Winnipeg* because I couldn't afford the passage money on one of the expensive liners."

"Well," resumed the baronet, somewhat impatiently, "you have come back, and that is the one obvious and unpleasant fact. And since you have neither been gored by a bull nor drowned in the sea, Providence evidently intends that you shall be preserved for a kinder fate, so you had better hang your cap up here until I have time and inclination to decide what to do with you."

This was all that I heard, and, having heard so much, I thought it discreet to close my door and get into bed.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A NIGHT ALARM.

**M**Y new room was a small one—as small as my den at school—with a camp bed in it that left little space for the chest of drawers, the dressing-table, and washstand. It must once have been used as a dressing-room attached to the much larger apartment now occupied by Wilfred Thornleigh, for there was a connecting door in the wall that divided them. On Wilfred's side this door was so hidden behind a wardrobe that you would not readily notice it, unless by the merest chance, such as had led me to its discovery.

I had dropped a collar stud on the floor, and it had rolled under the wardrobe, as collar studs have an annoying habit of doing. In searching for it on my hands and knees, I had seen the frame of the door. But in this smaller room the door was plainly visible, although manifestly not meant to be opened, for the bed was against it. There was a crack in one of the panels, and a knot-hole, which seemed to indicate that some occupant of either of the rooms—

possibly Wilfred himself in his mischievous younger days—had at one time been playing pranks, and charging at the door with his boot or his head, or a cricket bat, or something equally substantial.

The knot-hole was just above the head of the bed, and through it, before I turned over to go to sleep, I could hear Wilfred Thornleigh's movements. I heard him opening the drawers, one after another, as if searching for something, or exploring to see what he could find. Once he opened the wardrobe, but closed it again, finding it empty. He dropped a book, and I guessed that he was examining his school prizes, and the story-books that had been presented to him by his Aunt Mary and other kindly-disposed relatives. Probably he was adopting this means of reviving old memories. There are few things that recall the past so vividly as a book that one has thumbed and dog-eared in years gone by. One of the volumes seemed especially to interest him, for I presently detected the sound of the turning pages; and a wicker chair creaked. I was sensible of the aroma of a cigar. I had myself sat reading in that comfortable wicker chair more than once. It was near the fireplace, and Wilfred had a fire in the room to-night. I had heard him say to Crabtree that he would like one. The cold in England, he had explained, was different from the cold in Canada.

Leaf after leaf of the book I heard him turn over. I wondered which particular book it was—not his



Virgil or his Fénelon, I was ready to believe. Perhaps it was one of his stories of adventure; or, even more likely, his old diary, which I had once taken down from the shelf and put back again, because the entries in it were so detailed and explicit, so much in the nature of boyish confessions, that to read it was like prying into the writer's bosom secrets. He was surely very deeply attracted by the volume, whatever it was, if he chose to sit up reading it so diligently after having complained of being tired! He was still thus engaged when I fell asleep.

I did not know how long I had slept, when something—some noise or movement—awakened me. I sat up and listened. A clock somewhere downstairs struck four. Then all was silent. I was about to turn over on my pillow, when half consciously I became aware that someone was talking in the adjoining room. Again I sat up and listened.

The quietly-spoken words that I caught were disjointed. There were two voices.

"You needn't be afraid of the butler," muttered one; "old duffer . . . listen to servants . . . over the worst of it already . . . got to go through with it, anyway."

The second voice spoke even less audibly, and I caught no more than the name of Dr. Partridge, uttered in a tone of anxious inquiry, but the cadence of it convinced me, as I had suspected, that the speaker was Wilfred Thornleigh. I strained my ears

for his unknown companion's response, and it came at length—

“Trust to luck. Brass it out. There's nothing like audacity. Think of the prize that's at stake!”

I did not recognise the voice, but presently I heard it again, mentioning my name, and then I knew it to be the voice of Mr. Gedling. What he said of me I do not know, excepting that it was something about “busybody,” and “the eyes of a lynx,” which I did not take to have direct reference to myself.

I did not care to listen any further. Indeed, I should not have listened at all if my curiosity had not been aroused by the circumstance of a conversation of any sort going on at such an unusual hour of the morning. There seemed to be something secret and surreptitious about it. What surprised me most, however, was the fact of Mr. Gedling being already on such familiar terms with Wilfred Thornleigh, whom I had believed to be an entire stranger to him. What did they know of each other, these two? And what was their motive in meeting in this manner, so privately, so mysteriously, as if they were in conspiracy?

My bed creaked as I turned over. Their voices sank to a subdued murmur. They evidently had a lot to talk about. I was almost tempted to interrupt them by rapping on the panel of the door near my pillow. But an interruption came from an unexpected quarter.

Outside in the grounds a shrill whistle sounded.

"Hullo!" I heard Wilfred Thornleigh exclaim in alarm. "What's that?"

"A police whistle," muttered his companion.

A window was cautiously opened—a window in Wilfred's room. A dog barked. I scrambled out of bed, and drew aside the blind and looked out. The bushes of the shrubbery and the side lawn were flooded with bright moonlight. I saw a man's dark figure crossing the lawn at a quick run towards the back of the house. A second man presently followed him, as if in pursuit, and I saw by the white stripes on his arm that he was a police-constable on duty. A minute or two afterwards, there was a most awful yelping from the neighbourhood of the kennel, as if one of Roy Thornleigh's puppies had been trodden upon. All the dogs in and about the house set up a chorus of wild barking. Windows were flung open. And then came a man's cry for help, and the springing of a policeman's rattle. Downstairs a door was noisily unbolted, and I presently saw the butler crossing the lawn in a long dressing-gown, with a blunderbuss under his arm and a couple of terriers at his heels, followed at a short interval by Mr. Gedling, who, fully clothed, had rushed quickly downstairs, leaving Wilfred Thornleigh to close the window and turn into bed.

The excitement was over in a very few minutes—before I had time to draw on my trousers, with the

thought of joining in the row. I heard the men go away, and then all was quiet.

I overslept myself the next morning. But in this fault I was not alone, for neither Roy nor Pride had come down when I entered the breakfast-room. Miss Thornleigh and Wilfred were seated at the table together, and had already reached the marmalade stage of the meal. Wilfred looked astonishingly fresh and well groomed. He had shaved; his hair shone with pomatum; he wore a blue and red spotted waistcoat and a remarkably well-fitting morning coat, both of which I recognised as coming from Mr. Gedling's amply-stocked wardrobe.

He was reminding his aunt of many things that had happened to him in his schooldays, and of how he had had measles and she had come and nursed him. He gratified her by mentioning some of the presents she had given him, and telling her how well he remembered his journey to London with her. I was interested to notice that he now spoke of Mrs. Trevelyan with intimate knowledge, and that he referred familiarly to certain of his relatives and to the former members of the household, whom last night he seemed entirely to have forgotten. A night's sleep—even though shortened by much reading and a long conversation, to say nothing of the exciting interruption caused by the scene he had witnessed from his window—had evidently had a surprising effect in the sharpening of his memory. Or had his study of his

diary aided him in calling past events and forgotten persons to his mind?

Possibly his tentative reconciliation with his father had given him much of the self-confidence which he now exhibited. He scarcely paused a moment in his flow of talk. And even when Roy and Pride came in he did not cease, but only gave a dexterous turn to his spoken reflections by referring to certain cricket and football matches in which he had taken part at school. I began even to marvel at his good memory for names and incidents.

Only once did he betray perplexity, and that was when, during a moment's pause, Roy turned to him and said—

“Pennington is coming this morning. I daresay you will like to see him.”

“Oh yes,” returned Wilfred promptly; “I shall be awfully glad to see him again. How's his father?”

Now, Pennington was a Barnstaple tailor, and a very old man, whose father must have been dead a quarter of a century at least, and as Wilfred Thornleigh had been measured by him for a good many suits of clothes, it was next to impossible that he should forget him. Roy glanced at his brother curiously, and rectified the mistake, at which Wilfred went red with confusion, and bit his lip in vexation.

His aunt stared at him in blank astonishment.

“Really, Wilfred,” she said, “you are surprisingly altered!”



I covered the awkward moment by asking Roy if his puppies had been hurt, that they yelped so in the night. Roy replied that he had not heard the yelping, and that he had not yet been out to the kennel. Curiously enough, neither Roy nor Pride, nor even Miss Thornleigh, had been disturbed.

"Oh," I began to explain, "there was a great excitement in the grounds at about four o'clock this morning, wasn't there, Wilfred? You saw it all; I heard you open your bedroom window."

I paused to allow him to tell what had taken place, but I did not expect him to perjure himself.

"M'yes," he nodded indifferently, "there was a bit of a row. I was sound asleep, and it wakened me. I thought one of the dogs was being worried to death, it kicked up such a shindy. Then I went to the window, and saw a policeman, and Crabtree, and Mr. Gedling. I suppose it was some burglars trying to break into the house."

Roy stopped in breaking his egg.

"I hope none of my pups have been stolen!" he cried.

The butler entered at this moment with a dish of devilled kidneys.

"Crabtree!" exclaimed Miss Thornleigh, "what is this I hear about a burglar being on the premises early this morning?"

"Burglar, ma'am!" returned the butler. "No, ma'am, it weren't a burglar. It were a gipsy. The



police saw 'im in the plantation, and gave chase. 'E ran up towards the 'ouse, and tried to 'ide 'isself in one of the sheds. Only 'e made the mistake of goin' into the kennel where Master Roy do keep 'is pups, ma'am. 'E must 'a trod on one of the pups, for it set up a 'owling awful, and that led Constable Jawler to where the gipsy were 'id. Jawler, 'e were engaged in a struggle with the man when we came to 'is 'elp, just in time to save 'im from the knife as the gipsy were attackin' 'im with. The gipsy were caught, though, and 'e turns out to be the one as did for the young man down in the plantation, and 'e were took off, knife and all."

I felt Roy's eyes fixed upon me keenly. Wilfred Thornleigh gave utterance to a peculiar little chuckle of satisfaction.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### AN ENEMY IN THE HOUSE.

FOR some reason, known only to himself, Roy Thornleigh omitted to consult me that morning as to what we should do for the day by way of amusement; for, of course, there could be no thought of skating after such a rotten thaw as there had been through the night. It was patent to me that he wanted to avoid me, and accordingly I was careful not to throw myself much in his way.

We often had tiffs of this sort at school, and they never lasted very long. Usually they had very little foundation—my failure to say good-morning to him when we met, my neglect of him to pay some little attention to another boy, my determination to play football when he didn't want to play; it did not require much to excite his jealousy, and no doubt I was myself as often at fault as he.

It was our custom at Barracombe Manor to take a ride in the forenoon, either on horseback or else on our bicycles.

“Coming for a canter across the moor, Roy?” I

asked him, as he passed me in the hall on his way to the kennel.

He shook his head. "No," he answered gloomily; "got to see the tailor. But don't let me hinder you from going, if you want to. You can have Gladiator, if he'll let you mount him."

I did not particularly wish to go riding alone. Pride was not fond of riding, and his bike had a bad puncture; and Wilfred Thornleigh, I recollected, was also to see the tailor. I could have neither of them for a companion. Furthermore, I was in doubt as to what time the inquest was to be held. I had not yet seen Mr. Gedling, and it was he who was making all arrangements for the coroner. I went into the library, expecting to find him there, but he was probably upstairs with Sir Brian.

While I waited for him, Crabtree entered with a large bundle, which he placed at the end of the table. It was tied about with a white bed-sheet, and I wondered what such a parcel had been brought into the library for. The laundry seemed a much more appropriate place.

"What on earth have you got there, Crabtree?" I questioned in surprise.

The butler cautiously put his open hand to his mouth and whispered his answer.

"It's a part of the hevidence, sir," he informed me. "Constable Jawler 'e brought it up from the game-keeper's shed, sayin' as 'ow it were to be put 'ere, and

nobody but the doctor or the coroner were to hopen it."

"Ah, I understand," I nodded. "Probably it is the poor young fellow's clothing."

"Bein' as 'ow there's a pair of boots in it, I allow you're about right, sir," said he. "It's the young fellow's clothes, tied up by Dr. Partridge's own 'ands, which you might see by the way the knots is tied. Doctors be uncommon smart at tyin' things, sir, I've always took note of that—uncommon smart, they are. One tied a artery in my leg when I were wounded in Burmah, and you wouldn't believe 'ow skilful 'e done it."

"Indeed!" I followed him out of the room. "You don't happen to know where Mr. Gedling is, do you, Crabtree?" I asked.

"'E've jus' gone up with Sir Brian's letters, sir," he replied. "There was only three this mornin', so I expect 'e'll be down again very soon."

Going into the billiard-room, I found Wilfred Thornleigh there alone. He had been at the table practising for some time, and now I noticed that he had placed the three balls in exactly the same relative positions in which they had stood when Roy had embarrassed him by recommending the Bob Ackroyd stroke. He played the stroke now with surprising dexterity, holding the cue in his left hand. Assuredly he had recovered his lost memory.

He asked me to finish the interrupted game with

him, making it a hundred instead of fifty up, and I did so, losing by twelve points.

Before we had finished, I had heard Mr. Gedling return to the library. Wilfred wanted me to have yet another game with him, but I declined, and asked him instead if he would come out for a ride with me. There would be time, I said, before the tailor could come, and besides, the tailor would wait, if necessary. But I saw that he was not eager, and I did not press him further.

When I went into the library, Mr. Gedling was moving away from the end of the table where Crabtree had put the bundle, and I thought he looked just a trifle confused.

"Can you tell me what time the coroner is expected—what time the inquest is to begin?" I asked him.

He took up a letter and glanced at it before answering. I passed him, and went to the hearthrug, and stood with my back to the fire, looking beyond him at the bundle, for I had already observed that it was not tied as it had been half an hour before.

"Mr. Weldron will be here at two o'clock," he replied, dropping the letter. "The jurymen have been summoned for one-thirty."

"Thank you," I said. "Then I shall not be wanted until after lunch. If anyone asks for me, kindly say that I have gone for a ride across the moor, will you?"

“If you are going to ride on Gladiator, you had better be careful,” remarked Mr. Gedling warningly. “He’s a vicious brute, and requires skilful handling.”

As I went out I drew my hand along the recently dusted table, until my fingers came to a tiny fragment of white thread, which I picked up and carried out with me. I had no special purpose in taking it. It was merely an insignificant piece of ordinary sewing-cotton, about two inches long, wrinkled with the marks of stitching. It could tell me nothing. And yet I was interested in it. Somehow, I associated it with the parcel of clothes that had been surreptitiously opened; for certainly it had not been on the table before, and I concluded that it must have come out of the bundle.

I did not find that Mr. Gedling’s caution about the horse was necessary. I had a most exhilarating ride, and enjoyed it completely, notwithstanding that I had no companion. The animal carried me quietly, and was perfectly tractable, until I was returning along Frog Lane, when something caused him to stumble and go down on his knees. I was nearly flung out of the saddle. It was well that I kept my seat, for there was a nasty stone wall on the near side, and I should have come a cropper on my head against it and assuredly been seriously injured, and thus prevented from attending the inquest—even if an inquest had not been a necessity in my own case.



Gladiator regained his feet and reared, but I soon quieted him, and dismounted to see if he had hurt his knees. One of them was slightly barked by a sharp stone. He was usually so sure on his feet that I wondered at him stumbling. Nor could I see any cause for his clumsiness, until, when I led him to the roadside to remount by the help of the wall, I discovered that some idiot had stretched a line of wire across the lane, securing it at either end round the trunk of a tree. The wire must have been suspended quite two feet above the ground, and stretched taut. Downright lunacy alone could have prompted such a dastardly practical joke. I was ready to give a jolly good hiding to the rank miscreant who had done it, if I could but have laid hands upon him while my anger was hot.

But, of course, he was not to be found. I saw no one until I got beyond the bend of the lane. There, much to my surprise, I met Wilfred Thornleigh riding towards me on Mr. Gedling's tricycle. I drew rein as he approached, and, stopping, I told him of my escape. He was even more indignant than I was myself.

"Why, you might have been killed!" he declared sympathetically.

He turned back and followed me. I noticed that, notwithstanding my slow pace, he had obvious difficulty in keeping up with me, and once, when I glanced back at him, I was surprised to see that he

managed his machine with the awkwardness of one who is not accustomed to cycling. His legs and the wheels, indeed, seemed to be mixing themselves up all ways. There would have been nothing surprising in this if he had been a mere novice. But Roy Thornleigh had often told me what a splendid cyclist his brother Wilfred was, and here was he in difficulty even with a tricycle! What he would have done on a bicycle, I don't know. It was true that he had been for five years in Canada, and may not have had any practice in all that time. But I have always understood that cycling, like swimming, is an accomplishment which, once acquired, is not so easily forgotten.

After luncheon that day, I had occasion to go into the bicycle shed to do something to my own machine, which I purposed riding in the evening. In searching for my spanner, which I had lent to Austin Pride, I was somewhat astonished to find in a corner of the shed a coil of wire of precisely the same sort as that which had been stretched across the lane, and to notice that the loose end of it had been newly broken, as if a length of it had been cut off with a pair of pliers. I had thrown the offending piece over a hedge, and so could not make a comparison, but it seemed very remarkable that the miscreant who had tried to bring about an accident should have set his trap for me with wire taken out of this very shed, which I was in the habit of entering almost every

day. Could it be that I had an enemy in the house who desired to bring me to grief?

If so, who was he? Surely it could not be Wilfred Thornleigh, whom I had known scarcely more than a dozen hours!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY.

WE were finishing luncheon when the twelve jurymen arrived, with Mr. Weldron, Mr. Swift, the doctor, and Inspector Blower. They all trooped into the library.

Mr. Gedling, who was lunching with us, rose abruptly from the table. He looked across at Wilfred Thornleigh.

"You will attend the inquest, I suppose?" he said.

Wilfred gave a careless toss of the head, as if the inquiry were a matter of indifference to him.

"They seem to expect me," he answered in a bored tone, "although I can't very well see what good anything I can say will be."

"You are probably wanted to help to determine the time at which that gipsy person brought your bag home," observed Miss Thornleigh, who had by this time acquired considerable knowledge of the case. She herself did not intend to be present at the inquiry, as she had to go to the village to preside at a Dorcas meeting—whatever that may mean.

When we entered, the jury were answering to their names. They were a very varied set of men, drawn from the village and the neighbouring farms. Three of them were fishermen, two were small farmers, two were tradesmen, one was a publican, another the sexton, one a retired builder, and another the village schoolmaster. The foreman was a clever young artist who had come to the neighbourhood to do some sketching in the previous summer, and had taken such a fancy to it that he had bought a cottage, in which he now lived and worked. They were provided with chairs at two sides of the long oak table.

We boys and Mr. Gedling took vacant seats near the fireplace, somewhat to the rear of the coroner, who sat at the head of the table, with Dr. Partridge at his right and Lawyer Swift at his left. There were two smaller tables in the room, at one of which sat a young fellow, whom, by reason of his notebook and sharpened pencil, I took to be a newspaper reporter. On the other, the articles of evidence were neatly arranged—a pair of sea-boots, a white knitted guernsey, a pea-jacket, a pair of stockings, a cap, a leather belt, and a suit of blue and white pyjamas. The end of the long table was left unoccupied, and it was here that each witness stood, facing the coroner and the jury, when called upon to give evidence. Among the witnesses who had seats nearer the door, I recognised the gamekeeper, the butler, Tony Middlewick, and Gipsy Joe.

Inspector Blower, who acted as coroner's officer, administered the oath to the jury, while Mr. Weldron turned over a number of official-looking documents, and spoke in an undertone first to Mr. Swift and then to Dr. Partridge.

The coroner was a somewhat horsey-looking, clean-shaven, middle-aged gentleman, very neat and precise in his dress, with his hair parted in the middle. He wore a very high collar, which seemed to hurt him, for he was always putting his fingers up to his red neck to loosen its pressure. He owned the next estate to Sir Brian's, and was believed to be exceedingly proud of his position as a Justice of the Peace. I don't think he knew very much about the law, for during the inquiry he frequently referred to a magistrate's handbook, or consulted Lawyer Swift on some knotty point. But if he was not learned in the law, he had a good stock of British common-sense, and in the circumstances I daresay that served him just as well.

He opened the proceedings with a brief conversational address to the jury. They had viewed the body, he said, and it was now their duty to consider the evidence which would be brought before them, and return their verdict accordingly. They were first to determine, if possible, the identity of the deceased, and then inquire into the cause of his sad death. It was unfortunate, he added, that the melancholy occurrence had taken place within the



grounds of Barracombe Manor, but he was sure that the jury would sympathise with Sir Brian Thornleigh's family, who had been so much disturbed and distressed by it, and thank Sir Brian for permitting them to carry on this inquiry in his library. He would first call upon Dr. Partridge to give medical testimony as to the circumstances and condition in which the body had been found.

Dr. Partridge rose from the coroner's side and strode quietly to the end of the table, where he stood facing the Court. He looked more like a country squire than a medical man, with his ruddy countenance and his side whiskers and his jacket suit of grey tweed; but there was an alert expression in his blue eyes which was decidedly professional. Having taken the oath and kissed the Book, he said—

“Since Sir Brian Thornleigh's illness, it has been my custom to pay a professional call upon him every evening. Last evening I was on my way here, when outside the lodge gates I was met by my patient's son, Roy. It was already dark. As near as I can calculate, it was within a few minutes of half-past five. The boy was hurrying past me, when, recognising me, he halted and spoke my name excitedly. I asked him if his father was worse, or if someone was taken suddenly ill. He answered, ‘No; but there's a young man lying wounded—dead, I think—in the plantation!’ I hurried with him to the spot.”

“Wait, please,” interposed Mr. Weldron. “You say that Roy Thornleigh was agitated. Was his agitation excessive?”

The doctor shook his head.

“It was merely the natural agitation of a boy who had just looked upon a very disagreeable sight,” he answered. Resuming, he said, “Roy led me through the plantation by one of the narrow paths branching off from the avenue. I had heard the Manor carriage driving down to the gates, and now I heard it along the road. I asked where it was off to at that unusual hour, and he told me it was going to Barnstaple, but he did not then say for what purpose. Nor did I question him, for I then saw there was someone standing among the bushes farther on, waving an electric hand-lamp. It was Percival Saintsbury, and he was calling to us to hurry up. At the same moment the gamekeeper and Austin Pride appeared, coming from the direction of the hut where the body was afterwards taken.

“My first business was to make a hasty examination of the inert body that lay at Saintsbury’s feet. This I did with the help of the electric lamp. At the first glance I saw that the poor fellow was beyond all medical skill. I saw that he was young—I judged him to be about one-and-twenty. He was a perfect stranger to me. I had never seen him before to my knowledge, although——” He checked himself, and left the sentence incomplete. “By his

dress," he continued, "I took him to be a seafarer. There was a contused wound on the side of the nose, a scratch on his chin, and a much more serious wound in the chest, in the region of the heart. I have since made a thorough examination of the unclothed body, and have no doubt whatever that the wound in the chest was the cause of death. It is my belief that the wound was inflicted by a stab from a long-pointed instrument, probably a knife, the blade of which penetrated the left lung and the left side of the heart."

Dr. Partridge paused, and referred to some notes which he held in his hand.

"Have you formed an opinion as to whether the wound was self-inflicted or inflicted by some accident?" the coroner asked.

With a head-shake, the doctor replied—

"Such a wound could not have been inflicted by the deceased himself; neither, in my opinion, could it have been the result of any accident. Had it been an accident, I should have been able to discover the instrument or to find some indication of its nature. But there were no such indications. No. I am convinced that it was the work of a second person, and that the unfortunate fellow's death was the result of a violent assault. I am not prepared to swear, however, that it was not the result of the sudden, premeditated attack of a hidden enemy. The ground was marked with footprints, which would seem to show that there had been a struggle."

In describing his second examination of the injuries, Dr. Partridge gave many technical and gruesome details which I do not precisely remember, not having paid particular attention to them. I was occupied, indeed, in watching Wilfred Thornleigh, who was some yards away from me, at the farther side of the fireplace. He affected to be bored. He sat with his hands in his trousers pockets and his legs stretched out in front of him. There was a tired look about his face, but I could see by his eyes that he was listening with suppressed eagerness to every word that fell from the witness's lips. He must have felt that my eyes were upon him, for once he glanced at me with irritation, and thereafter I ceased to watch him.

When the doctor proceeded to speak of the absence of marks on the body and clothing, I was interested to hear him say—

“The hands were fairly clean, and there was something almost of refinement about the finger-nails. The left hand, however, was smeared with mud, and I observed, while I was examining it, that on the little finger there was a band of fairer skin on the first joint, as if it had been protected from the weather by a rather wide ring. But he was not wearing a ring. I would suggest that possibly one was stolen from him by his assailant.”

“We will return to that point presently,” nodded the coroner, taking note of it. “I want now to determine the question of the identity of the

deceased. You carefully examined his clothing, I suppose?"

"Not last night," returned the witness. "I only looked at it casually then, before packing it up in a bundle. But I examined the garments very carefully this forenoon, in here."

I wondered when he said this if he was aware that in the meantime the bundle had been opened—if it had been he who had opened it.

"Well," inquired the coroner, "did you discover anything which might lead to the identification of the deceased—anything which might give us a knowledge of his name, or of what town he came from?"

"It was with that purpose in view that I overhauled the clothing," said the doctor, "but I arrived at nothing satisfactory. There was no name, no initials even. I thought that the brass buttons on the trousers might help. There were eleven such buttons. Seven of them, which were entirely blank, appeared to be the original buttons of the trousers. Of the remaining four, one bore the name and address of a London tailor, one was stamped with a name but no address, and the two others bore the name and address of a certain cheap clothier in Bristol. It is therefore impossible to determine where the trousers were bought. The cap has no name in it, either. The pyjamas are of very fine material and good workmanship. I expected to find the maker's name on the tab which is usually sewn inside the collar-band of

the jacket, but here again I was disappointed; for although there had originally been a tab there, it has lately been ripped off. I say lately, for although the neck-band is soiled from long wear, yet if you look you will see a small clean square of the material, whence the name-tab has been removed."

Why they did so, they themselves knew best, but on hearing this piece of evidence Wilfred Thornleigh and Mr. Gedling exchanged significant glances. I could almost have believed that, on Wilfred Thornleigh's part at least, it was a glance of triumph.



## CHAPTER XV.

TONY MIDDLEWICK.

NO one but myself seemed to observe that curious look in Wilfred Thornleigh's eyes. It was but instantaneous, and may have meant no more than that there was some sort of mutual understanding between him and the secretary.

I could not believe that either of them knew anything of the removal of that tradesman's name-label from the pyjamas. What interest could either of them have in seeking to obscure the identity of the poor young fellow who was a stranger to both of them? And yet I did not forget that the bundle had been opened while Mr. Gedling was alone with it in the library, nor did I close my eyes to the possibility that the tiny fragment of sewing-cotton which I had seen on the library table might have served to attach the missing name-tab to the collar of the flannel jacket.

The coroner and the jury examined the pyjamas, and seemed to agree that the name, whatever it may have been, had been torn off recently, but there was

no evidence to show that it had been removed since the owner's death.

"You said just now that you took the deceased to be a seafarer," pursued Mr. Weldron, addressing Dr. Partridge. "Do you consider it probable that he was a foreigner?"

"That is not probable," returned the doctor. "The brass buttons with the local names on them, and the make of the clothing generally, would seem to indicate that he was English. It was pointed out to me—by Percy Saintsbury, I think—that there was an odour of fish about him, and I certainly found some fish scales clinging to the welts of his boots and the seams of his trousers. I should judge him to be a fisherman, if it were not that the hands, and particularly the fingernails, gave no evidence of hard work. I have said that there was an appearance of refinement about him, and I would submit to the Court that he might purposely have assumed a disguise. His clothes did not fit him as if they had been made for him."

"In that case," interposed Lawyer Swift, in a slow, drawling voice, "is it not likely that he himself ripped the name-label off his pyjamas? Suppose the label in question had borne the address of a maker in Melbourne, that would indicate very surely that the wearer had bought the garments in Australia, wouldn't it?"

"Precisely," agreed the coroner. "He may not have wanted it to be known that he had been in

Australia." He turned to the witness, and added, "You searched his pockets, did you, doctor?"

Dr. Partridge nodded.

"And found absolutely nothing," he replied. "It is my belief that his assailant robbed him, and there is no knowing what valuables he may have carried."

"He may even have had his pockets full of Australian gold," suggested Mr. Swift.

"We have not yet proved that he had ever been in Australia, however," the coroner promptly reminded him. "And we have seen that his clothing was of English manufacture. By the fact that his pockets had been rifled, however, it is obvious that there was a motive for the attack upon him. That motive may have been robbery, it may have been self-defence, or long pent-up vengeance; or it may have been a desire on the part of the criminal to get rid of a hated rival or of a person who was in possession of some dangerous secret. Once we discover the motive, we shall be in a fair way to discover the unknown offender."

Mr. Weldron was examining his notes as he spoke. Presently he glanced again at Dr. Partridge.

"Of course, doctor," he went on, "you searched the place for the weapon and for such evidence as would be supplied by footmarks or bloodstains?"

"I did," was the reply. "I failed to find any weapon. As for footmarks, there were many—those of the deceased, those of the gamekeeper, of Roy Thornleigh, Saintsbury, Austin Pride, and my own.

The ground was trampled all over. As for blood-marks, it is true that Saintsbury's hands were stained ; so also were young Thornleigh's. But then so were my own."

The coroner paused before saying—

"I need hardly ask you if you noticed any undue agitation on the part of any one of the three boys, or anything that would lead you to suspect any one of them?"

Roy Thornleigh, who sat near me, moved uneasily in his seat at this reference to the three boys, but I heard him give a deep breath of relief when Mr. Weldron quickly added, "But you say the game-keeper was also present. Was there anything suspicious in what he said or did?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I paid very little attention to Thew," he answered, "but he seemed to be cool and collected, and he gave me willing help."

The coroner was dismissing the witness, although it occurred to me that there were many questions which he had omitted to ask. This also seemed to be the feeling of at least one of the jurymen, for the little schoolmaster stood up and said—

"I should like, Mr. Coroner, to ask Dr. Partridge what he knows about the gipsies."

"We shall hear about the gipsies by and by," declared the coroner, at which the little schoolmaster sat down with a grumble. "I wish first to have the

evidence of"—the coroner referred to his notes—"of Anthony Middlewick."

Tony Middlewick jumped up from his seat with alacrity, and in all the splendour of his shining silver buttons. He touched his forelock to the coroner, with supreme self-assurance, and gabbled through the oath as if he were accustomed to the words, "the truth, the yole truth, and nothin' but the truth." Tony was a Cockney, brought down from Sir Brian Thornleigh's town house, and he had an amusing contempt for what he called country bumpkins. I wondered what he would have to say concerning this present case.

"Please to tell the jury exactly what you told me this morning," the coroner requested.

Tony cleared his throat, and stood at his full height against the table with his hands clasped in front of him. He looked with calculating scrutiny at each of the jurymen in turn, and then at the coroner.

"Wot! the yole lot, sir?" he questioned.

"Yes," nodded the coroner.

"Well," began Tony, with the air of one who was conscious that he held the attention of the Court, "I were in the butler's pantry yesterday afternoon, 'elpin' Mr. Crabtree to clean the silver for dinner, w'en I 'ears the dinin'-room bell. I goes into the dinin'-room to answer it, and Miss Thornleigh were there with a basket of eggs and fruit, and says she to me, she says, 'Tony,' she says, 'I wants yer to take this 'ere basket



along to Widow 'Odge, wot's ill, and give it 'er, with my compliments,' she says, 'and mind you don't 'ave a accident with the eggs, like you did last time,' she says."

"Yes," nodded Mr. Weldron encouragingly; "and you took the basket of eggs to Widow Hodge?"

"A-ridin' on my bike," continued Tony, "with the basket on my arm, which, as the roads was 'ard with the frost, there wasn't much fear of side-slip. Well, w'en I gets to the cross-roads, I seen a young chap leanin' over the rail of Whitehouse Park admirin' of your worship's bull, wot took a 'Ighly Commended at the Smi'field Show. 'E were dressed—the young chap, I mean, not the bull—'e were dressed like a sailor-man, in the identical same togs—I mean clothes—wot the jury's just been lookin' at on this 'ere table. 'E never looked round as I passed. But I'd just got beyond the turn of the road w'en I 'ears a shout. So I slows down, and got off my bike, layin' the eggs on the bank, and looked through the bushes into the park. There I seen the bull runnin' like mad after the postman, and the sailor chap a-runnin' after the bull. 'Ow 'e done it, I don't know, but just as the postman were bein' cornered, and the bull were lowerin' 'is 'ead, the sailorman cut in between 'em, leapt on to the bull's neck with one 'and on a 'orn and the other slung over the animal's face.

"'All right, postman!' the sailor sung out, and the postman were out in the road in no time. The bull



tried to toss the chap, but the sailor were off as quick as 'e'd got on, and the bull stood like a statute, starin' at 'im in surprise."

Lawyer Swift smiled at this comparison.

"Rather smart work for a seaman not accustomed to cattle!" he remarked, giving expression to the thought that was running through my own mind.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### AN "OUT-AND-OUT GEN'LEMAN."

"THAT'S just wot I said to 'im myself, only in other words," pursued Tony, with a knowing nod. "'That ain't the first time you've tackled a bull, gov'nor,' I says. 'No,' 'e says, wipin' 'is face that 'ad got a nasty scratch on it. 'It was a close shave for the postman, though,' 'e says, makin' 'is way out on to the road, and sittin' down on the bank next to my basket of eggs, with 'is sea-boots agin the tyre of my front wheel. 'That's rather a good bicycle of yours, Buttons,' 'e says. 'Is it your own? It's like one I used to ride myself. What do those initials stand for, cut on the saddle?'"

The coroner was writing something on the papers in front of him. Tony waited until he resumed his attention.

"'Well,'" he continued, "'if you wants to know,' I says, 'they stands for Wilfred Thornleigh, Sir Brian Thornleigh's son, that went away to Canada five year ago. It's a old-fashioned machine,' I says, 'and not up to much now; that's why Miss Thornleigh gave it

to me, so as I might go 'er errands quickly. Which reminds me,' I says, 'that I've got to take this 'ere basket of eggs to Widow 'Odge, and be back to the Manor before tea-time.' And I went away then, leaving 'im wipin' of 'is face. But when I were comin' back, I seen 'im again, trampin' quickly along the road towards the village."

"That will do," broke in the coroner. "Now, Anthony, answer me a few questions. You are certain, are you, that the young man you speak of was wearing these clothes that we have just been looking at?"

"I'd take my oath they're the same," answered Tony decisively.

"Describe him as well as you can, please."

Tony's description was accurate, even to the details as to the colour of the stranger's eyes, his broken tooth, the wound on the side of his nose, and the scratch on his chin. The wound on the nose, he explained, was not done by the tussle with the bull, although it had received a knock and was bleeding.

"Did you happen to notice if he wore a ring at all?" questioned Mr. Weldron.

Tony scratched the back of his ear.

"Now that you ask me, sir, I believe 'e did," he answered, after a moment's hesitation. "It was on one of 'is little fingers. But I don't feel sure whether it were the left or the right."

"Should you know the ring if you saw it again?" asked the coroner, taking a tiny parcel of tissue-paper

from the side of his inkpot and slowly opening it. "What was it like?"

"Well, it was a thick one," said Tony, "with some sort of writin' on it, I think."

"Anything like this one?" said the coroner, holding up the ring which he took from out the tissue-paper, and signing to one of the jurymen to pass it along the table to the witness.

Tony picked it up and slipped it upon one of his fingers, examining it at arm's length.

"I reckon that's the very identical one," said he with conviction, returning the ring along the other side of the table.

It came into Dr. Partridge's hand, and I leaned forward to look at it. Dr. Partridge was good enough to pass it to me, and I examined it as Tony had done, but my recognition was not so quick as his, and I reflected that he had seen it closely, and in daylight. It was silver, not gold, as I had supposed, and the engraving upon it was not of the signs of the zodiac, but in Roman letters forming the word "Mizpah." If this was the ring which the deceased youth had worn, then I must for once have been at fault in my observation. I handed it back to the coroner, feeling somewhat nonplussed. Glancing at Wilfred Thornleigh, I saw that he had half closed his eyes, but that his lips were twitching in what looked very much like a smile of satisfaction.

"Tell me," said Mr. Weldron to Tony, "in what

sort of a tone did the young man speak to you? I mean, did he talk like a foreigner, or like a Devonshire fisherman, like a stranger to these parts, or what?"

Tony thought for a few seconds in silence.

"That's one thing that puzzled me about 'im, sir," he replied at last. "By the looks of 'im, 'e was no better than a ordinary out-of-collar tramp. But w'en 'e talked, well, if you'd shut your eyes, sir, you'd 'ave took 'im for an out-and-out gen'leman, the same as Mr. Roy and Mr. Wilfred, or Mr. Saintsbury, that 'ave 'ad a public-school education. There wasn't no School Board way of talkin' about 'im."

"Thank you." Mr. Weldron signed to Tony to return to his seat, and called upon the next witness—James Thew—to take his place.

The tall gamekeeper, in his brown velveteen coat, rose from his chair near the door, and strode to the table. The coroner began at once to question him.

"You were present last night in the plantation when Dr. Partridge arrived on the spot where this sad affair occurred, were you not? And you saw the deceased by the light of your lantern?"

"Yes."

"Had you seen him before?"

"I'd seen him early in the morning," answered the gamekeeper. "When I was having my breakfast he passed by my cottage window, as if he was going up to the house. But I didn't take much notice of him."

"Do you live alone in your cottage?"

"Yes, just now. My wife and two children are in Somerset, spending Christmas-time with her mother. Afterwards, when I was going my rounds of the estate, I saw him again, prowling about in a suspicious manner. There've been a lot of poaching here lately, sir, as you'm aware, and I guessed his object. So I watched him until I felt sure he was a poacher. I went up to him at last, and asked him what he was up to. He answered me sharply, 'What's that to do with you?' And then I sent him away, warning him that if I caught him trespassing here again I'd give him up to the police. He laughed in my face, and said he'd come as often as he liked, and called me an interfering Jack-in-office."

"Did you strike him?" questioned the coroner.

"No," replied Thew in a low voice. "I'd my gun under my arm, and that seemed to frighten him. I didn't see him again until—not until last night, when the doctor and the young gentlemen were there in the plantation."

"Do you still think that he was a poacher?"

"I'm nigh certain," answered the gamekeeper. "I found the snares that he'd set, and well set they were, too, for there was a rabbit or a hare in each of 'em."

Mr. Weldron leaned forward.

"What were you doing between five o'clock and half-past five last evening?" he asked abruptly.

The gamekeeper drew back from the table, and paused for several moments before answering.



“I was asleep on the sofa until nearly half-past five. It was at that time that young Mr. Saintsbury rushed into the cottage and told me that there was a tramp lying dead in the plantation. I gave him my lamp, and said I’d follow him when I’d washed my hands and face.”

“But why should you want to wash at such a moment as that?” questioned the coroner severely.

“I was in the middle of washing when he came in,” was the not very satisfactory explanation.

“Now, when Mr. Saintsbury came into your cottage—rushed in, I think you said—did you notice anything particular about him?” the coroner inquired.

Thew answered: “He was out of breath, alarmed, very much upset, and—well, if I must tell everything—there was blood on him—on his hands—and when he saw I’d noticed it, he took out his handkerchief and wiped it off. He wanted to say that I’d been out in the plantation, but, as I’ve told you, sir, I was asleep.”

Roy Thornleigh was watching me closely as the gamekeeper gave this evidence. He watched me even more keenly when presently Austin Pride was called upon to say what he had seen and heard.

In answering the questions put to him as to the coming of the gipsies, Pride was curiously undecided. First of all, he said that he had seen the three caravans coming along the main road towards the village from the direction of Barnstaple. Then he

admitted that it might be from Ilfracombe that they were coming. When it was pointed out to him that he could not possibly have seen the main road from the lake where we were skating, he corrected himself, and said it was along Frog Lane that they were passing. All that he was certain of was that he had seen three yellow caravans, and that this was at about a quarter to four.

Speaking of the tramp looking in at the lodge gates, he declared that the stranger was certainly more like a poacher than a seaman (as if poachers wear a special uniform!), and that he walked lame, which was a needless exaggeration of the man's peculiar trick of twisting his foot.

But it was later on that Austin Pride betrayed his imperfect observation of facts and circumstances. To do him justice, he seemed painfully anxious to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth; but he ought, I think, to have been certain that his conclusions were logically possible before he rashly stated them in open court.

Describing how, immediately upon leaving the tea-table, he had gone round to the stables, half thinking that he would go to Barnstaple with the carriage, for the sake of the drive, he said that he was deterred by a sprinkle of rain, so he determined instead to go for a stroll. Accordingly, he turned down the plantation path leading past the gamekeeper's cottage to the road.

“When I got to the middle of the plantation,” he continued quickly, “I heard someone moving among the bushes in advance of me. I was a bit timid. It was getting dark, you know, and I turned back. I hadn’t gone far when I heard two persons speaking as if they’d just met each other. I didn’t catch all they said, but one cried angrily, ‘*You!* What brings *you* here?’ The other spoke too low for me to hear distinctly, but his voice was threatening, and I thought I recognised it. Then one of them must have struck the other, for there was the sound of a blow and a heavy fall, followed by a cry of pain and a call for help. Perhaps I oughtn’t to have gone away, but I did. I was frightened. When I’d gone some distance, I waited, wondering what they’d been fighting for, and then I turned back again, trembling. Everything was fearfully quiet. Suddenly someone ran past me, panting. He nearly knocked me down; but I knew him. I ran after him until he escaped me, and I lost my way in the darkness. But after a long time of wandering, I saw a light and went to it. It wasn’t in the gamekeeper’s cottage. It was a lantern on the ground, and by its light there was someone bending over the body, lifting the left hand.”

“Ah!” interjected Lawyer Swift, “taking the ring, I suppose?”

“Wait,” ordered the coroner, fixing his gaze upon Austin Pride. “You are going too quick. You said

just now that you thought you recognised one of the voices. You said you knew the man who nearly knocked you down. Whose voice was it? Who was it that was escaping? What manner of person was it who was bending over the dead body? Was it one and the same individual, or were there three distinct persons?"

"It was only one person," answered Pride.

"And who was he?" pursued the coroner.

Pride shook his head stubbornly. "I'd rather not say," he objected.

"But you must do so. I demand the name."

Everyone in the room waited breathless for the answer to this imperative order. Pride still hesitated. Then, to my utter amazement, he faltered painfully—

"The voice was the voice of Percy Saintsbury. It was Saintsbury who was running away. It was Saintsbury who was bending over the body."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### ENOCH LEE'S ALIBI.

“**T**HE voice was the voice of Percy Saintsbury. It was Saintsbury who was running away. It was Saintsbury who was bending over the body.”

This was an astounding declaration to come from my own friend and companion. I could scarcely believe my ears. If it meant anything, it meant that Austin Pride believed that I, and I alone, was guilty of the young stranger's death. And this, I felt sure, was the interpretation which the jury put upon the evidence. I did not for an instant imagine that Austin Pride had made the declaration in malice. He had spoken with reluctance, yet even his reluctance in speaking so of his friend was all the more damning, because it was manifest that he desired to tell what he believed to be the truth, even though it incriminated his companion.

The eyes of all present were upon me. I knew what they all were thinking, what they all suspected, and it was necessary that I should immediately wipe out the impression which Austin Pride

had so ignorantly made. I sprang excitedly to my feet.

"Mr. Coroner," I said, "before you go on any farther, let me explain."

"Order! order!" broke in the coroner, glaring at me reproachfully. "If you have anything to explain, you will have an opportunity presently, when you are called upon to give evidence."

"But I must say it now!" I protested impulsively, and rather more warmly than I should have done.

Dr. Partridge whispered to Mr. Weldron, who then allowed me to have my say.

"I have been accused of having blood on my hands," I cried. "It is true that my hands were stained, but it was with the blood of a hare that I liberated from a trap set by some poacher. The witness has said that it was *my* voice that he heard spoken in anger in the plantation. But that is absurd—impossible. I was in the avenue at the time, and I myself heard the voices. It is true that it was I who nearly knocked Austin Pride down—when I was running to the cottage for a light. And when I had brought the light and was seen kneeling by the body, I was examining the hand from which the ring had already been stolen——"

"That is enough," interrupted the coroner. "I repeat that you will have an opportunity of explaining these details when you are called to the witness-table."



I sat down, feeling that instead of removing a false impression I had only made matters a good deal worse by my blustering, for there was a lot of whispering and head-shaking among the jurymen, and particularly between the little schoolmaster and the artist, the latter of whom leaned over and made a remark to the coroner about gipsies and poachers, at which Mr. Weldron nodded.

“Very well, if you wish it so,” he said. “I can take the other evidence afterwards.” And he called the name Joseph Lee.

Gipsy Joe shambled noisily up to the table with a sullen cloud on his dark, bearded face. He mumbled the words of the oath with the air of one who did not regard its conditions as in any way binding upon his conscience.

“Look 'ere, mister,” he grumbled hoarsely, as he threw the Testament with a careless toss upon the table, “I ain't got nothin' to do wi' this yere case. I dunno wot you've dragged me yere for, a-wastin' of my vallible time. I told that 'ere gen'leman larst night as I never seen the chap afore, and didn't know 'im from Adam.”

“Oh, I am not going to accuse you of anything, I assure you,” the coroner told him politely. “Please make your mind easy on that score. I simply want you to answer a few straightforward questions. And to begin with, you were good enough yesterday to give a young gentleman a lift in one of your

caravans, I think. Do you see him here in this room?"

Joe Lee nodded his rough head towards the part of the room where Wilfred Thornleigh was sitting.

"Ay, 'e be over there nigh the fire," said he, "though dressed differ'nt from what he were when we met 'im on the road loaded with 'is bag. Didn't guess 'e were a 'ristocrat. Why, 'e told us 'e were jus' come 'ome from Canada—place where a pal o' mine went ten years ago, and done well, too."

"Yes?" smiled the coroner encouragingly. "And at what time did you come into Barracombe yesterday afternoon?"

"'Twere more like evenin'," returned the gipsy. "Reckon 'twere well arter four o'clock, anyhow, 'fore we got to our pitch nigh to Coppinger's Copse."

"But when you came to a halt near the copse, the young gentleman—Mr. Wilfred Thornleigh—had left you, with his bag, hadn't he?"

Lee shook his head. "No. 'E weren't in no 'urry to leave us, and I'd a lot to ask 'im 'bout Canada, bein' as my son Enoch do think o' goin' there one of these times."

"But he was coming here, to this house. Why did he not alight at the lodge gates, or at one of the two footpaths which you must have passed?"

"'E didn't want to go without 'is bag, I reckon, and Enoch couldn't 'elp 'im with it until the 'orses were

let loose. Arterwards 'e did go without it, seein' that Enoch promised to carry it up at six o'clock."

The coroner looked puzzled.

"Do you tell me that it was not until six o'clock that Enoch Lee left the caravans with the bag?" he questioned.

"Yes," came the decisive answer. "'Twas a quarter arter six."

"And at what hour did he return?"

Lee scratched his head. "Not till near ten o'clock," he answered. "He were so long a-comin' 'ome that when I 'eard there'd been a young chap done for in the plantation, I made sure 'twere Enoch, 'though when I went wi' the constables to look, I seen 'twere someone else—a man as I'd never set eyes on afore."

"You are sure — you are positive that the deceased man was a stranger to you?" pursued the coroner.

Joe Lee protested that he had never seen the young man before to his knowledge, and nothing would stir him from his certainty. The jurymen shook their heads. They evidently believed that the gipsy was lying in order to shield his son. But my impression was that he was telling the truth.

"Look at this ring," went on the coroner, passing it, "and tell me if you know it."

The gipsy took the ring in his horny fingers, and promptly replied—

"'Tis our Enoch's ring that 'e got from Esther Faa when she promised him marriage. Enoch allus wore it. I seen it on his finger when he went away with the bag."

Here I began to have doubts. If it was Enoch's ring, and if Enoch wore it at six o'clock, then it could not possibly be the same ring that Tony Middlewick had sworn to as having been the property of the dead tramp, or the same that I myself had seen on the dead tramp's finger. Was Tony, or was Joe Lee the more to be believed?

There was a sensation in the room when Mr. Weldron, dismissing Joe, called for Enoch Lee to be brought before him. It was apparent to me that whatever some few of them thought of myself, the majority of the jurymen had already made up their minds that Enoch's was the guilty hand that had taken the life of the as yet unknown stranger, and they all turned their eyes expectantly towards the door. Presently Constable Jawler entered, bringing with him the young gipsy, who had been arrested early in the morning.

Enoch was a man of about five-and-twenty, very powerfully built and athletic, wearing a red corduroy waistcoat, a blue silk muffler, and a short brown jacket, with brown tweed trousers and leather leggings. Immediately upon seeing him I recognised him. On the previous evening, as I have said, when I was returning to the house with the doctor's message, I

had noticed him coming away from the front porch. The light from the doorway had shown me his face and his red waistcoat as I passed him to enter and discover the newly-arrived Wilfred Thornleigh, and now for the first time I recollected that I had almost unconsciously seen Wilfred Thornleigh's bag in the hall where the gipsy had probably left it. Remembering this fact, it occurred to me that I was in possession of evidence which would prove conclusively that however guilty Enoch Lee might be of trespass and poaching, he at least was innocent of the graver crime of which he was suspected.

He answered with obvious honesty all the questions put to him. He corroborated his father's statement that he was working among the caravan horses until six o'clock, and declared that he had gone with the bag straight from the caravans to the Manor House, returning by way of the avenue. He had not been on the estate, he explained, more than half an hour, and that was between half-past six and seven o'clock. He accounted for his delay in getting back to the caravans by saying that he had gone into the "Three Herrings" public-house and remained there smoking and drinking until half-past nine. When the ring was passed to him, he merely glanced at it, and said—

"Yes, 'tis mine. My gel gev it me two years ago, and it had never left my little finger until this mornin', when the police took it from me."



The jury were still incredulous. "Who would believe a gipsy, even on his oath?" I heard the little schoolmaster remark.

"At four o'clock this morning," pursued the coroner, "you were discovered in the act of poaching rabbits on this estate, you were pursued and arrested in one of the outhouses. You do not deny that, do you?"

Enoch Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"That ain't got nothin' to do with this yere case, 'as it?" he asked cunningly. "I thought as this was a coroner's inquest."

The coroner inclined his head. "I am quite aware of that," he returned quietly. "It is not my present duty to try you for the poaching. But—well, perhaps I had better examine Constable Jawler on this point."

Jawler, who next took the witness's place at the table, then told how, when he was on duty in the grounds early that morning, keeping an eye on Thew's hut, he saw the young gipsy setting a snare. Lee escaped him at first, but he gave chase, and ultimately ran him down in the shed where Roy Thornleigh's puppies were kept. Here he had a struggle with the man, who was armed with a formidable knife.

"That will do," nodded Mr. Weldron. "Inspector Blower will now produce that knife."

The weapon was handed to the coroner. I saw at once that it was the same which had been hidden by



Roy Thornleigh in the corner of the kennel. Roy, too, must have recognised it, for his face grew ashy pale as I met his eyes. I looked beyond him at his brother Wilfred, and was astonished to see that Wilfred also was strangely agitated.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SUSPICION.

THE coroner passed the knife to Dr. Partridge, who scrutinised it carefully, even taking out a pocket magnifying-glass to examine the blade.

“There are stains of blood upon it,” he announced. And in reply to a question from Mr. Weldron, he added, “Yes, I should judge that the crime was committed with just such an instrument as this.”

The jurymen fixed their twenty-four eyes upon Enoch Lee. But Enoch did not flinch from their gaze. Nor did he betray any obvious concern when Inspector Blower held the weapon in front of him, allowing him to look at it.

“That is the knife with which you attacked Constable Jawler, is it not?” inquired the coroner.

The young gipsy moved restlessly on his feet.

“It’s the one as I found on a shelf in the shed where the young dogs were,” he admitted. “But, beggin’ your pardon, I never attacked the constable with it. When ’e seen it in my ’and, ’e snatched at my wrist, and we’d a bit of a tussle, that’s all.

And I dare 'im to prove that I meant to use the thing."

"Remember you are on your oath," cautioned Mr. Weldron.

"If I was on fifty oaths, I'd say the same," protested Lee.

"And do you pretend," pursued the coroner, "that you never saw or handled that knife before you entered that shed at four o'clock this morning?"

"I never saw it, even then," declared the gipsy. "'Twas dark in the shed, and I on'y got a look at it when the policeman 'eld it in 'is 'and in the moonlight."

The coroner looked perplexed. The jury looked incredulous and dissatisfied.

"What were you doing in these grounds at that time in the morning?" was the next question put.

Enoch Lee did not answer until the question was twice repeated. Then he said—

"Look 'ere, sir: I've spoke 'onest to everythin' you've asked me yet, because this 'ere case ain't got nothin' to do wi' me; but you don't expect that if I'd been doin' a bit of innocent poachin' as I'd own up to it, and get myself put into quod, do you? 'Tain't likely. And if I was to say I 'adn't even seen such a thing as a rabbit, you wouldn't believe me. I allow I was trespassin'; yes, I allow that. And if a poor little rabbit 'ad chanced to walk up to me and mistake

my pocket for its burrow, like—well, I don't say as I wouldn't 'ave took it 'ome with me."

"That matter will be dealt with at another time," said the coroner severely. "You were caught poaching, and you were found with that weapon in your possession, and the jury will draw their own conclusions from these circumstances. There is one more question I wish you to answer. You were taken into the gamekeeper's shed this forenoon, and there you saw the body of the unfortunate young man into the cause of whose death we are now inquiring. That is so, is it not?"

Enoch Lee nodded affirmatively.

"Yes," he replied. "I seen the body. Likewise the clothes as were took off of 'im."

"Did you recognise him?"

Lee shook his head. "No," he declared positively. "Never set eyes on 'im afore as I know of."

"You are sure of that?"

The gipsy hesitated, looking about at the stuffed birds above the library bookcases.

"Well," he said presently, "now as you ask me, I do sort of remember seein' a chap something like 'im on the road yesterday morning nigh to Bittadon. Dressed as a seaman 'e was, in clothes the same as them on the table, and 'ad a cut across 'is nose. We'd stopped to give the 'orses a feed, when I see 'im trampin' along as if 'e was in a 'urry. When 'e come abreast of the front caravan, where I was sittin' on the

step smokin' and listenin' to Joe talkin' about Canada with 'im as were inside with 'im, I see the sailor chap come to a sudden stop. Then 'e came nearer, as if 'e wanted to 'ave a better look at the portmantle as my back were leanin' against. But 'e couldn't see much of it, and 'e went on without sayin' nothin', but starin' at us queerly, all the same. Yes, sir, I reckon it was the same chap. But that's all I know about 'im."

The coroner passed this little item of evidence as of no account. Wilfred Thornleigh was the only person present who seemed to take any notice of it. He moved restlessly, and turned to whisper something to Mr. Gedling, who sat next to him. As for myself, I listened with acute interest to what the gipsy said. Why had the supposed sailorman looked so intently at that leather bag? Did he know it? Did he divine by its presence there in the doorway of the caravan that its owner, Wilfred Thornleigh, was within the van? If so, he must have been in some strange way acquainted with Wilfred, and was possibly pursuing him for some purpose of hatred or revenge.

I almost trembled as I continued this train of thought. Had Wilfred Thornleigh indeed been pursued? Had his pursuer confronted him in Barracombe plantation, there to attack him? And—oh, fearful thought!—had Wilfred Thornleigh been too much for him in the encounter, dealing him the blow that had proved fatal?

Suddenly I was reminded of my original surmise in

connection with the dead tramp, as we called him. In the first awful moments when I looked upon him lying lifeless in the plantation, and indeed until I went back to the Manor with the doctor's message, I had firmly imagined that he, the dead tramp, was himself Wilfred Thornleigh. Had I heard it earlier, this evidence of the young gipsy's would have seemed to support my instinctive belief, for what more natural than that the returned prodigal, seeing what he thought to be his own bag on the caravan, should pause to look at it more closely? I tried to persuade myself that this was idle theorising. Was not Wilfred Thornleigh—the real, unquestioned Wilfred Thornleigh—here in his home, where he had been received with unerring recognition by his relatives? It was surely nothing short of ridiculous of me to cherish these doubts, when his own father, his aunt, and his brother were apparently so certain of his identity!

And yet it could not be denied that Wilfred Thornleigh, hearing what the gipsy said of the sailor-man's inquisitive glance at the bag, had betrayed uneasiness. He seemed to be burdened with some secret dread. The more I observed him—the more I reflected upon the results of my observation—the more suspicious did I become that there was something altogether sinister and mysterious about him and his home-coming—something which remained obscure and unaccountable.



I did not know until afterwards that this same suspicion of him had already begun to trouble Miss Thornleigh's active brain.

It occurred to me that Wilfred Thornleigh's evidence, if truthfully given, might clear up a great many of the perplexing points of this inquiry. Where had he himself been, and what had he been doing, between the hours of five and six o'clock on the previous evening? What did he himself know of the deceased? I was hoping that the coroner would call him to the witness-table at this juncture, but instead it was his brother Roy who was requested to stand forward.

Roy was obviously nervous, and I was uncomfortably conscious that more than once his glance wandered in my direction to fix itself upon me appealingly. In the course of his examination he volunteered nothing, and I felt certain that for some hidden reason he did not intend to tell the whole truth, although, on the other hand, he told nothing but the truth.

In reply to the coroner's questions, he described how he had walked down the avenue with me, and how, while I went on to the lodge, he took the path towards the village in search of Mr. Gedling. He had not gone far, he explained, when he thought he saw Mr. Gedling going through the shubbery towards the avenue. Roy turned back, expecting to meet him in the open, but was only in time to see a dark figure



“THERE ARE STAINS OF BLOOD UPON IT,” HE  
ANNOUNCED.—*Page 149.*





cross the drive and disappear into the plantation. He waited for a few minutes, then went farther down the avenue, pausing at the place where the unknown figure had leapt the fence. Listening, he heard voices.

“I heard the same exclamation that Austin Pride heard,” he said, “but it seemed to me that the words were not ‘You! what brings you here?’ but ‘Thew! what brings you here?’ and from that I thought, at first, that the gamekeeper had dropped on a poacher. I heard the cry for help, and I ran in among the trees until I came to the place where I found the young fellow lying on his back dying. There was no sign of anyone else there, except that there was a sound of breaking twigs as if someone were hurrying away. I struck a light, and saw that the man who had been wounded, and who was then, so far as I could tell, dead, was the tramp that we’d seen at the lodge gates earlier in the evening. And then a curious thought came to me. I wondered for an instant if this stranger could possibly be my brother Wilfred, whom we were expecting. While I was still looking down at him, there was a sound of footsteps near me, and then I saw Percy Saintsbury. He made a lunge at me and caught me by the arm, but soon released me. I told him what had happened, but—he seemed to know already. And when I struck another light, I noticed that his hands had blood on them.”

“Do you mean to imply by that that you suspected—that you thought it possible—that Saintsbury had been there before you?” questioned the coroner.

Roy glanced at me again. “I don’t mean to imply anything,” he answered, “except that Saintsbury seemed to be the only person in the plantation beside myself.”

“But you said just now that you heard voices,” pursued Mr. Weldron. “Was one of those voices the voice of Percival Saintsbury?”

“I—I can’t say. I don’t know,” stammered Roy. “The whole thing took place so quickly, and I was so nervous. I can’t trust myself to give any opinion.”

“You are not asked for an opinion,” the coroner told him. “You are only asked to state the facts that came to your knowledge. Did Saintsbury betray any agitation? Did he say anything which might lead you to suspect anything?”

“No,” Roy answered impatiently. “He was more cool and collected than I was myself, and he said very little, except to advise me to go for Dr. Partridge, which I did.”

This ended Roy’s evidence, and the proceedings were interrupted for a quarter of an hour, during which the jurymen were served with cups of tea. The coroner, the doctor, and the lawyer went with us into the drawing-room, where afternoon tea was served.

As we crossed the hall, I drew Roy Thornleigh aside.

"Roy," I said, "you are hiding something. You are trying to shield someone. You have not told the coroner all you know. Why don't you tell the truth—the whole truth?"

He stared at me aghast.

"What!" he cried. "Do you—you ask me to tell the truth?"

"Yes," I urged him. "The truth about the knife, the truth about everything."

He clutched at my arm eagerly, wildly.

"Forgive me, Saintsbury," he faltered. "I know now that you are innocent. But it was for your sake that I was silent. I have been silly enough to believe you were guilty."

"Guilty!" I echoed, drawing myself away from him. "Guilty of what?"

He swept his hand over his forehead and through his hair, as if he were waking from an unpleasant dream.

"Why," he answered, in a tone of infinite relief, "of taking that poor fellow's life!"



## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE MISSING PORTRAIT.

I WAS amazed, dumfounded at his words. He, Roy Thornleigh, my best and dearest companion, had suspected me, his friend and guest, of having committed that unspeakable crime! This was the reason why he had pointedly shunned me, looked at me askance, shrunk from me as if my mere touch were contamination! And by withholding the truth he had been seeking to shelter me!

“Roy,” I cried, “you do not know what harm you may have done by not speaking out. Even if I had been guilty, it would have been wrong of you to try to defeat the ends of justice. You ought to have told everything—*everything*.”

He took hold of my arm and drew me to the hall fireplace.

“What am I to do, Saint?” he implored.

“Your duty is plain,” I returned. “Go to Mr. Weldron, now, in the drawing-room, and tell him that you want to be re-examined and cross-questioned.”

Remind him that he has not yet asked for your evidence in connection with that knife."

He looked at me perplexed for an instant. I met his gaze calmly.

"All right," he decided; and I watched him go up to the coroner and remain with him in conversation for several minutes.

While I was drinking a cup of tea, I happened to overhear a conversation between Dr. Partridge and Wilfred Thornleigh, who stood at my elbow.

"Your life in Canada has made a tremendous alteration in you," the doctor casually observed, meditatively stirring his tea. "I suppose you have spent a great deal of your time in the open air, eh?"

"Yes," was Wilfred's laconic answer.

"And you haven't had any further trouble with your lungs?"

"My lungs!" There was something of surprise in Wilfred's repetition of the words. Possibly he had forgotten that he had been troubled with weak lungs before he went abroad. "I hardly remember that I ever had anything wrong with them," he quickly added.

The doctor drank his tea and put down the empty teacup on the edge of one of the small tables.

"You are altogether more robust than you gave promise of being," he remarked, returning to Wilfred, "and your face is hardly recognisable with that

moustache. But I think the greatest alteration is in your voice. I certainly should not have known you by it."

"That's what my father said," smiled Wilfred. "But it was not broken before I went away."

"H'm," grunted Dr. Partridge. "I had an idea that it broke when you were fifteen, just after you recovered from measles. Perhaps it broke a second time—although that is not a frequent occurrence, by any means."

He looked at Wilfred keenly as he spoke. He too, it seemed, had some latent suspicion that this heir from the Colonies was not all that he pretended to be.

I saw a shadow of a frown pass across Wilfred's brow.

"Shall I get you another cup of tea, Dr. Partridge?" he asked abruptly, as if with the design of dismissing the subject.

The doctor declined, and Wilfred went over to the other side of the room, where Mr. Gedling was standing between the window and a tall fern palm. As he passed, his sleeve almost overbalanced Dr. Partridge's teacup, that was perilously near the edge of the little table. I stepped forward, and was pushing the precious porcelain into a safer position, when I caught sight of a photograph album. Roy had looked through this volume with me during the few awkward minutes of my first arrival in the house,

and I remembered now that among the portraits to which he had drawn my attention was one of his brother Wilfred.

Standing near the album now, I opened it and turned the cardboard pages until I came to the one I wanted to find. To my astonishment, I discovered that Wilfred's portrait had been removed, and the space where it had been was left blank. I wondered who had removed it, and why it had been taken out of the book where it had been untouched for five years. Slowly closing the volume, I happened to glance in the direction of the window, and there I saw Wilfred Thornleigh standing behind the palm with his eyes fixed upon me in a gaze of undissimulated enmity.

At this point there was a movement towards the library. When we were all seated and order had been called, the coroner cast his glance round the table and back at the witnesses.

"When we adjourned a few minutes ago," he said, "the witness Roy Thornleigh was under examination. He was suffering from nervousness; but now that he has been refreshed by a cup of tea, I trust that he will give his further evidence with less hesitation."

Roy walked to the end of the table, and the coroner resumed his questioning.

"You have stated," he said, "that a few minutes after five o'clock you left the house and walked down the carriage-drive as far as the path leading to

the village, and that your friend Saintsbury was with you. Why did you want to go to the village?"

"To try to find Mr. Gedling," Roy answered, "and get from him some information about a letter which had come from my brother in Barnstaple, saying that he, my brother, was on his way home. Mr. Gedling had read the letter to my father, and knew more about it than anyone else I could ask. I understood that he had gone to the village to send off a telegram to my brother."

"And why did Saintsbury go with you?"

"Merely for company," Roy answered. "I had asked him to come."

"Then if you had not asked him, you believe he would have remained in the house?"

"Yes. He had no other reason for going out of doors. When we got to the path, he went on, at my request, to the lodge."

"Are you sure that it was not Saintsbury's figure that you saw crossing the avenue and plunging into the plantation?"

Roy nodded. "It was too dark for me to see clearly, but he hadn't time to go down to the lodge, as he did go, and be back in the avenue so quickly as that. Yes, I am sure it wasn't Saintsbury."

"Might it have been Mr. Gedling, or the game-keeper?"

"It could hardly have been Mr. Gedling," Roy replied thoughtfully, "because I happen to know now

that Mr. Gedling was still round at the stables when I was in the avenue. He was despatching the carriage to Barnstaple. Whoever the person was, I could not identify him. It might have been the gamekeeper; it might have been the deceased himself, or someone else altogether."

This suggestion that the person Roy saw might have been the tramp, did not seem to have occurred to anyone before. It was an important suggestion, however, inasmuch as that person must in all likelihood have been either the tramp or else his assailant.

One of the jurymen—a retired builder—here scribbled a note and passed it to the coroner. Mr. Weldron read it, and, evidently prompted by it, asked—

"What reason—what proof have you for believing that Saintsbury actually did go down to the lodge?"

Roy Thornleigh looked confused.

"I have no positive proof," he admitted reluctantly. "I have only my belief."

"Do you swear that the voice you heard was not the voice of Percival Saintsbury?" inquired the coroner—"I mean the voice that you heard crying the words 'Thew! What brings *you* here?'"

"Excuse me, sir," returned Roy rather warmly, "I said that it was my 'impression' that those were the words used, and I cannot state positively whether they began with 'Thew' or the word 'You.' Neither can I swear that either of the voices was Saintsbury's



voice. They were both deeper and older voices than Saintsbury's, and both were strange to me."

Mr. Weldron made a sign to Inspector Blower, who approached Roy and placed the knife on the table in front of him.

"Kindly look at that," said the coroner, "and tell the jury if you recognise it."

There was a perceptible sensation in the room when Roy Thornleigh, without touching the thing, glanced at it, and answered in a composed and level voice—

"Yes, I recognise it. It is *my* knife."

The faces of the jurymen expressed blank astonishment, Dr. Partridge was incredulous, and Mr. Swift looked as if he thought Roy had taken leave of his senses. But the most curious result of the evidence was its effect upon Wilfred Thornleigh, whose countenance became livid. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, as though he were going to faint.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ROY THORNLEIGH'S EXPLANATION.

“**Y**OU are sure it is yours?” inquired the coroner.  
“Quite sure,” returned Roy. “It was given to me three or four years ago by a friend of my father’s, an officer who brought it from Abyssinia. I kept it in my bedroom with a lot of other trophies from foreign lands. Yesterday I took it down to use it for cutting up some raw meat for my puppies. I had read in a dog-book that a little raw meat occasionally is good for pups, and I got some calves’ liver that morning from the cook. Any other knife would have done as well, but the cook objects to my using the household plates or knives in the kennel.”

“And you used this knife yesterday morning?” questioned the coroner.

“Well, it was after lunch-time, really,” explained Roy. “Just before Saintsbury and Pride and I went skating.”

“Then,” went on the coroner, “when you had used it, did you leave it just as it was in the kennel?”

“No,” Roy answered; “I cleaned it first, then I

put it back into its leather case and slipped it into my pocket, taking it away with me."

"Just examine it attentively, please, and tell us if the stains that are now on the blade were there when you took it out of the kennel."

"I need not examine it more closely," was Roy's ready response. "When I returned it to its case the blade was so clean and bright that you could see your face in it."

"Continue," urged the coroner encouragingly. "You carried it in your pocket when you went skating, you say?"

"Yes. And I thought no more about it until we were at the lake putting on our skates. Austin Pride was in some difficulty with his skate straps, which were too long, and he wanted to shorten one of them. He asked me for a knife to cut it with. I then put my hand into the outer breast pocket of my jacket, and discovered that the knife was not there. I had lost it. But Saintsbury lent Pride his penknife, so it didn't matter very much."

"Had you any idea where you had lost it? By which way did you go down to the lake?"

"We went by the path past Thew's cottage," Roy explained. "And we were running to see which of us would get his skates on first. I believe that it was somewhere along that same path that the knife jumped out of my pocket. My coat was not buttoned, and I remember that we each vaulted over the

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stile between the plantation and the three-acre meadow."

"One moment," interposed Mr. Swift, laying his hand on the coroner's arm. "There seems to be some confusion about all these paths. To which one are we to understand that the witness is now referring?"

Roy Thornleigh here explained that he was speaking of what was called the plantation path, which crossed the meadow and came out on the road north of the lodge gates. The other footpath, leading to the village, and entering the road south of the gates, was called the field path.

"Now," resumed Mr. Weldron, "assuming that you lost the knife at the stile between the north fringe of the plantation and the three-acre meadow, we may infer, I suppose, that it might be picked up by the first person passing that way?"

"Naturally," assented Roy.

"But how do you know that it was lost, and not stolen?" asked the coroner.

Roy replied that he was positive that it could not have been stolen, and as positive that he had lost it near the stile.

"Could Saintsbury have gone back and picked it up?" he was asked.

"Well," he answered, "if he had known where it was, he might have done, and certainly he was not at my side all the time we were skating, and Pride and I came away without him, and he didn't

come up to us until we were near the lodge gates. But seeing that Saintsbury didn't even know that I had taken the knife down from its place in my bedroom, it's not likely that he could have thought anything about it one way or another."

"You returned home by the same way, did you?"

"No," declared Roy; "we came back by the avenue. I have already told you that it was at the lodge gates that we all three saw the tramp looking in."

"Quite so," acquiesced the coroner. "And, by the way, when you saw the tramp, did you happen to observe whether he wore a ring or not?"

Roy shook his head. "No," he said.

"Nor afterwards, when you discovered him lying wounded in the plantation?"

"No."

"In what position was the deceased lying when you saw him?"

"Flat on his back," returned Roy, "with his right arm stretched out from the shoulder and his right fist closed."

"But that was not the position in which Dr. Partridge found him," observed Mr. Weldron.

"No," agreed Roy. "The body seemed to have been moved during my absence, when I went to fetch the doctor. I believe it was during that interval that he was robbed."

"But we don't know that he actually was robbed,"

objected the coroner. "That is only a surmise, based upon the common belief that no one—even a homeless tramp—goes about with absolutely empty pockets. If you could assure us that he wore a ring later than the time at which the boy Middlewick saw one on his little finger, then we might have ground for the assumption that there had been robbery."

Roy inclined his head in acceptance of the argument.

The coroner paused, thrusting two fingers between his high collar and his red neck. During the pause, Wilfred Thornleigh rose from his chair near the fire and strode on tip-toe towards the door.

"You are not leaving the court, Thornleigh?" cried the coroner. "I shall want your evidence presently."

Wilfred looked back at him impatiently.

"I am only going to a seat farther away from the fire," he said. And he dropped into a chair at the rear of the witness. I had the impression that it was not so much the warmth of the fire which caused him to change his place, as the desire to remove himself out of the direct range of my scrutiny.

Addressing Roy, the coroner continued—

"Just before the adjournment, you stated that when Saintsbury joined you at the scene of this crime, he appeared to you already to know what had happened. You stated also that you noticed the red stains on his hands. You have shown us that it was within the scope of possibility that he could have



found and taken possession of the suspected weapon. Now, I do not wish you to commit yourself to any rash declaration, but I want you honestly to tell the Court whether you did or did not suspect Percival Saintsbury of having committed the crime."

Mr. Swift sprang up from his seat on hearing this question.

"Pardon me, Mr. Coroner," he protested, "but are you not asking a little too much in requesting a witness to reveal his private opinion instead of stating facts?"

The coroner took the rebuke in good part.

"The witness will answer the question, I think," he remarked.

Roy Thornleigh then said—

"I will confess that I was so much in doubt of him, that later in the evening—after dinner—I induced him to play a game of billiards, with the purpose of observing whether he was nervous. But whatever my private opinion may have been, I am now very firmly convinced that he could not possibly have been on the scene before me. He had not time, for one thing. How could he have gone down to the lodge, then come half-way up the drive, enter the plantation and liberate a hare from a poacher's snare, meet the stranger, have a violent quarrel with him, strike the fatal blow, and then escape unobserved, all in the few minutes during which he and I were separated? It couldn't be done, sir. For another

thing, it would be ridiculous to suppose that he had even the shadow of a motive for doing such a thing. He had never seen the stranger before, except at a distance; never spoken to him, knew absolutely nothing about him."

"Thank you," interrupted Mr. Weldron. "I am glad to hear you speak like that. Your explanation removes the impression which you made by your earlier evidence." The coroner paused, and again struggled with his tight collar. "And now," he went on, "as to this knife of yours. If, as you say, you lost it at the stile, and it was then bright and clean, how do you account for it being found by Enoch Lee in the shed where you keep your dogs?"

Roy looked across at me anxiously. I could see that he was again a little nervous, but he pulled himself together with an effort, and answered—

"When Enoch Lee told you just now that he found the knife in the kennel, he was telling you the truth. He did find it there. He found it on the shelf in the corner at the right side of the door, under a piece of sackcloth. It was I who put it there."

Again there was a sensation among the jurymen. It was obviously apparent to them that the more Roy Thornleigh spoke the more darkly was he making the evidence tell against himself. They had only his own unsupported word for it that he had ever lost the knife. He had himself admitted that he was the first to discover the dead body, and he had declared his

belief that until I arrived upon the spot he was alone in the plantation. I began almost to regret that I had so earnestly urged him to be re-examined.

"It was I who put it there," he repeated, when the jurymen had ceased to nudge each other and whisper. "I put it there just before dinner-time, when Saintsbury came into the kennel to tell me that my brother Wilfred had arrived."

"But if, as you declare, you had lost it, how came it again into your possession?" inquired the coroner sternly.

"When Dr. Partridge was looking at the body," Roy resumed, "he said something about the kind of weapon that must have been used. I at once remembered the knife I had lost, and I was a bit terrified lest it should be found and recognised as mine. I wanted to get hold of it again and put it away somewhere. After Saintsbury went up to the house, the doctor and the gamekeeper carried the body to Thew's hut, Pride going in front of them with the lantern. Instead of going with them, I went aside along the path to the stile. There I searched for a long time without any result. Then I gave up the search and turned to go home. But I had only gone about thirty yards when my foot knocked against something on the ground. It was the knife. I picked it up, and then felt about for the scabbard, but couldn't find it, so I came home and went straight to the kennel. Until I got into the kennel and turned on the light of my

hand-lamp, I never imagined that this particular knife could have had anything to do with what had happened in the plantation. But when I saw what was on the blade, I grew frightened, and I thrust the thing on to the shelf, and was covering it over with the sackcloth when Saintsbury came in. My knowledge that the blade had blood on it made me frightfully nervous all the evening. There!" he concluded, "that is all I know, and I've told you the whole truth."

What others who heard it thought of this evidence I could only guess. But it seemed to me that it left the whole case more perplexing and mysterious than ever. It had cleared away the suggested suspicion against myself; it had also corroborated Enoch Lee's account of himself. Roy and Pride were, to my mind, both above suspicion, and, unless the gamekeeper had spoken falsely, upon whom was the burden of guilt to be fastened? Was it some total stranger, who had left no trace of his presence in the plantation? or was the guilty party even now in our midst, sitting unknown in this room, breathing the same air with us, and listening to the statement of a problem which he alone could solve?

## CHAPTER XXI.

### WILFRED THORNLEIGH'S TESTIMONY.

I HAD never before been present at a coroner's inquest, or, indeed, in any court of law, and it was not easy for me entirely to understand Mr. Weldron's methods of gathering evidence from the various witnesses. Sometimes he seemed to go quite aside from the problem at issue, and to ask questions which didn't strike me as having anything to do with the case; at other times he omitted to ask things which appeared to me to be of obvious importance, and this was particularly so in regard to his examination of Mr. Gedling, who was called to the table when Roy had told all that he knew.

What he sought to draw from Mr. Gedling was exact information as to the time at which the gipsy man, Enoch Lee, arrived at the house with Wilfred Thornleigh's valise. In giving this information, however, the secretary stated two facts which threw new light upon his own movements. The first was that he did not start to go down to the village to send the telegram to Barnstaple until after Roy and I had left

the house. He had waited to give the coachman full instructions as to how he was to find Wilfred Thornleigh, and also to see the carriage start. Then he had returned into the house to write out the telegram to Sir Brian's dictation. He went out of the house, he said, at exactly twenty-five minutes past five, and sent off the telegram from the village post-office ten minutes afterwards. He went by the field path, and would thus be on his way at the time when I was in Thew's cottage. The telegram was addressed to Sir Brian Thornleigh's banker, and Mr. Gedling waited for a reply, receiving it at half-past six.

The second fact was that, in returning by the same path, Mr. Gedling had passed Enoch Lee carrying the bag, and that when he was questioning the gipsy, Wilfred Thornleigh himself came up to him and introduced himself. Mr. Gedling and Wilfred walked up to the house together, the gipsy following behind.

This information, so far as it went, was manifestly favourable to the young gipsy's own account of himself. But I observed that the coroner still sided with the jury in doubting the evidence of both Enoch Lee and his father. Enoch might, indeed, have left the encampment at half-past six, but this did not conclusively prove that he had not been in the plantation between five and six o'clock; and in order to make this matter clear, Wilfred Thornleigh was summoned to the witness-table.

He rose promptly from his chair and took the oath.



The shade of the table-lamp nearest to him was crooked, and the light shone into his eyes. While waiting for the coroner's first interrogation, he put forth his hand and moved the shade, rather too much, I thought, for now his face was put into shadow, and one could not discern the play of his features.

"We have already heard from the witness, Joseph Lee," began the coroner, "that you made a portion of your journey from Barnstaple to Barracombe yesterday in one of his caravans."

Wilfred nodded, and did not attempt to explain at what part of the road he had fallen in with the gipsies. I regretted that this point was not pressed, for I had a particular desire to know exactly how and in what circumstances that journey had been performed.

"And," continued Mr. Weldron, "doubtless you remember the caravan coming to a halt at Bittadon?" Wilfred again nodded, and the coroner asked, "Did you happen to see the young man who, when passing along the road, paused in his walk and looked in at the doorway where Enoch Lee was sitting?"

"Yes," answered Wilfred, "I saw him. I saw his face and cap and shoulders. It seemed to me that he was going to ask his way or something, but he went on without speaking. He looked like a seaman on the tramp."

"Had you seen him before?"

"No," was Wilfred's emphatic response. And the denial was accepted as the truth.

"Have you seen him since?"

"No," came the equally positive reply, and I felt certain that it was a falsehood.

"At what time did the caravans reach Barracombe?"

Wilfred glanced at the clock on the library mantelpiece.

"Well, I think it must have been about four o'clock, or a little after," he answered doubtfully.

The coroner stroked his clean-shaven cheeks meditatively.

"Four o'clock, and yet it was not until after six o'clock that you arrived here at your home? Was not that an exceedingly strange delay, seeing that you had been absent in a distant country for five long years?"

"It may seem so to you, sir," rejoined Wilfred, "but——"

"But what?"

"Well," he continued, with cleverly assumed innocence, "the circumstances of my return were rather peculiar. I don't want to enter into an explanation of my private affairs before strangers. But, to be candid, I was in considerable doubt as to what kind of a reception awaited me. I had written to my father three days before from Barnstaple to say that I was in England, and asking him to send a carriage for me. He did not reply. The carriage did not come. I could only believe that I was not wanted, and, I

assure you, sir, it required a good deal of courage on my part to come up to the house at all. I was a long time in making up my mind."

"I understand," broke in Mr. Weldron, with a sympathetic inclination of the head. "And for that reason you lingered in the caravan, passing in turn the plantation path, the avenue gates, and the field path?"

"Yes," added the witness quickly, "and going on to Coppinger's Copse, where I took up yet more time in having a wash and making myself tidy. Then, too, I found the gipsies rather entertaining and hospitable, and——"

The coroner again interrupted.

"Then at what time did you finally decide to take the important plunge?" he asked.

"Well," returned Wilfred in an off-hand tone, "I can't fix the time exactly. I'd no watch with me, but I heard the church clock strike six before I left the copse."

"That will do," said Mr. Weldron, allowing the explanation to pass unchallenged; "in any case, it was after half-past five, was it?"

"Oh yes," Wilfred asseverated.

"Well, now, where was Enoch Lee all that time?"

"He was working among the horses mostly, feeding them and letting them loose, and carrying water from the brook."

"Ah! You are positive of that, are you?" interro-

gated Mr. Weldron, with a significant glance at the jurymen. "You are willing to swear that Enoch Lee did not leave the encampment from the time at which the caravans drew up at the copse until the time when he took your bag and followed you up to the Manor?"

"I am absolutely certain," was Wilfred's quietly-spoken assurance.

This concluded his evidence, and certainly it was not very enlightening. Wilfred, however, had obviously made a good impression upon the jury by his cleverly assumed candour, and he fully established the innocence of Enoch Lee.

That proving of the young gipsy's innocence seemed to come almost as a disappointment to the jurymen, and especially to the little schoolmaster, who had apparently made up his mind from the first that Enoch Lee, and Lee alone, was guilty. There was a lot of whispering and argument and consultation going on while Wilfred was returning to his seat, and more than once I heard the name of the gamekeeper mentioned. The coroner meanwhile was searching busily among his notes of the evidence. Presently he demanded silence, and then he called my own name—

"Percival Saintsbury."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE PERSON UNKNOWN.

WHILE I was taking the oath he continued to consult his notes, and I stood for a long time at the table before he looked across at me.

“Yesterday afternoon,” he began, “you went skating, I believe, with your companions, Roy Thornleigh and Austin Pride, on Barracombe Lake. By which way did you go down to the lake?”

I answered: “We went down the avenue, then turned to the left by the plantation path, crossed by the stile into the three-acre meadow, and so got into the main road and Frog Lane.”

“In what order did you cross the stile? Which of you went over first?”

“I myself did,” I replied. “I leapt over it with a running jump. Then Pride vaulted it, and after him Roy Thornleigh cleared the top bar at a jump, but stumbled on the meadow side, and went down on his hands and knees.”

“Ah! He fell, did he? He did not tell us that.”

Roy leaned forward in his chair and interjected the remark—

“It’s quite right, Mr. Weldron. I did stumble, but I’d forgotten that.”

“Now, when he fell, did you see or hear anything drop from his coat pocket?” the coroner asked me.

“No. His skates rattled, but he was upon his feet in a moment and after us.”

“Did you know, or did you not know, that before he fell he had a large knife in his pocket?”

“I did not know. I believed the knife to be still in his bedroom. He said nothing about having lost it, even afterwards, when Pride wanted to cut his skate strap, although I remember seeing him feeling in his pockets for something.”

I was then questioned concerning the time at which I left the lake, the way by which I went before joining Roy and Pride in the lane, and then concerning the stranger at the lodge gates, whom I was asked to describe. I did describe him, mentioning his peculiar walk, and the ring on his finger.

The coroner closely cross-questioned me on this matter of the ring, and I persisted that I had seen one on the left little finger both when he was at the gate and when I saw him lying dead in the plantation by the light of Roy Thornleigh’s wax matches. Enoch Lee’s ring was handed to me to examine.

“This is not the same,” I declared, in spite of Tony Middlewick’s evidence as to its identity. “The one



that the deceased wore was a wide one, and it may have had the same word upon it, for it certainly bore some letters or signs—possibly the zodiac signs—engraved in relief. This ring, however, is silver, and my impression is that the one the deceased wore was gold.”

In response to further interrogation, I described the position of the body as I saw it first and as I saw it on returning with the gamekeeper’s hand-lamp; and I also mentioned how I had observed an impression of a part of the left hand on the ground, together with various other signs indicating that the body had been moved and probably robbed.

The coroner paid me a compliment on the acuteness of my observation, and then proceeded to examine me regarding my hurried visit to the gamekeeper’s cottage. Referring to Thew’s assertion that he had been asleep on the sofa, I stated how I had noticed that his cap was still warm as though he had just come in, and how there was new mud on the soles of his boots. These points seemed to impress both the coroner and the jury as being evidence incriminating the gamekeeper. But I was not myself in any way suspicious of Thew, remembering that he had himself told me, and also repeated in his own evidence, that after he had risen from the sofa he had gone out to the well for water.

I added, also, a further piece of information which was calculated to support his defence of himself, and

this was the fact that his fire had been newly kindled, the coals not being yet ignited. Calculating the time that it would take him to rise from the sofa, take down and light the table-lamp, procure sticks and new coal, build the fire and set a light to it, get the water-can from the sink and go out to the well and back, and then prepare to wash himself, I concluded that it was not humanly possible for him to have done these things in the few minutes which had elapsed since the quarrel in the plantation and my own entrance into his cottage.

A considerable amount of time was occupied with my cross-examination by the coroner and Mr. Swift. They seemed to be trying to trip me in some contradiction, and they followed my movements almost moment by moment of the hour during which the crime was committed. How long was I in walking down to the lodge after leaving Roy? What time did it occupy me to liberate the hare? Was it before or after I had seen Roy that I ran against Pride? Did I not think that a tall man like Thew would take up more than the length of the sofa, and so avoid touching it with his dirty boots? And wasn't it possible that he slept with his cap on his head? At what juncture did I hear the carriage wheels? and was I certain that it was Enoch Lee I saw coming away from the house?

It almost seemed that I was expected to account for everyone who had entered the plantation and

everything that had happened within it. But Mr. Weldron afterwards told me that he had found me a most exact and useful witness, and that my evidence had helped him materially. He was only sorry that he had not put me at the witness-table at an earlier stage of the proceedings.

When he dismissed me, he made his address to the jury, in which he recapitulated much of what had already been said, and disentangled the superfluous from the essential evidence.

“It is greatly to be regretted,” he began, “that, so far as we can judge by the evidence that we have just heard, there is absolutely no clue to the identity of this ill-starred young man. To us he is a nameless, homeless wanderer. We do not know where he came from; we do not know where he was going, or what he was doing in this neighbourhood. We surmise that he had come from a distance—probably from some seaport or fishing town—but that is about all we can say of him. It is not even possible to determine satisfactorily to what station of life he belonged. His clothing would seem to indicate that he was a seafarer, but I must warn you, gentlemen of the jury, against judging merely by his apparel, without also taking into consideration the evidence of the boy Middlewick, who declared that the deceased spoke in the tone of a person of good breeding.

“You will remember, too, the testimony of Dr. Partridge, who gave it as his skilled opinion that the

young fellow's hands were those of a gentleman, and that the texture of his skin and the general appearance of his physique indicated that he was not of the working class. If you conclude that the deceased was a gentleman—and I confess that I am myself inclined to that conclusion—then you will naturally make the inference that, either on purpose or by necessity, he had disguised himself. It appears to me that this belief that he was not an ordinary vagrant is supported not merely by the fact of his having once owned a bicycle, not merely by the fact that he wore a gold ring, but also by the circumstance that his underclothing was of fine quality. I think you may take it as certain that these seaman's clothes, this cap and these sea-boots, were made or bought for an older and bigger person than himself."

Here the coroner introduced some argument as to the buttons on the trousers, and conjectured that it was the deceased himself who had torn the missing name-label from off the collar-band of the pyjamas.

"I do not myself wholly credit the supposition that the deceased was in the neighbourhood for the purpose of poaching," the coroner continued; "although the fact that the gamekeeper found him trespassing, coupled with your knowledge that some person or persons had been setting snares or traps for game on the estate, may warrant you in holding a contrary opinion. If he was a poacher, he would have done his work secretly, and not allowed himself

to be seen in broad daylight, staring, as one of the witnesses expressed it, with 'yearning' eyes in at the front gates."

Mr. Weldron's collar seemed still to trouble him, and one could almost have known when he was approaching a full stop by seeing his hand go up to his neck.

"You have next to consider the question of motive," he went on. "Was that motive mere sordid greed, which impelled his assailant to take a life for the sake of robbery? We do not know what valuables the deceased may have had in his possession. He may even, as my friend at my left has suggested, have carried a bag of Australian gold about with him. All that we know for certain is, that what is believed to be a gold ring was taken from him, and you will probably have gathered from the evidence of the witness Saintsbury that the criminal, disturbed at his evil work, concealed himself and awaited his opportunity to return to the body and plunder it.

"Yet even the theft of the ring and the rifling of the pockets do not conclusively prove that robbery, and robbery alone, was the motive of this terrible crime. The prompting motive may equally well have been jealousy, or vengeance, or sudden anger; or the fatal blow may even have been struck in self-defence. Looking at the circumstances of this fatality, it appears to me to be almost certain that the deceased and his



assailant were known to each other. The angry words, 'What brings you here?' indicate this. But we are led to the belief that not one of the witnesses whose evidence we have taken was in any way acquainted with the deceased or had seen him before yesterday. And to no one of those witnesses can we impute a motive for violence against the stranger, apart from the possibility of a sudden, unpremeditated quarrel, or of a simple misadventure.

"I have suggested that plunder may not have been the prime motive, and yet we know that there was robbery. I would submit to you the theory that the assailant may possibly have taken the ring and emptied his victim's pockets in order to increase the difficulty of identification, or in order to put the police off the scent by making it appear that theft was his motive. This seems the more probable if you believe that the deceased was a person of good position going about in disguise. We cannot even guess at his reason for so disguising himself. It has even been suggested to me that he may have been a professional detective pursuing the person who, when they met in the plantation, turned upon him and took his life, or that he may have been in the possession of a secret which his death alone could silence.

"Gentlemen of the jury," the coroner continued, after a pause, "this is not an Assize Court, and you are not sitting in judgment upon the actions of any one individual. What you are here for is to discover



the cause of this unfortunate young man's death, and the medical evidence should make your work easy. Dr. Partridge has told you that the death was not due to an accident or to misadventure, but that it was the result of a violent attack. It remains for you to determine whether or not that attack was a pre-meditated one, and to indicate, if you can, the person who made it.

“Your deliberation will be assisted if you confine yourselves to a few definite questions, as, for example: Is the weapon which has been produced the same that caused the fatal wound? Did Roy Thornleigh actually lose the knife near the stile? If so, who was it that picked it up and used it with such awful purpose? Might that person have been the gamekeeper? Is the gamekeeper likely to have thus attacked a comparative stranger, whose only offence was that of trespass? Was it Percival Saintsbury who got possession of the knife, and had Saintsbury any conceivable motive for committing such a terrible crime? Was it Enoch Lee who did this foul deed, or was it some person still unknown—some person who had a secret grudge against the deceased and who wanted to remove him from his path?

“Then, again, who was it that Roy Thornleigh saw crossing the avenue and entering the plantation? Might that have been the gamekeeper, or the young gipsy, or young Saintsbury? Was it the deceased himself, or was it some person not yet identified?

Whose was the second of the two voices heard in the plantation by Austin Pride? Was it, as he seems to have believed, the voice of Percival Saintsbury? or might it have been Roy Thornleigh's voice, or that of Enoch Lee, of the gamekeeper, or of a total stranger?

"If you decide that the crime was wilful and premeditated, then I do not see how your suspicions can possibly rest upon any one of the persons I have named, for no one of them has been shown to have had a shadow of motive, either of cupidity or revenge, of hatred or jealous fear; and no one of them is likely to have engaged in a sudden and causeless quarrel with an absolute stranger. It seems to me, gentlemen, that we are very far from the true elucidation of this mystery, and for that reason I anticipate that you will bring in an open verdict."

The twelve jurymen rose from the table and filed out of the library. While we waited in anxious expectancy for their return, Wilfred Thornleigh unsteadily approached the fire and held his hands close to the flames, as if he were very cold, although, in truth, the room was stifling. I observed that his whole body was trembling. If he had himself been the person unknown to whom the coroner had referred, he could not have betrayed more singular nervousness.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

MARKED "PRIVATE."

THE finding of the jury was just what everyone must have expected in view of Mr. Weldron's instructions. They could not say with any degree of certainty who or what the unfortunate young man was, neither could they divine for what purpose he had loitered about the Barracombe grounds. They expressed the belief that he had been something better than a mere vagrant, and that probably he had been going about the countryside in disguise; but that was all.

As to the cause of his death, they were unanimous in their verdict that he had been maliciously attacked, wilfully and fatally stabbed, and afterwards robbed, by some person or persons unknown.

In accordance with this verdict, the coroner wrote out the death certificate, and stated that Sir Brian Thornleigh had generously offered to bear the expense of the nameless youth's funeral, adding that the further investigation of the case would now be placed in the hands of the police. Each of us who had been

a witness in the coroner's inquiry was thereupon served with a subpoena commanding us to appear when called upon to give evidence before a Magistrate's Court.

I was the last to whom the formidable and official-looking blue slip of paper was handed, and by the time that I had read it everyone else had left the library, excepting Inspector Blower, Constable Jawler, and their prisoner, Enoch Lee. The young gipsy was to be detained in custody on the charge of poaching; but he did not appear to regard his fate with any great dread, for he was strolling about the room to get a closer view of the cases of stuffed birds on the top of the bookshelves.

Blower was packing up the sea-boots and clothing and other articles of evidence, and had spread the dust-sheet on the library table.

"What's going to be done with those, Inspector?" I questioned him in passing.

"Why, sir," said he, "they're impounded now, and 'ave got to be put under lock and key against the next time they be wanted. If us do arrest the man as committed this 'ere crime, there'll be a trial, d'ye see?"

"I hope you won't be very long in arresting him, then," I remarked. "We shall be back at school in another fortnight, and I'm sure I for one don't want to have the term broken into by having to attend any trial. I suppose it will be held at Exeter, won't it?"

He had folded up the pea-jacket, and now he put forth his hand to take up the suit of pyjamas.

"I allow 'twill be at Exeter that the Assizes 'll take place," he explained; "but there'll be the Magistrate's Inquiry before that. This sort of business do take up a mortal lot of time from first to last."

"Do you mind my having a look at this garment?" I asked, laying my hand on the jacket of the pyjamas. "I should like to see where that name-label was."

He allowed me to make my examination. The inside of the blue-and-white collar-band was soiled as if from long wear; but at the place which would come against the back of the wearer's neck there was a small oblong space of cleaner material, and at the edge of this I found a tiny fragment of white sewing-cotton precisely similar to the fragment which I had found on this same table in the forenoon. I left the thread where it was, and, before passing the jacket back to the inspector, I quickly took up a piece of white paper that had been left on the table by one of the jurymen, placed it flat on the collar-band, and folded it exactly to the same size as the missing tab, upon which, it was to be presumed, the name and address of the shopkeeper from whom the pyjamas were bought had been woven.

I had just finished doing this, and was slipping the folded paper into my waistcoat pocket, when a hand slapped me on the back, rather more heavily than the occasion warranted.

"What are you up to, Saintsbury?"

It was Wilfred Thornleigh who made the angry demand. I turned round upon him impatiently, and faced him.

"What's that to you?" I cried, with less courtesy than I ought to have shown to one in whose house I was a guest.

He eyed me with veiled malice as he took the garment from me and passed it to the inspector.

"Oh, don't you lose your temper," he returned, with a forced smile. "You might have been caught spying, the way you started."

It struck me that if there was any spying at all, it was on his own part rather than mine. He had come back into the room silently, wearing the moccasins which, he had told me, he had brought home from Canada as a present for his brother Roy. I understood now how Indians tread so noiselessly when their feet are similarly shod.

"Thank you, Blower," I nodded to the inspector, as I went out of the library; "and I do hope that I shall not be dragged away from school in the middle of the term."

Wilfred followed me. I could believe that he had come into the room on purpose to see why I remained behind.

"What are you going to turn to when you've done with schooling?" he questioned me lightly, as we crossed the hall.



"I hope to go into the Army," I answered.

"Indeed!" he spoke sneeringly. "I should have thought you were cut out for a detective."

"I have not the slightest wish to have anything to do with Scotland Yard," I retorted; and I was uncharitable enough to remember the incident of the forged cheque, which had so nearly brought Wilfred Thornleigh into the clutches of the detectives.

When I went upstairs to dress for dinner, I took the folded piece of paper from my pocket and cut the slip to the size of the missing label. It was as near as possible two inches in length by half an inch wide. I was interested in this matter, because I thought that it might prove to be an important clue as to the identity of the dead tramp; but that night, when I was preparing for bed, I chanced to look at the label on my own pyjamas, and was somewhat nonplussed to find that it measured almost exactly the same size, only that mine was just a trifle wider.

That night I was admitted to Roy's room, and we had our usual boyish chat before separating for bed. Both Roy and Pride were profuse in their expressions of regret that they had been such "rotters" as to suspect me, but I assured them that I did not bear the slightest resentment against either of them. We discussed the inquest, and made up all sorts of fanciful stories to explain the tramp's reasons for going about in disguise.

"We don't know but what he was like that jossar

in the *Arabian Nights* that went about in Bagdad dressed like a beggar, although he was a prince all the time," said Roy.

"Yes," added Pride; "or there may have been a vendetta against him, and some chap may have followed him for weeks before he ran him to earth at last."

"I thought Mr. Swift's idea wasn't half bad," I suggested, "that perhaps he'd come home from the Australian gold diggings with a bag of gold under his coat, and that some fellow who knew about it tracked him down for the sake of getting hold of the swag."

"There was a tale I once read," resumed Roy, "about a chap that stole a great diamond from an idol's eye-socket in India somewhere, and some Hindoos shadowed him for months and months, and even came over to England after him, trying to recover the precious stone. He assumed all sorts of disguises to escape them, but they always turned up when he least expected them, and they got the better of him at last."

"I don't feel altogether sure that those gipsy Johnnies haven't something to do with this affair," ventured Pride. "Gipsies are an Oriental people, you know, and they'd swear to anything and do anything for the sake of gain."

"Yes, but these same gipsies are well known in Devonshire," explained Roy, "and they've been in Barracombe often. Besides, Wilfred's evidence disposed of all suspicion against them."

"Wilfred was rather lucky to get the chance of spending all that time in a caravan," remarked Pride. "I've often wished to have an experience like that. It must be like going a yachting cruise on land."

"Yes; but I don't suppose Wilfred thought much of it," agreed Roy. "After he has been in Canada, there's nothing very exciting in the way of adventure to be got in prosy old England."

"Rather hard lines on you, Roy, Wilfred's coming back and doing you out of the baronetcy," observed Austin Pride. "It will make a heap of difference to your career."

"Naturally," sighed Roy. "I shall have to take a back seat now. But, of course, I can't be sorry that my brother turns out to be alive after all. I can only wish that he had a better record behind him, and that I had more cause to be proud of him."

On the following morning, while waiting for breakfast, I strolled out across the side lawn, reading a letter which had come to me from my mother, when Tony Middlewick came up to me and presented me with a note which he drew from his trousers pocket.

"Mister Weldron's compliments, sir, and 'e arsked me to give you this 'ere on the quiet. It's marked 'Private.'"

"When did Mr. Weldron give it to you?" I inquired, wondering what that gentleman could have to write to me privately about.

"Early this mornin', sir," said Tony. "Me and 'im

met along the road, and 'e says to me, 'Tony,' 'e says, 'jus' give this 'ere note to Mr. Saintsbury,' 'e says, 'and you needn't let everyone in the 'ouse see you 'and it to 'im.' And 'e tips me 'alf a crown."

"You haven't quite obeyed your instructions, I'm afraid, Tony," I said, "for there is Mr. Wilfred at his bedroom window, and he for one has seen you give me the letter."

There was nothing very private in the note after all, however. It contained merely a few hurriedly written lines from the coroner, in which he asked me to do him the favour of dining with him that evening. So little private did I consider the communication, that I was careless enough to leave it lying open with my other letters on the window-seat in the breakfast-room. I did not think of it until after breakfast, when I was putting on my boots, and on coming down again I was surprised to see Wilfred Thornleigh standing by the window in such a position that he could easily have read the note. Indeed, I was not quite sure that he had not already mastered its contents, for he studiously avoided looking at it.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE INDIGO INITIALS.

“**T**HOSE pups of yours are getting more and more rocky every day,” I remarked to Roy, when I found him in the kennel administering vermifuge pills. “It would be a mercy if you were to put them out of their misery by a painless death. Look at that little Brownie! Why, it’s walking on its knees now, and pulling itself along by the help of its nose! And those other two are nearly as bad. Kelpie’s the only one of them that looks as if he’d live.”

Roy sighed and glanced up at the coachman, who was standing by.

“What do you think, Locke?” he asked. “You know a lot about dogs.”

“Well, they’re certainly rather dicky just now,” returned the coachman, with a grave head-shake. “But I’ve seen a litter worse than these that came out all right. And of the same breed, too. They’ll be all right in a week or two, if you only peg away at ’em for a bit. You can never tell how pups will turn out. Why, the worst-looking pup I ever set eyes on,

and the weakest on his pins, grew up to be the best dog I ever had, and took no end of prizes at the dog shows. If I was you, Master Roy, I'd see a vet about them. I reckon he'll tell you that you're feeding them too much. There's a good vet in Barnstaple."

"I'd recommend you to go and see him to-day, Roy," I interposed. "We've nothing else to do. We could go on our bikes."

"Not a bad idea," Roy agreed; and as Pride also was willing, this was arranged.

"Your brother might like to go along with us," I suggested, observing Wilfred coming towards us through the covered way. And when he stood near, watching the last pill being administered, Roy looked up at him and said—

"We're going in to Barnstaple this morning, Wilfred. Do you feel inclined to come with us?"

Wilfred shook his head doubtfully.

"How are you going?" he asked. "On horseback?"

"No; on our bikes," answered Roy. "You can borrow Gedling's."

Still the elder brother looked doubtful.

"Perhaps Wilfred doesn't feel at home on a bicycle?" I remarked mischievously, at which Wilfred moved uneasily. "But mightn't we drive in the dogcart?"

Roy scouted the idea that his brother was not an expert wheelman.

"We can go in the dogcart, of course," he said,



“although it’s slower. I thought Wilfred would prefer cycling.”

“I don’t see why I should go to Barnstaple at all,” objected Wilfred. “I think I’d rather hang about at home and take a stroll round the grounds.”

“But you’ve got some shopping to do, haven’t you?” urged Roy. “You ought to buy a new silk hat to go to church in to-morrow. And, by the way, perhaps the dogcart would be better, after all, if we’ve got to bring home any parcels.”

“How am I to buy a hat, or anything, when I’ve got no money?” demurred Wilfred.

“You can easily get some from Aunt Mary, surely,” suggested Roy. “She will probably want us to call at the Bank when she hears we’re going. She always sends someone on Saturdays. Go in and tell her to make the cheque a bit bigger, while I go round to the stables.”

“I think Miss Thornleigh is in the housekeeper’s room,” I informed Wilfred. He looked puzzled, as if he did not quite remember where the housekeeper’s room was situated. “I will see if she is there,” I added. And he followed me.

He made his request very modestly, seeming to doubt that it would be complied with.

“I am going to Barnstaple with Roy, Aunt Mary,” he said. “I want to make some purchases—a hat and a pair of gloves, and some cigarettes. Might I have a little money?”

Miss Thornleigh, who sat at the table with a lot of tradesmen's books in front of her, looked up at him with sharp scrutiny, as if she were mentally comparing him with the Wilfred she had known in years gone by. There was something of doubt and suspicion in her gaze, but immediately she lowered her eyes. "Certainly," she responded. "How much would you like? Five pounds?"

"Thank you, that is quite enough," said Wilfred, who evidently had not expected so much.

"Let me see," reflected his aunt, fixing her gold-rimmed spectacles more comfortably on her nose. "I have already made out a cheque for twenty-five pounds that I require. And Roy wants two pounds. I will write a second cheque for seven pounds, and you can get them both cashed together."

She drew her cheque-book towards her and dipped her pen. I went out of the room and through the servants' hall to the stables, where I found Roy and Pride superintending the harnessing of Gladiator. Roy had to see Mr. Gedling about some stationery that was wanted, and he instructed the coachman to take the dogcart round to the front door. I waited until it was ready, and then crossed by the nearer way of the kitchen garden. In front of the bicycle shed as I passed I was surprised to come upon Gipsy Joe.

"Hullo!" I cried. "What are you wanting here?"

"Waitin' to 'ave a word with Master Thornleigh," said he, touching his rabbitskin cap.

"You had better wait near the front door, then," I told him. "He will be out there presently." I judged that it was Wilfred that he wished to see.

"That gipsy chap, Joe Lee, wants to speak to you," I informed Wilfred, when he came out, buttoning his coat. "He is waiting there at the library window."

Wilfred frowned with quick annoyance, but nevertheless went along the carriage-sweep to where the gipsy showed himself. From Lee's gestures as he spoke, I guessed that he was demanding something which Wilfred was reluctant to give. Wilfred shook his head in protest, and I caught the words "Black-mail" and "Not likely." Then the gipsy seemed to fling at him a threatening retort. "See if I don't!" I heard him declare.

The coming of the dogcart took away my attention from whatever else was said or done between them.

"Who's going to take the reins?" cried Roy, flinging a fur rug up to the driver's seat.

"Wilfred, of course," I suggested; for I knew that Roy himself did not care for driving.

Wilfred presently joined us, looking extremely disconcerted.

"You're going to drive, Wil," nodded Roy. "Pride and I will get up behind."

A strange look of perplexity came into Wilfred's face. Was it possible that he did not know the way

to Barnstaple? If so, he cleverly covered his ignorance. Probably his experience with horses had taught him that it would be safe to trust to Gladiator's own knowledge of the road.

"Mind you don't lose those two cheques," I cautioned him, seeing that they were in danger of working their way out of his pocket. He took the slips of paper in his fingers, opened them, and glanced at them each separately, and then folded them smaller before replacing them more securely. As he folded them, I happened to observe that the inner one was marked next to the perforation with the figures £7. 0. 0. in Miss Thornleigh's clear penmanship. I afterwards had cause to remember the amount.

When we turned out of the avenue into the main road, Gladiator broke into his steady, determined trot. Wilfred held the reins loosely, and had no need to use the whip.

"Ah, he's a splendid goer!" exclaimed his driver, with admiration.

"I suppose you had lots of driving in Canada?" I said, by way of inviting him to talk.

"Yes, but never with such a fine horse as this one," he responded, "and mostly it was riding that I did. Sometimes I was hardly out of the saddle for weeks."

He did not talk very much, and most of what he said was about his life in Canada. But he also questioned me a good deal about our school, asking whether certain masters whom he named were still

there. Some of the nicknames he used were unfamiliar to me, and once he referred to Mr. Curtice as the mathematical master, forgetting, I suppose, that Mr. Curtice takes classics; but on the whole his memory was surprisingly accurate, considering that it was nearly six years since he had left the school.

When we approached the forked roads, I noticed that he grew a bit anxious, as though he was not certain which one to take; but he slackened the reins and watched the horse's ears, and Gladiator took the right turn of his own accord.

"Gladiator seems to know this road pretty well," he said, in a tone of relief.

"Yes," I told him. "He comes by it twice a week at least."

Wilfred seemed to think he might as well trust to the animal's instinct in the town as in the country roads; but in this he committed a slight error, for instead of taking us to the Bank, which was our first destination, Gladiator pulled up at the kerb in front of a milliner's shop, and Wilfred looked in vain for the Bank buildings.

"Go on! go on!" cried Roy. "What on earth are you stopping here for? We don't want to buy bonnets, do we?"

"All right," returned Wilfred coolly, dropping the reins on my knees and preparing to alight. "I want to call in at Clifford's to ask about something I ordered the other day."



Now Clifford's was a newspaper shop and branch post-office, which we had just passed, and I believe he had read the name over the window. However it was, he got down, leaving the reins in my charge, and went back and entered Clifford's. He was walking along the pavement when a carriage and pair drove up to the milliner's, and to give it room I drove Gladiator out into the road and made a long turn, drawing up opposite the door which Wilfred had entered.

From my high seat I could see right into the shop, and there I perceived him standing at a desk writing, as if he were going to send off a telegram, although I was aware that he had no money with which to pay for its despatch. He remained there a considerable time, and when he moved away he did not go to the counter, or speak to anyone, or hand in the telegram, but came out pushing a piece of folded paper into the pocket in which he had kept the two cheques. He was evidently astonished and not a little vexed at seeing the dogcart so near.

"You had better keep that seat now, Saintsbury," he ordered, mounting on the near side. "Drive on to the Bank."

I thought this exceedingly adroit of him. If, as I was beginning to feel convinced, he had never been in Barnstaple before, he could not have played a better stroke than to abandon the reins, and so save himself from betraying his ignorance.



He went alone into the Bank, and remained there a considerable time, for there were many customers inside, as always on a Saturday. When he came out, he handed Roy two sovereigns. Then we called at Pennington's, at a hatter's, a corn chandler's, a tobacconist's, and a hosier's, fulfilled some commissions for Miss Thornleigh, had a scratch lunch at the hotel; finally, Roy visited the veterinary surgeon to take advice about his pups and get some physic for them, and then we drove home to Barracombe Manor.

In the afternoon I went into the billiard-room for a book I had left there. On the couch, near a very large fire, I found Wilfred Thornleigh lying asleep. My book was on a small table at his side, with an empty coffee-cup and a lot of cigarette ash on the top of it. His left hand was under his head, and his coat sleeve and shirt cuff were drawn back, exposing his strong forearm. I glanced at his arm, and saw just above the wrist the indigo tattooing which had caught my eye on the evening of his arrival. The design formed the initials of his name, "W T" I went closer, leaning over him, and was struck by the discovery that the second letter was incomplete, the stroke at the top of the "T" being left unfinished, thus, "7" Curiously enough, the initials were so placed that when his arm was bent in front of him they would appear to him upside down. I moved to the end of the couch and looked at them from that

position. To my astonishment, the letters then read, not "W T" but "L M"

"Oho!" The exclamation escaped me unintentionally. Suddenly he opened his eyes and sprang to his feet.

"Spy!" he cried aloud. "What detective's game are you up to this time?"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE GIPSY'S DEMAND.

WILFRED'S astonishment and indignation at finding me so close to him while he slept, were quite extraordinary. If he was as innocent as he wished to make himself out to be, why should he betray this alarm?

"What detective's game are you up to this time?" he had demanded to know, as if he were conscious that there was something to detect.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, smiling at his agitation, "what are you frightened at? I came in here for my book, of which you have been making an ash-tray. I have done you no harm, I hope? I'm sorry to have wakened you, certainly."

My composure mollified him. He stepped on to the bearskin rug, and stood with his back to the fire, with his hands in his pockets.

"All right," he nodded. "You only startled me, that's all. I had a bad dream, and your looking down at me so curiously seemed to be a part of it. Have a cigarette?"

I shook my head. "No, thank you. I've told you before that I'm not a smoker. By the way," I added, "now that you're awake, I may as well tell you that your trunk that you lost in the shipwreck has just come from Clovelly."

"Has it?" he cried eagerly.

"Yes. The carrier has taken it up to your room. I believe he is waiting to be paid."

He drew his hand from his pocket, filled with money. I was sure that there were more than five sovereigns among the silver, notwithstanding that he had spent a good deal of his five pounds in Barnstaple, and had duly delivered the cash for her larger cheque to his aunt.

"How much does he want?" he questioned, picking out two half-crowns and returning the rest to his pocket.

"I don't know," I replied. "Miss Thornleigh is paying him, I think."

He hurried out of the room in advance of me. I made the mental reflection that when, as now, he wore moccasins, the peculiar twist of his foot in walking was more marked. He went quickly up the stairs, probably to open and unpack his trunk, which had been so fortunately recovered from the bottom of the sea. It must have been absorbing work, for he could not draw himself away from it, even to come down to tea.

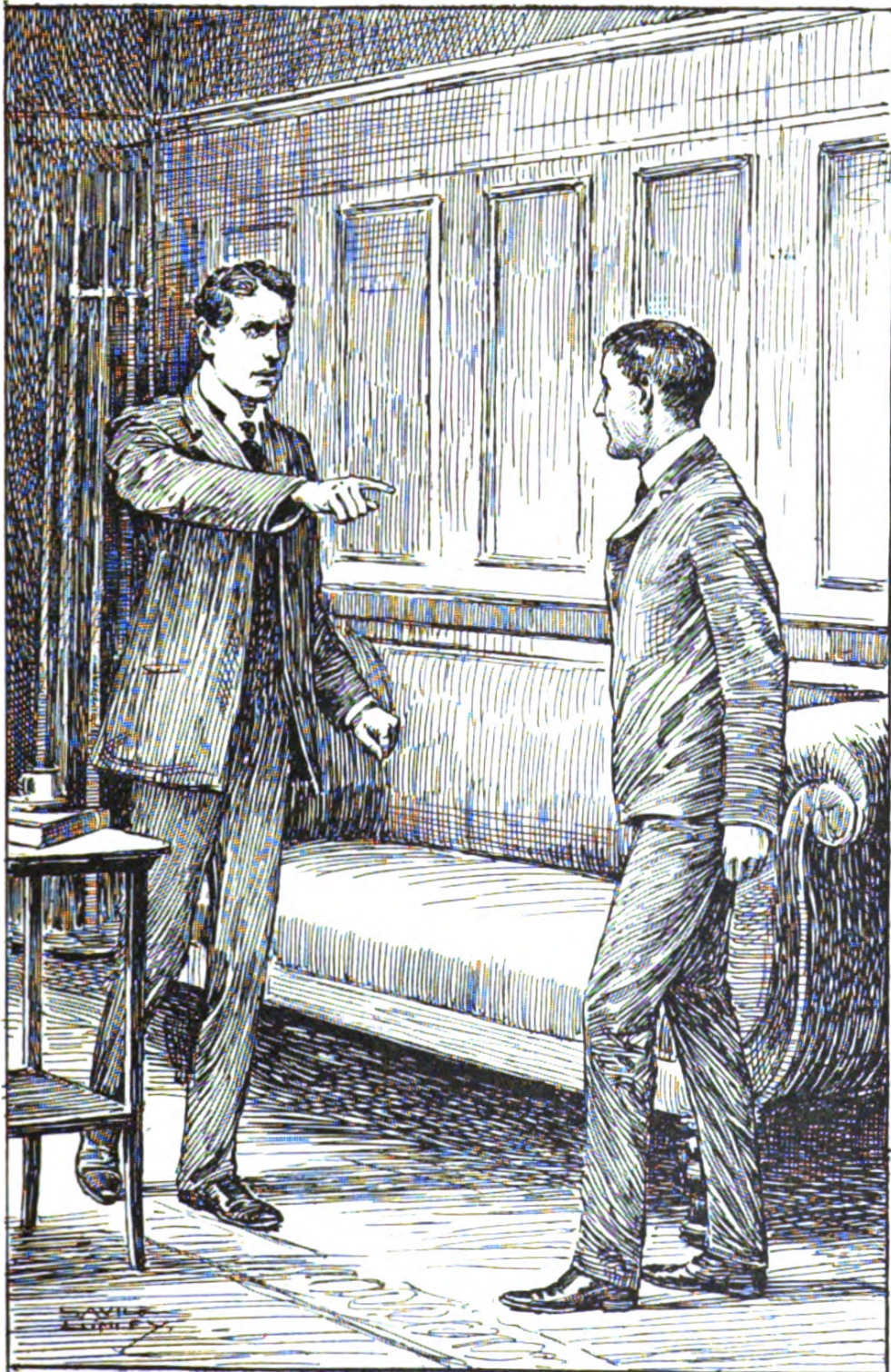
Although I had affected not to pay great attention

to it, I was nevertheless considerably puzzled over his evident alarm on being disturbed in his sleep. I wondered if he had seen me looking at the indigo marks on his arm. He had leapt to his feet with surprising agility, affording me very little time in which to make a minute inspection of the initials. I had seen them, however, quite distinctly, and recalling them to my mind's eye, I found myself in perplexity concerning them.

The tattooing was not especially artistic, and it was on his left arm; therefore I surmised that he had done it himself. I could not doubt that the letters were the initials of his own name. But a person marking his initials on his arm would not naturally put the letters upside down, as were the W and the incomplete T on Wilfred Thornleigh's arm. Whereas, these same letters, printed as he would print them, and seen as he would always see them, with his left forearm in front of him, assumed the form of the initials "L M" as plainly as if they referred to quite another name.

Another name! Here I arrested my conjectures. Why should I hastily conclude that they must necessarily be the initials of his own name? Men have been known to tattoo the names of their sweethearts on their arms, and Wilfred was quite old enough to have fallen in love. But what had it to do with me, in any case? My inquisitiveness was getting the better of me. It was becoming im-





"SPY!" HE CRIED ALOUD. "WHAT DETECTIVE'S GAME ARE YOU UP TO THIS TIME?"—Page 209.





pertinence. If I continued to pry into other people's affairs, I should be doing some mischief.

But somehow I seemed to be fated to see things and overhear things that were not intended for my eyes or ears. Even on that same Saturday evening, when I was putting on my overcoat to go out to keep my appointment with Mr. Weldron, I came unexpectedly upon Wilfred Thornleigh in the hall. He, too, was preparing to go out, for he had his cap in his hand, and was obviously annoyed at my seeing him.

"Hullo!" he said, in assumed surprise. "Going out? Where are you off to?"

"Yes," I answered lightly, "I am going out."

He came closer to me.

"Ah yes," he said, as with sudden recollection, "I forgot. I heard you were going to have dinner with the coroner and indulge in a second inquest."

"Indeed!" I retorted. "You heard it, did you? That is rather queer, seeing that no one in the household has the slightest idea as to where I am going. It would have been more correct, I fancy, if you admitted that you had read Mr. Weldron's letter which I left in the breakfast-room this morning."

He shot a malicious glance at me and turned away, flinging his cap on to the oak settle as he passed towards the back hall.

The evening was dark, and a cold wind was blowing across the lawn. I walked quickly down the avenue. As I went out through the lodge gates and

turned to the left, a man appeared in front of me from out the shadows, barring my way.

"Right you are, sir," he muttered. "I 'eard you comin' down the walk. I knew you'd keep your word like a gen'leman. 'And me over the five quid, and——"

"What do you mean?" I cried. "Who are you?"

He started back into the light of the flickering lamp at the gate, and I looked at the dark, bearded face and the rabbitskin cap of Gipsy Joe.

"Hang me!" he exclaimed. "I thought——"

Whatever it was that he thought he did not explain, for at this moment a motor car flashed round the bend of the road, and the gipsy drew back into the shadow of the wall and the overhanging trees. The car came to an abrupt stop.

"Is that you, Saintsbury?" called the voice of the driver. I had already recognised the car as Mr Weldron's, and it was Mr. Weldron himself who spoke. The side light was shining in my face. "Jump in," he said. And I got up beside him, dismissing for the moment all thought of Joe Lee and his strange demand for the sum of five pounds which someone seemed to have promised to him.

Mr. Weldron was too much occupied in the management of his car to talk very much, and I was so deeply engrossed in what was to me a novel experience, that I did not utter a word until we halted at the door of his house. His man-servant

took my coat and cap and ushered me into the drawing-room. Here, while I waited alone, I opened a Bristol weekly newspaper that was on the little table near the chair in which I sat, and I found marked in it with blue pencil a long account of the wreck of the *Winnipeg* on Hartland rocks. Much of what I read was known to me already by what I had heard from Wilfred, and gathered from the earlier report of the wreck. But there were some few particulars which were new to me, and one fact was that, although a cargo boat, the steamer had carried four passengers—three in the cabin, including Mr. W. Thornleigh, son of Sir Brian Thornleigh of Barracombe Manor, and one in the steerage.

The steerage passenger and an engineer were missing, one of the boats having been swamped in putting off; but two of the cabin passengers had been brought ashore in the long boat with the captain, the second officer, and eight of the crew, while the third passenger had saved himself by swimming. I inferred that this last was Wilfred, although the newspaper writer seemed to have missed the interesting episode of the bullock having helped him in his struggle to land.

I had been led astray by the previous newspaper report of the wreck, which had made no mention of passengers, and had believed that Wilfred had worked his way over from Montreal; but this new knowledge that he had been a passenger fully explained why his

hands and clothing had borne no trace of hard work on board ship.

Perhaps all my other doubts of him would be explained with equal satisfaction when I came to see the facts in their true light.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### EVIDENCE BY TELEPHONE.

IT was not until after we had had dinner that my host said a word as to his reason for inviting me to his house. I knew that he must have some special reason for wishing to see me, for we could hardly be said to know each other, and in accordance with the ordinary rules of social life it would have been a breach of etiquette for him to omit to include Roy Thornleigh in his invitation. During the greater part of the meal he spoke of motor cars, football, hunting, and his life at a great public school, and he encouraged me to speak about myself.

When dinner was over, he drew his chair round to the fire, and asked me to do the same.

“How do you get on with young Thornleigh?” he casually asked, lighting his pipe and offering me a cigarette, which I declined. “Rather a rough-and-ready sort of customer, isn’t he?”

“Yes,” I agreed; “but I haven’t seen very much of him yet, you know.”



He puffed at his pipe, watching the smoke drift towards the chimney.

"I should say you'd seen quite enough of him to be able to sum him up," he remarked. "It struck me, indeed, that you were engaged in summing him up during the inquest yesterday. You are rather a keen observer, Saintsbury; and you gave your evidence remarkably well. You ought to make a good lawyer. You are interested in this case, aren't you?"

"Yes," I admitted, "deeply interested."

"Ah, I thought you were. So am I. And"—his fingers went up to his collar—"so is Wilfred Thornleigh."

"You think so?"

He pressed the loose tobacco down in the bowl of his pipe.

"I am sure," he said. "He is so intensely interested in it, that he would very much rather that you had not been present at the inquiry—you will have a cup of coffee, won't you?" He glanced at his man, who at that moment entered the room. "A cup of coffee for Mr. Saintsbury, Barker," he ordered, and continued to smoke in silence until the servant had withdrawn. "By the way," he then resumed, "you had a bit of an accident yesterday morning when you were out riding, hadn't you?"

"Yes," I answered, remembering my ride on Gladiator. "Some cad stretched a wire across the road."

He nodded and crossed his legs.

"I should call him something worse than a cad," said he. "Of course you know that it was Wilfred Thornleigh who did it?"

His question disconcerted me.

"I—well, I admit that I half suspected him," I stammered.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Weldron, "your suspicions will be confirmed when I tell you that I saw him along the road on a tricycle with a coil of wire on the handle-bar. If I had known yesterday what he had done with it, my examination of him would probably have taken a very different turn. To interfere with a witness is a very grave offence in the eyes of the law, you know, and it is clear to me now that Thornleigh had a secret reason for wishing to prevent you from attending the inquest. You understand, Saintsbury—he wanted to prevent you from giving evidence. Why he should have any such reason I cannot guess, for nothing that you said incriminated him in the slightest degree. Indeed, throughout the whole of the proceedings there was not a breath of suspicion against him personally, and I cannot connect him in any direct way with the crime. But the fact remains, he is intensely interested in the case."

I was silent for a moment.

"Surely you have no particular wish to connect him with it, have you, Mr. Weldron?" I asked.

He did not respond until his man had brought in my coffee and left us alone.

“On the contrary,” he then said. “Wilfred is the son and heir of my dear friend Sir Brian, and I should be sorry indeed to have to drag him into the case. At the same time, I am not wholly satisfied with his positive assertion that the first time he ever saw the deceased was when the young fellow was passing the caravans near Bittadon. I have a private belief that they were not such strangers to each other as he tried to make out.”

I looked across at him in surprise. “Indeed!” I exclaimed. He nodded gravely.

“Yes,” he went on. “I have been as far as Bideford to-day, and have made inquiries at the villages along the road. I find that they both slept in Bideford on Monday night—Wilfred Thornleigh at the ‘Devon Arms,’ a small tavern near the bridge, and the other at a miserable coffee-shop on the opposite side of the street. At the tavern I learned very little about Thornleigh, except that he had barely enough money to pay for his bed and breakfast; but at the coffee-house the information I got was more valuable. The young fisherman, as they called their guest, for he gave no name, tendered a sovereign in paying his score in advance, and it was noticed that he wore a handsome gold ring on the little finger of his left hand.”

I listened eagerly to this little item of information.

“Did they describe it?” I questioned, leaning forward in my chair.

Mr. Weldron nodded. "Well," he returned, "they described it sufficiently to lead me to understand that it was one of those West African rings with the Arabic signs of the zodiac engraved round it."

"Yes, yes!" I cried. "That is what I thought it was, although I didn't know that such rings come from Africa."

"The landlord, who saw most of him," continued Mr. Weldron, smoking vigorously at his pipe, "was not at home,—he was at Barnstaple Market,—but his wife assured me that the young fellow was what she called well-spoken—more like a real gentleman than a poor fisherman; and, in answer to my inquiries, she informed me that he sat at the front window most of the time, and seemed to be watching for someone to come out of the 'Devon Arms.' He left very hurriedly on the Wednesday morning, and she was not sure that he was not following a young man who went out of the tavern a few moments earlier, carrying a bag."

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "That looks as if he knew Wilfred Thornleigh, at any rate."

"Wait!" interposed Mr. Weldron. "It was not Wilfred Thornleigh who went out with the bag, but a short, thick-set man, wearing a red muffler and brown leather leggings and a grey cloth cap."

I drank some of my coffee while he paused.

"What do you make of it, Saintsbury?" he asked.

"Not very much," I answered, "unless that it was

the bag and not the man that claimed his interest. And yet," I added, "your mention of the red muffler, the brown leggings, and the grey cap, all in combination, reminds me that the description would apply to one of the gipsies—one named Seth, whom I saw in Coppinger's Copse on Thursday night. You didn't happen to discover whether the gipsies were in the neighbourhood of Bideford on the Monday night, did you?"

Mr. Weldron shook his head. "No, but we can easily find out."

"Because," I went on, "it may be only a mere chance coincidence that Wilfred Thornleigh and the gentlemanly tramp had dealings with them on the same journey as far as Barracombe. It is possible that you made a mistake in concentrating your attention on Enoch Lee, who was obviously innocent. It is a pity that you did not also summon some of his fellow-gipsies to the inquest."

"Then," pursued my host, "you think it possible that the crime was committed by this man Seth, as you call him?"

I shrugged my shoulders in doubt.

"I will not go so far as that," I replied; "but my impression is that the gipsies know more about the matter than they have yet admitted. And I believe, too, that the gipsies have some sort of a hold upon Wilfred Thornleigh."

Mr. Weldron urged me to an explanation of this



remark. Perhaps it was disloyal in me to give expression to anything like a suspicion of Wilfred Thornleigh, but I took refuge in the belief that I was merely helping to elucidate a mystery which might, after all, reflect no discredit upon him personally, and I mentioned the incident of Gipsy Joe's interview with Wilfred when we were starting for Barnstaple, and that other incident of how I was accosted by Joe at the lodge gates with the demand for five pounds. But I added the suggestion that the money might only be the reward which Wilfred had promised for the accommodation which he had enjoyed in the caravan.

"But five pounds would be an extravagant amount to pay for a lift along the road," Mr. Weldron reminded me. "Besides, where was he to get the money? Did Miss Thornleigh give him any, do you know?"

I told him of the two cheques, and also mentioned the money which I had seen Wilfred draw from his pocket.

"Miss Thornleigh had surely forgotten her nephew's tricky way of dealing with bank cheques," was Mr. Weldron's rather uncharitable remark. He put down his pipe and leaned forward to push the button of an electric bell near the mantelpiece. When the servant appeared in answer to the ring, he said—

"Barker, just go to the telephone and see if you can call up Mr. Glynn."



Mr. Glynn was the manager of the Barnstaple Bank.

"All things considered," he resumed, rising and walking to and fro between the window and the fireplace, "I am afraid we shall not get to the root of this business until we find out who and what this young fellow was. It seems hard to bury him without a name, and as if he had not a soul in all the world belonging to him. At the present I am even more anxious to know who he is than to discover the person who took his life. Everything that might lead us to the truth as to his identity seems to be lost, and yet I feel sure that he was not a common vagrant. Those pyjamas of his are quite luxurious. Dr. Partridge believes that they were the only garments that were his own. That is why we were so keen about the shopkeeper's label that had been torn off it."

"Yes," I responded, drinking what remained of my coffee. "It is a thousand pities that Dr. Partridge did not examine the label before it was torn off."

"What!" cried Mr. Weldron, stopping suddenly in his pacing of the room, and fixing his eyes sharply upon me. "What's that? Do you tell me that the label was there after his death?"

"I am not sure," I faltered timidly. "I only know that the bundle was opened by someone else than Dr. Partridge, after he had tied it up, and that I

found a fragment of sewing-cotton on the library table. It looked like a piece of the cotton with which the label had been sewn on."

"Saintsbury, why did you not mention this before?" he demanded sternly. "Who was it that opened the bundle? Partridge suspected that it was tied up differently. Who was it? Was it Wilfred Thornleigh?"

"No," I answered decisively. "It was not Wilfred Thornleigh."

At this moment the servant entered, and informed his master that Mr. Glynn was at the other end of the telephone. Mr. Weldron excused himself to me and went out, closing the door behind him. He had been absent about ten minutes, when he opened the door and looked in.

"You are sure that one of the cheques was made out for seven pounds, are you, Saintsbury?" he asked.

"Certain," I answered. And he darted away again. I heard him speaking at the telephone in the hall. "Yes, that's right, seven. Eh? Well, how astonishing! Thank you so much. Sorry to have disturbed you. Good-night."

Again he returned and flung himself down in the chair he had vacated.

"I've had a talk with the banker in Barnstaple," he said. "And about that cheque for seven pounds. Mr. Glynn examined it this morning, just after it was cashed. But it was made out for seventeen pounds,

not seven, and seventeen pounds were handed over the counter to Wilfred Thornleigh."

"Impossible!" I cried incredulously. "I saw the figure seven distinctly!"

"Very likely. I don't deny that," returned Mr. Weldron. "But, as it happens, it was an easy figure to increase by ten. You see, Wilfred Thornleigh had only to put a figure '1' in front of the '7' and add the word 'teen' to the written word 'seven,' and the thing was done. He had no need to alter any of the numerals, but simply add to them. You didn't happen to see him using a pen anywhere before he alighted at the Bank, did you?"

I reflected a moment. "Yes," I exclaimed. "He went into Clifford's, and I saw him writing."

"Ah, then the case is proved against him, and he has stolen ten pounds from his aunt before he has been home forty-eight hours! Now you have this against him, Saintsbury, and you may spy upon him as much as you please. You have the whip hand of him, and if he jibs, you have only to mention this little matter of the forged cheque and threaten to expose him to Sir Brian. I think you will then find that he will amble very quietly, and you needn't be afraid of him. Mind you, I don't ask you to do anything mean or dishonourable, my boy. But remember that I am a Justice of the Peace, and it is in that capacity that I instruct you to find out everything you can and report it to me."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE BUTLER IN PERPLEXITY.

“**D**EAR me!” complained Miss Thornleigh, “why do not Roy and Austin come down to breakfast in decent time? They don’t seem to consider that I have to dress for church! And how can they expect things to be kept hot for them? And Wilfred, too; he is just as bad as Roy. I’m afraid he has not improved his habits in Canada. He always used to annoy me by his unpunctuality. I wonder that the servants don’t rebel. It is quite impossible for them to serve the meals properly when everyone in the house comes in at a different time. Wilfred is old enough to know better, but the way he behaved last night was positively disgraceful!”

I glanced at her inquiringly, not knowing what his behaviour had been.

“You were not here,” she reminded me. “But although the dinner gong had sounded loud enough to waken the Seven Sleepers, he didn’t make his appearance until we were half-way through the meal and even then he had not brushed his hair. Of

course, he said he had been out in the grounds; but what he was dreaming of, going into the grounds after sunset, and when it was so near to dinner-time, I don't know."

I wondered, when she said this, if Joe Lee had had anything to do with Wilfred's delayed appearance at the dinner-table.

"You never met Wilfred before he went abroad, did you, Percy?" she went on. "No, I thought not. He is very much altered—almost unaccountably altered. And not only in his looks, but also in his manners. Sometimes, indeed, I hardly recognise him. And now I find that that is the impression he gives to others of the household as well as myself. The cook amused me this morning by saying that she didn't believe he was Wilfred at all, because Wilfred used to be so fond of blancmange and strawberry jam, and now he won't touch it. But then, people's tastes in the matter of food do certainly change extraordinarily. I remember the time when nothing would induce me to eat a tomato; and my brother, who once doated on lobster, objects now to its being brought on the table."

"Some people believe that we entirely change our identity once every seven years," I remarked, remembering a theory that I had once heard discussed at home.

"Yes," she responded, "I have heard of that fiction; but I am sure that I am the same person that I was even twenty years ago. And Wilfred has not been away more than five years."

I probably took her observation more seriously than she intended.

“Of course, Miss Thornleigh,” I said, “you cannot think it possible that another person—an absolute stranger—could come home from Canada and take your nephew’s place without being found out?”

“Good gracious!” she exclaimed in amazement. “Of course not. However can you make such a suggestion?”

My remark seemed to afford her amusement—if, indeed, anything could amuse so demure a lady. Nevertheless, when Wilfred entered the breakfast-room and took his seat, I noticed that she fixed her eyes upon him with searching curiosity, and I fancied that her cheeks became a shade paler as a result of her scrutiny.

During the meal, she engaged him in conversation on many topics, but to all her questions and references to family affairs he responded with appropriate answers, and he behaved so amiably, so tactfully, that his aunt appeared to be actually pleased with him. I wondered what she would think of him if she had known as I did of his alteration of her cheque and theft of ten pounds. I did not betray by any look or word that I was in possession of this knowledge, but it certainly made a difference to me in my estimate of him. I began to realise that he was a most accomplished actor.

Crabtree was in my room, putting my Sunday



clothes ready for me, when I went up to dress. It struck me that he lingered longer than was absolutely necessary, and that he had something on his mind that he wanted to say to me. He sighed deeply as he laid my clean collar on the dressing-table.

"Anything gone wrong this morning, Crabtree?" I asked him.

"No, sir, no," he said; "I were on'y thinkin'."

"Is that something unusual?" I smiled.

"Ah!" he sighed, standing with one hand on the brass knob of the bedstead and looking uncommonly introspective, "I've been thinkin' a lot, sir, since 'e came 'ome." He nodded towards the adjoining room. "'E's different, sir. I can't make 'im out, no'ow."

"Different!" I echoed. "In what way?"

"Well, I dunno. But 'e's different. 'E ain't got the same look in 'is face as 'e used to 'ave. Seems absent-minded, like, just as if 'e'd woke out of a long sleep and didn't know where 'e was. Yesterday, for instance, when I came up to 'is room to ask 'im if 'e wasn't goin' down to tea, and 'e were tryin' to open that trunk of 'is that was fished up out of the wreck, I says, 'Aven't you got no key for it?' and 'e says 'e'd lost it. I asked 'im what kind of a key it was, and, actually, 'e didn't know, no more than if 'e'd never used it. And when I borrowed Miss Thornleigh's keys and we got the trunk opened, you'd think 'e'd never before set eyes on any of the things that was inside it. As for the way 'e goes about the

'ouse, sir, why, you'd think 'e were a stranger. Fancy 'im turnin' in at the larder instead of out at the back door!"

"Well, you see, Crabtree," I said, in excuse for Wilfred, "a person may forget a good many things in five years."

The butler nodded ironically.

"I daresay, if I was away in Canada for so long, I might p'r'aps forget exactly 'ow many tablespoons and forks I'd left in the silver cupboard," said he; "but," he added, looking at me curiously, "I don't reckon that I'd forget the date of my own birthday."

I glanced back at him questioningly.

"Yesterday," he went on, "I says to 'im that it were a pity 'e 'adn't come 'ome a couple of days sooner, for then 'e might 'ave been 'ere on the third of Janniuary. 'The third of Janniuary!' says 'e. 'Yes,' I says, 'your birthday,' and the look as come on 'is face it was enough to make you laugh, sir. And another thing: 'e didn' know as there's a artesian well in the kitchen garden, though it 'ave been there for a 'undred years."

"Strange that his memory should play him tricks like that!" I remarked. "I wonder if he ever had an accident to his head? A knock on the head often makes one forget the common things of life."

"Forget!" repeated Crabtree incredulously. "Do you call it forgetfulness, sir? Do you think you can forget a thing that you never knew, then?"

His question puzzled me. It was too psychological to be solved off-hand. What did he suspect concerning his young master ?

He was about to quit the room, his fingers were on the door-handle, when I detained him.

“Crabtree,” I said, “you don’t happen to know, do you, whether there is a photograph of Mr. Wilfred in the house—one taken before he left home ?”

He moved back into the room.

“There used to be one in the album on the drawin’-room table,” said he ; “but it ain’t there now. I was lookin’ for it only yesterday, to refresh my memory of what he used to be like. But it’s gone. Somebody ’ave took it away. But the cook, she’ve got one, I believe. Did you want to ’ave a look at it, sir ?”

I said that I should rather like to see it, just for the sake of discovering how much Mr. Wilfred had changed during his absence ; and the butler departed, leaving me to dress for church.

When he returned, in about half an hour’s time, Wilfred Thornleigh was already in his room. Crabtree knocked before cautiously entering mine.

“Your hot water, sir,” he said, loud enough for Wilfred to hear ; but instead of a hot-water can it was a small flat parcel that he handed to me. And then he shut the door noisily.

I opened the parcel, and found in it the cabinet portrait of a youth of about sixteen years of age. It

was what is called a vignette photograph, and the face was in profile, or nearly so. Across the lower half of the card was inscribed the words, "To Cooky from Wilfred," and the writing was the same as that which I had seen in the letter from Barnstaple.

I took the portrait to the full light of the window and examined it closely. The face was handsome, refined, and candidly boyish—just a little impudent. Yes, Wilfred had changed considerably; yet there were still some traces of a likeness between the portrait and the original as he might have been five or six years before, when he wore no moustache, and before his hair had begun to get thin about the temples.

What struck me most in the photograph was the peculiar formation of Wilfred's right ear. There was a drooping point on the upper rim, the lobe was short, and the inner parts were very irregular, like the inside of a shell that has something wrong with it. I considered it rather an ugly ear, and I had not noticed that Wilfred's ears were ugly.

I put the photograph away in the pocket of my dressing-case, having learned very little from my inspection of it.

"Now, Postscript, are you ready yet?" cried Roy Thornleigh, flinging open my door and entering in all the glory of his Sunday Eton suit, and with his prayer-book and gloves in his hand.

He waited for me, and we went down together. Wilfred was in advance of us, and had already started

to walk down the avenue with his aunt and Austin Pride. He looked remarkably well in his new blue overcoat and silk hat, and walked with almost a soldierly stride, except for the peculiar twist in his foot.

As we passed down Frog Lane to the village church, I noticed that the gipsies' caravans had gone from the pitch near Coppinger's Copse. They must have started early in the morning, if not before midnight. Wilfred noticed their absence too, for I saw him glance towards the copse and say something to his aunt, who nodded comprehendingly.

Miss Thornleigh paused near the church door to speak with the sexton, and Wilfred entered alone, or rather, some yards in advance of us. There was not a trace of his limp as he went up the aisle. He went very slowly, staring about him curiously, as if recalling his old memories of the sacred building so closely connected with the history of his family. He was himself the object of much curiosity on the part of the members of the congregation who were already seated. He must have been conscious that he was being observed, for he nervously dropped one of his gloves, and made himself even more conspicuous by having to stop and pick it up. Or was his dropping of the glove a subterfuge? I had a strong suspicion that his reason for stopping was that he did not remember which was the Thornleigh family pew, for by his delay he cleverly contrived to let Roy go in front of him and show the way.

I sat at his right, and during the Litany I chanced to catch sight of his ear. It was a singularly beautiful ear, as delicate as any I had ever seen, and not at all like the ear in the photograph.

Assuming that photographs do not lie, I was not a little perplexed at this circumstance ; for I could not believe that the climate of Canada, or any other influence short of a disfiguring accident, was capable of altering the complete shape of the human ear, and, as I have said, Wilfred's ear was not disfigured, but peculiarly beautiful in its shape and texture.

What was I to conclude from this remarkable disparity ?

With the purpose, I suppose, of making the service in some way appropriate to the occasion, the parable of the Prodigal Son was read for the second Lesson ; and the vicar chose for the text of his sermon the words : "*For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; was lost, and is found.*"



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### RENEWED CONFIDENCE.

“**I** WISH you fellows would stop your jawing and let a chap read,” objected Austin Pride from his cosy arm-chair near the fire.

We were in the library. Rain was pattering against the casements, and the swaying trees moaned in the wintry wind. Had the weather been fine, we had intended to go out for a walk along the cliffs; but we were kept indoors, and were glad of the warm fire that Wilfred Thornleigh had piled up with sea-logs.

“You ought not to read when conversation is going on,” said Roy. “Besides, what’s the good of reading in the holidays?”

“But this is an awfully fine book I’ve got hold of,” returned Pride. “It’s all about smugglers and preventive men, and a Johnnie that tried to swindle his brother out of the family estates, and I’ve just got to an exciting part.”

Wilfred took up a new cigarette. One thing that his aunt complained of in him was his constant smoking of cigarettes, and his untidy habit of making

ash-trays of the polished tables and her china saucers. She had said that, if he must smoke at all, then he might do so in the billiard-room and the library, or in the front hall, but in none of the other rooms. This was the reason, I think, why he joined us in the library, for the billiard-room fire was not lighted on Sundays.

“There is something about tales of smuggling that is always fascinating,” he remarked sententiously, flinging the fag end of his old cigarette dexterously into the fire. “I used to like that sort of book more than anything, especially when they were about Devon and Cornwall.”

“The scene of this one is laid quite near to here,” said Pride, referring to the volume on his knee. “And there’s a subterranean passage in it, Roy, just like the one that you told me about that leads from this house down to the caves. And that reminds me, you said that we should explore that underground passage some day during the holidays.”

“I’m afraid we can’t,” said Roy in a tone of regret; for, like most boys, he thirsted for adventure. “It’s been blocked up, you know, since Wilfred got lost there years ago.”

“How did that happen?” I interposed, glancing at Wilfred himself. I put the question to him pointedly, half expecting that he would be unable to give any account of this boyish escapade. But, to my surprise, he narrated the adventure unhesitatingly,

and as circumstantially as if it had happened the week before, instead of six or seven years ago.

“There used to be a lot of smuggling done in this neighbourhood,” he began, stretching out his legs on the hearthrug and contemplating the end of his cigarette, “and a long time ago the Thornleighs themselves were not above running a cargo of contraband goods. The subterranean passage that Pride has just mentioned was connected with the cellars under the Manor and the caves in Barracombe cliffs. But afterwards, when the family gave up their dealings in the lawless traffic, the caves were still used by the fishermen, who did a bit of smuggling on the quiet. On one occasion, when they were landing a cargo in Barracombe Cove, the revenue men dropped on them. There was a fight, and one of the preventive men was wounded, and the ringleader of the smugglers escaped. The revenue men searched for him for weeks, but never ran him to earth. What was curious about their pursuit was, that one of their own crew, a young lieutenant who was very active in the search, disappeared, and could not be found. It was believed that he was either kidnapped or else drowned in one of the tidal caves, and that his body was washed out to sea.

“This is by way of preface,” said Wilfred, leaning back in his chair and staring at the ceiling. And we waited while he paused, as if to give an interval between two chapters of his story.

“During the summer holidays,” he went on, “some of my schoolfellows were staying here with us—a fellow named Nuttall, and another called Hutchinson, and a little chap named Everett. You remember Everett, don’t you, Roy?”

“Yes,” said Roy; “he went up to Cambridge last half, an awfully clever chap, although no longer little.”

“Well,” continued Wilfred, “Everett was interested in smugglers and caves and that sort of thing, the same as Pride here; and one hot afternoon, when we were out in the boat, he proposed that we should explore one of the caves. So we went in as far as we could with the boat, for the tide was nearly full in, and then we tied up the boat and climbed over the rocks, by the light of a tar-rope torch. Nuttall got into a funk and turned back, and Hutchinson sprained his ankle and couldn’t go any farther. Everett and I went on until we came to the entrance of an inner cave that was hidden behind a tall rock. He forced his way into it, which was easy, as he was a little chap, and I followed with more difficulty. The inner cave soon proved to be a made passage cut through the rocks. We didn’t know then that it would have led us into the cellars of the Manor. It was so long that it seemed to be leading us into the middle of Devonshire.”

He struck a match and lighted his cigarette.

“Everett began to be timid lest we should be cut off by the tide,” he went on, “and he proposed that

we should turn back. He was just making this proposal, when I cried out, 'What's that thing lying behind you?' He turned the torchlight on to the object, and there we saw two ghastly human skeletons. One was dressed in the mouldy uniform of a naval officer. There was a rusty pistol in his left hand, and the top of his head was smashed in by a heavy stone that was still there. The other chap was dressed as a fisherman, and we afterwards concluded that he had been shot. Anyhow, there was every sign of a fight. But we hadn't time to look carefully; for Everett dropped the torch in his fright, into a pool of water, and we were left in the darkness. We tried all through the night to find the way out, but it was not until the middle of the next morning that Nuttall and some fishermen rescued us."

There was silence when he stopped speaking—a silence which Pride was the first to break.

"And what about the two skeletons?" he asked unnecessarily, for it was clear that they were those of the smuggler and the preventive officer.

Wilfred was turning to him to explain, when the library door was opened and Mr. Gedling came in.

"Sir Brian wishes you to take tea with him upstairs in his room, Mr. Wilfred," he announced, and then went out, followed presently by Wilfred.

I have said that I was surprised that Wilfred Thornleigh should be able to tell so circumstantially this story of his adventure in the cave. Probably it



was the butler's remarks earlier in the day, coupled with my own incompletely formed suspicions of him, which caused me to expect that he would fail to recall this incident of his schooldays. But he told it with such ease, with such evident intimate knowledge of the facts, that I was forced to dismiss my secret doubts of him. All that afternoon, indeed, during our conversation in the library, he was so constantly recalling episodes of his youth and experiences which he had gone through before his flight to Canada, that I began to believe in him implicitly, and to surmise that I had been entirely led astray by a few of his lapses of memory.

I persuaded myself that all my suspicions of him were capable of a creditable explanation, and that even the evidence of the old photograph was not to be trusted. I had imagined that there was something not wholly genuine about him, but to-day he had innocently given me ample proof to the contrary. For surely no impostor could by any possibility, or after years of careful coaching, play his part so naturally, so successfully, or without instant discovery. Even my fancy that there was a guilty understanding between him and Mr. Gedling was shown to have no foundation, when I learned by chance that they had positively never seen each other before they met on the evening of Wilfred's return home.



I, of course, did not forget the grave incident of the alteration of the amount on his aunt's cheque. There could be no question that he had stolen ten pounds from Miss Thornleigh's banking account. I did not acquit him of dishonesty in this direction. Neither did I suppose that his aunt would acquit him when his forgery should in due time come to her knowledge. Nevertheless, I had renewed confidence in his claim to be what he was supposed by his family to be—the real, if erring, son and the acknowledged heir of Sir Brian Thornleigh, Baronet.

And if my renewed confidence in his genuineness had had no other excuse, it would have been sufficiently supported by what Wilfred himself told us regarding his second interview with Sir Brian.

He came uninvited, although welcomed, into Roy's room that night, dressed in an elegant suit of white flannel pyjamas trimmed with pink silk, which he had purchased in Barnstaple; and he gave us a full report of the interview. Sir Brian had been most amiable, he said. There had been no reproaches, no lecturing, but only simple and straightforward advice, with promises of generous, fatherly help. And, as a beginning in his future career, Wilfred was to go up to London at the end of the ensuing week to visit his Uncle George, who, being connected with one of the Government

departments, was expected to find him an appointment.

As he told us all this, Wilfred sat on the edge of Roy's bed with his arms folded and his legs swinging. I sat opposite to him, on the ottoman. His loose sleeves were drawn up to his elbows, and his left arm was exposed, so that I again saw, and this time more plainly, the initials tattooed in indigo on the skin. It struck me that I must have made a stupid mistake when I looked at them in the billiard-room; for now the two letters were exceedingly distinct, and the T, instead of being incomplete in its form, was perfectly visible. What was more, I now observed that there was a tiny full stop after each of the initials; showing without a doubt that they were intended to be seen as I now saw them, and not inverted, as he would see them himself.

I could not believe that he had tattooed the initials anew, even although I was half conscious that the skin surrounding them was slightly inflamed. I could only conclude that my earlier observation of them had been ridiculously hasty and indecisive.

So, you see, my whole judgment of him was astray; my condemnation of him was without solid foundation. And yet—and yet—I still could not convince myself that there was not something left unexplained as to his movements on that night of the crime in Barracombe plantation.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A MISSION OF INQUIRY.

ON the Monday morning—the morning of the funeral—Tony Middlewick came up from the lodge carrying a large square cardboard box, which he delivered to Miss Thornleigh, saying that it had been left at the lodge by a messenger from Barnstaple. Miss Thornleigh did not expect such a parcel, and she requested Tony to open it in the hall.

“I cannot imagine what is in it,” she remarked to me, as Tony cut the string.

When the lid was taken off and the paper lining turned back, we discovered a very beautiful memorial wreath of hothouse flowers.

“I did not order this,” she said, with a perplexed head-shake. “I wonder who sent it!”

“Perhaps there is a card on it somewhere,” I suggested, carefully taking out the wreath. But we found no intimation whatsoever as to whom it had come from, although its purpose was obvious. Tony was instructed to see that it was placed on the poor fellow’s coffin.

Very sad was the burial that took place that morning in Barracombe churchyard. Sad, because of the tragic circumstances of the unknown youth's death, but more especially sad because among those who stood at the grave-side there was not one who claimed to be his friend, not one who could tell his name or history, or say whence he had come and whither he was going on that night when he gave up his life. To be buried there by strangers in a strange place, lonely, friendless, unwept—it was a melancholy fate. But for the solitary anonymous wreath on the plain oak coffin, there was no token that anyone remembered him or cared for him.

Wilfred Thornleigh was the last to turn away from the grave-side. Strangely enough, he alone was visibly moved. I saw his eyelids tremble, and I am not sure that a tear did not moisten his cheek. As he stepped back, he breathed a deep sigh that sounded almost like a moan of pain. Could it have been he who sent that wreath of hothouse flowers in sympathy for one whom he could only esteem as a stranger and an alien? Divining that this was so, I experienced a new access of respect for him.

Mr. Weldron beckoned me to him as we were leaving the churchyard.

“Should you care to come for a ride with me in my motor car to-day, Saintsbury?” he inquired.

I glanced at him in surprise. It seemed to me so

unusual that he, a grown man, should invite the companionship of a schoolboy.

"I should enjoy it immensely," I answered. "It is very kind of you to ask me."

"Not at all," he rejoined. "I was not thinking of pleasure. I am going as far as Bideford to make further inquiries concerning this case, and it occurs to me that you, with your quick perception and your keen, logical mind, would be of great help to me in prosecuting my investigations. The gipsies have gone in that direction, and we must follow them up and find out something more about that man Seth. There are other clues to be examined into, too."

"Wouldn't it look rather odd my going away like that while I am a guest at the Manor?" I demurred.

He shook his head.

"This matter is of more importance than any consideration of etiquette," said he, "and the results of your work with me will be a sufficient excuse for your absence."

"Shall we be back again by dinner-time?" I questioned, remembering Miss Thornleigh's objections to unpunctuality.

"Well, I'm not sure," he returned. "The business may take longer than I think. We may even be kept away until to-morrow. But in that case we can easily telegraph to Miss Thornleigh to say that we have had a breakdown. That, to be sure, would be an unwarrantable libel on my car. But, between ourselves,

Saintsbury, I'd rather undertake the inquiry with your help than bring down a detective from London."

I felt flattered by his confidence in me, and certainly I was not by any means reluctant to accept his invitation to ride about the county on a well-equipped motor car.

"Mightn't Roy Thornleigh come with us?" I asked.

"No," he replied promptly. "That would not do. We must keep our object a profound secret, and two of us will be quite enough. Besides, Roy does not take so much interest in the business as you do. And it is just as well that he does not; he might be indiscreet, and discretion is most important, as you can readily understand."

"Very well," I agreed. "At what time do we start?"

He told me that the car was ready waiting, and that we were to go at once, and we discussed our plans while walking through the village.

"I hope you don't mind my taking away your guest, Roy," said Mr. Weldron, when we overtook him and Wilfred near the post-office, "but Saintsbury is coming with me for a spin in my motor car. Perhaps you and your brother will come with me another day?"

Roy only said that he was sure I should enjoy the experience, and he was not at all inquisitive as to our proposed destination. Mr. Weldron allowed him to suppose that we were going towards Ilfracombe.



I went back to the Manor to change my black clothes for something more suited to dusty travel, and I had not to wait long before the car came panting up to the porch. Mr. Weldron was in it alone, and I got up beside him, watched by Wilfred Thornleigh, who seemed to look with envy at the two vacant seats behind, and by Mr. Gedling, who stared at me curiously, as if in wonder at my intimacy with the coroner. They both smiled—possibly in satisfaction at being rid of me for at least one afternoon.

The car grunted noisily down the avenue and along the lane to the main road. Then we put on speed and rattled up the incline of Barracombe hill, gliding silently but swiftly down again into the farther valley to the level road across the open moor. We went like a whirlwind through West-down and Braunton, passed with caution through Pilton, where a flock of sheep streamed past us like a bounding current of foamy water, and brought up within an hour in Barnstaple.

Here we had luncheon, and here, in conversation with a drover who stood on the kerb to watch us start anew, Mr. Weldron gathered the information that a party of gipsies had been seen early in the morning outside the village of Goodleigh. This was a greater distance from Barracombe than we thought it probable that three heavy and encumbered caravans could travel in less than twenty-four hours. If these gipsies were Joe Lee and his companions, then they

surely had special reasons for making such a hasty journey, and this notwithstanding that they had left one of their number in Barracombe lock-up. The drover could not say how many vans there were, nor what colour they were painted. He had been too much occupied in getting his cattle past them in the narrow lane to notice such details. Goodleigh was but a few miles to the north-east of Barnstaple, and I suggested that we might perhaps go aside in search of the gipsies' new encampment; but Mr. Weldron pointed out the necessity of going at once to Bideford, and said that it would be easy to return by the South Molton road and meet the caravans from that direction.

Leaving Barnstaple at half-past one, we were crossing Bideford Bridge at three o'clock, and we came to a halt outside the 'Devon Arms.' It was more like an ordinary public-house than a tavern, and in other circumstances I should have been surprised to see a gentleman like Mr. Weldron entering such a place.

The landlord was sunning himself at his front door when we pulled up, and Mr. Weldron made a pretence of doing something to the machinery before entering into conversation with him.

"Fine day for the time of year," he began, crossing the pavement.

The landlord led the way into the bar parlour, where we ordered some cider. At the first we spoke only

of the weather and the motor car, and the landlord was greatly interested in learning how far we had come, how far we were going, and at what rate of speed we could travel.

“If we had come an hour earlier, we might have taken you for a ride round the town in her,” said Mr. Weldron, at which the landlord brightened up exceedingly.

“Ah,” said he, “I allow ’twould make my neighbours sit up straight to see I in a vayhicle the like of that!”

“By the way,” said Mr. Weldron, having gained the man’s goodwill, “you remember the young fellow who slept here last Monday night, don’t you?”

“You mean him as made out he’d been shipwrecked in Barnstaple Bay?” ruminated the landlord. “Yes, I do remember un well. Ur beant asked ’ee to pay the balance of his reckonin’, have he, sir?” he smiled. “I dedn’ credit en when ur zaid ur’d no money, and yet tried to make I believe ur lived in a great mansion down to Barracombe.”

“Well, you could hardly expect him to have his pockets full of money, when he had been roused from his sleep to save himself from a sinking ship, could you?” said Mr. Weldron, in defence of Wilfred Thornleigh’s poverty. “He could not pay his railway fare to Barnstaple, either.”

“I know that were what ur zaid. Ur were forced

to walk, I allow; but that hadn' nought to do wi' I. Be he a friend o' yourn, sir, by any chance?"

Mr. Weldron lifted his glass of cider. "He is the son of my neighbour, Sir Brian Thornleigh," he said.

"You don't zay!" cried the landlord, astonished. "Well, for sure! And there I was thinkin' that tale about 'im bein' on the shipwreck were all made up to gain my zympathy, as you might zay, which looked likely enough, you'll allow, sir, seein' as his clothes were as dry as a bone. Son of Sir Brian Thornleigh! You do maze I, for sure! If I'd ha' know'd that, sir, I'd ha' trusted en for the night's lodgings, ay, and lent en the railway fare too. But to tell 'ee the truth, sir, I dedn' quite like the looks of en. Neither ded en talk like a man of Devon."

"He might have left his luggage as a pledge," I suggested.

"I beant sure that I'd ha' took it," returned the landlord. "'Twas but a shabby, good-for-nuthen article, that might ha' ben filled with scrap-iron for all I could tell—though ur zeemed to think a precious lot of it, I allow."

"Did he carry the bag with him all the way to Barnstaple?" asked Mr. Weldron, working nearer the point at which he designed to arrive.

"No," said the landlord. "Monday night he were in the bar there, askin' of I what were the best way to get the bag taken to Barracombe, when a man

that stood nigh zaid as he were goin' that way next mornin', and would take the bag for en for a consideration, if there beant no hurry."

Mr. Weldron eased his collar, which was always a sign that he was getting interested.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### ON THE TRAIL.

“**T**HEN they didn’t know each other, this gipsy and young Thornleigh?” he asked.

“Gipsy!” repeated the landlord. “I never zaid he were a gipsy, though, come to think of it, ur did look like one, for sure. No, they dedn’ know one another. ’Twas a matter o’ business between ’em; and next mornin’ the gipsy ur come for the bag and carried it away.”

In reply to further inquiries, the landlord described the gipsy so minutely that I could have no doubt that it was Seth Lee who had carried the bag, and I judged that he had taken it outside the town to where the caravans were stationed.

This was practically all the information we gathered at the ‘Devon Arms,’ and it served no other purpose than that of merely fixing the place and time at which the gipsies and Wilfred Thornleigh had come together. It did not help us to trace any connection between the gipsies and the nameless wanderer with whom our inquiries were concerned.



But we had yet to visit the coffee-house on the other side of the street.

The coffee-house keeper was stubbornly uncommunicative at first, and in order to awaken his interest Mr. Weldron told him of the tragic death of the young man who had been a lodger in the house on the previous Monday night. This had the desired effect, and the new facts that we elicited were of considerable value. The young fisherman, who was fully described to us, had been quiet and morose. He had given no name, but he seemed to be well acquainted with the neighbourhood, and had spoken in a way which led his host to believe that he was a native of Devonshire, and that he had come from somewhere near Clovelly. He had said that he was on his way to Barnstaple. On the Monday night, when he was asking for accommodation, he had kept his eyes fixed on the 'Devon Arms,' and had started visibly at sight of two men who stood talking together at the door. One of the men was apparently a gipsy, and it was the sight of this same gipsy leaving the tavern on the following morning, carrying a bag on his shoulder, which caused the young fisherman so hurriedly to leave the coffee-house in pursuit, as if with the intention of picking a quarrel with the gipsy.

This last item of information convinced Mr. Weldron that the stranger whom we had buried that morning had had a grudge against Seth Lee, and

that it was this grudge which had led to the fatal quarrel in Sir Brian Thornleigh's plantation. The inference was based on very flimsy foundation, and it left many things to be explained, but it was at least evident that the deceased youth had followed the caravans all the way to Barracombe, and this fact in itself strongly supported Mr. Weldron's theory as to Seth Lee's guilt in the matter of the crime.

If Seth Lee had, as was possible, alighted from one of the caravans and stolen into the Barracombe grounds by the plantation path to set the poacher's snares, which we knew to have been set, then he might easily have found Roy Thornleigh's knife near the stile. And his being in the grounds would account for our having seen the pursuing tramp looking searchingly in at the lodge gates. Seth's absence from the caravans at that time would also explain the circumstance that it was his brother Enoch who, instead of him, carried Wilfred Thornleigh's bag up to the Manor.

My own chief interest in the coffee-house keeper's information was centred in the fact that, as he had averred, the nameless fisherman was a native of Devonshire, and had come from some place near Clovelly. From the first I had been more eager to ascertain the truth as to the young fellow's identity than to discover the criminal who had taken his life, and it was for this reason that I urged Mr. Weldron

to follow up the trail that we had hit upon, and to continue our journey to Clovelly.

This would necessitate our remaining away from Barracombe over-night, and accordingly we sent a telegram to Miss Thornleigh.

It was already dusk when we left Bideford, but my companion knew the roads well, and with our car lamps burning brightly we sped onward through the darkening night.

Mr. Weldron had friends at Clovelly Court, which he proposed to make our destination, but he willingly agreed to my suggestion that, instead of my accompanying him, he should drop me at the top of the village, and that I should take up my night's quarters at the 'Red Lion' inn. This plan would enable me to go about among the villagers, and perhaps gather from them some information which would determine our proceedings on the following day.

I had spent my last summer holidays in Clovelly, and knew many of the cottagers and fisher-folk. Even as I was alighting from the car, I recognised a coastguardsman, who nodded a good-night to us. His name, I remembered, was Harper. I followed him into the lane that led downward to the steep village street, and quickly overtook him. After we had exchanged a few ordinary remarks, I said—

“You don't happen to know if there is a young fellow missing from this neighbourhood within the past week, do you?”

He answered me in the negative, and then I told him why it was that I made the inquiry. He had read about the inquest in the Saturday's newspaper, so that I had not much to explain. There was certainly no fisherman missing from anywhere near Clovelly, he told me. There had been a smack wrecked in the late storm, but all her hands had been saved.

This mention of the storm led me to ask him about the wreck of the *Winnipeg* on Hartland Point, and I was much interested to learn that he, Harper, had been one of the crew of the lifeboat which had put out to the wreck. The survivors had been brought ashore at Clovelly, and he had seen and spoken with Wilfred Thornleigh—a fact which had given him especial interest in reading the report of the Barracombe inquest, in which young Thornleigh had been examined as a witness.

We were still speaking about the wreck when we came to the 'Red Lion' inn. Here we separated, arranging, however, to meet again later in the evening.

When I had had something to eat in the inn, I went round to the coastguards' shed, where several men had gathered and were discussing the object of my visit to Clovelly. Among them were Harper and the harbour-master, and round about them was a quantity of wreckage—ships' furniture, packing-cases and boxes—salvage from the wreck of the *Winnipeg*.

The harbour-master, a picturesque old salt with a white beard, approached me as I entered. He held an open letter in his work-worn fingers.

“You’m a friend of Master Thornleigh, as were saved from the cattle steamer, I hear,” said he. “This be a letter from he that I got last Friday’s post.”

It was a brief note that he handed to me—half a dozen lines requesting the harbour-master to send the writer’s trunk to him at Barracombe Manor, if it should chance that the article in question should be washed ashore from the wreck.

In ordinary circumstances, such a note could have had no possible importance in my eyes, but now as I held it in the lamp-light I regarded it with amazement and incredulity. The handwriting was exceedingly neat. It did not in the slightest degree resemble the cramped, boyish writing in the letter which Wilfred Thornleigh had sent to his father from Barnstaple, and yet, it bore Wilfred Thornleigh’s signature and was addressed from Barracombe Manor. I read it a second time, nervously, excitedly, searching for something which might explain its enigma. The very first word at the top of the sheet convinced me that it was spurious, for the word ‘Baracombe’ was spelt with only one ‘r,’ and I could not believe Wilfred Thornleigh capable of committing such a glaring error.

Who, then, had written this letter ?

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE GREEN PAINTED BOX.

I FOLDED the letter, believing that in it I had by chance come upon an article of evidence of considerable importance.

“If you have no objection, I will take charge of this,” I said to the harbour-master, thrusting the folded sheet of paper into my pocket.

“Tain’t no use to I,” said he. “The box come ashore the day after the wreck, and us sent it by the carrier to the owner. He ought to ha’ gotten it before ever he wrote the letter.”

“He received it all right,” I said. “The carrier delivered it on Saturday evening;” and I handed him a half-sovereign for his trouble. Mr. Weldron had given me a good deal of money, in case I should require to loosen the tongues of the fishermen. I turned to Harper. “I suppose you haven’t learnt anything of the young fellow I was asking you about, have you?” I asked.

The coastguard shook his head.

“There’s no one missing from anywhere round



Clovelly," he informed me, "or we should soon have heard of it. Young Tom Craddock went away three weeks ago to take a place as gardener down to Exeter, but his mother she'd a letter from him yesterday saying he was all right and happy. And besides, Tom have got red hair, and the chap you mentioned was dark, you say, and had a moustache."

"Yes," I nodded; "dark brown hair and a small brown moustache. He was rather tall, and looked like a gentleman, except for his clothes. They were fisherman's clothes—a pea-jacket with horn buttons, a white knitted frock, blue serge trousers, heavy sea-boots, and a blue peaked cap."

The men in the shed shook their heads. None of them recognised the description.

"He wore a gold ring," I added,— "a broad ring, it was, with foreign-looking signs carved round it."

"The chap as come ashore to Westward Ho he wore a gold ring," remarked one of the fishermen who stood behind me, "but er dedn' have no clothes on at all, not to speak of."

"No," added the coastguard. "I allow he hadn't time to put his clothes on, being as he were asleep in his bunk when the ship struck. He was lucky enough to get away with his life. Young Mr. Thornleigh had a close shave of it, going back into the cabin to fetch that leather bag of his. He very nearly missed getting into the captain's boat."

“That was the boat that was swamped, wasn’t it?” I asked.

“No,” returned Harper. “’Twas the first mate’s boat that didn’t get clear away.”

There seemed to be some discrepancy between the coastguard’s account of the rescue and the report which I had read in the newspaper.

“How did it happen, then,” I inquired, “that Mr. Thornleigh had to save himself by coming to land by the help of a bullock?”

The men about me exchanged glances, and some smiled.

“There was plenty of bullocks swam ashore,” remarked the harbour-master, “but I don’t reckon that any of ’em landed with a man astride of its back. No; the captain’s boat came in with hardly a foot of water in the bilge, for I went down to quay when she come alongside, and young Master Thornleigh ’e were in her stern sheets with the bag on ’is knees.”

“H’m!” I responded to this perplexing piece of information. Had Wilfred Thornleigh been drawing upon his imagination when he wrote to his father that he had been saved by a bullock?

“The engineer that were drowned were seen clinging to the tail of a bullock,” observed an old fisherman who sat near the shed door on a packing-case.

“And what became of the steerage passenger who was missing?” I inquired. “Was he drowned too?”

It was Harper who replied.

"No," he said. "It was him that was picked up by a fishing smack and landed at Westward Ho. There was only one life lost, and that was the engineer's."

"I suppose there are none of the survivors still in the neighbourhood, are there?" I interrogated, glancing towards the harbour-master.

He shook his grizzled grey head.

"Mr. Adams, that was one of the passengers, was staying 'ere at the 'Red Lion' until last Saturday mornin'," said he. "He'd sprained his leg jumping down into the boat, d'ye see, and were badly knocked about on the rocks after his long swim. He were unconscious for two days, poor chap. He've gone home to Barnstaple, I b'lieve. As for the crew, they be all up to Bristol to attend the inquiry. Mr. Miller, the other cabin passenger, he went away the day after the wreck to Manchester. He lost everything, he did, and even had to borrow a pair of boots and a suit of clothes that the Squire lent him."

"Nay; Squire told he not to trouble to send 'em back," corrected one of the fishermen. "'Twas a gift, and not a loan, I reckon."

"I allow the chap as come ashore at Westward Ho had to borrow something to cover his nakedness, too," interposed the harbour-master. "Did ye see anything of en, Harry, 'fore he went away?"

"Not I," answered the man named Harry. "Er

went away like a thief in the night, as you might say, and nobody had speech with en save Dick Cruse, that brought 'im ashore. I allow Dick gave en a better rig-out than er possessed before the wreck, anyhow, for a chap couldn't be worth much that would go steerage in a old cattle boat the same as her as run ashore on Hartland rocks."

"No," added the harbour-master; "and I reckon there beant much of value in that there box of hisn that Ambrose Pennington fished up in his trawl net, else he'd ha' made inquiries for it."

As he spoke, the harbour-master glanced at a small green painted box that lay amid some coils of rope and miscellaneous jetsam on the floor of the shed. It certainly seemed to be of very little value. I was about to look at it closer, when Harper touched my arm.

"I shall be going up along to Hartland to-night, sir," he said, "and will look in at the constabulary as I pass, and ask if they do know anything about him as you're inquiring after."

I followed him to the door.

"I shall be at the 'Red Lion' until eight o'clock in the morning," I told him, "and if you hear anything, you might ask for me and let me know. Good-night."

Instead of returning into the shed, I went down to the end of the stone-built quay. It was a beautiful winter night, clear and starry, and the sea was scarcely

ruffled by the cool breeze that blew across it. Far away I could dimly see the outline of Lundy Island, and, nearer, the black sails of the Clovelly fishing fleet dotted the dark waste. It was difficult to imagine what a different scene must have been presented here a week before, when the storm was raging and precious lives were in peril down there at Hartland Point, where the *Winnipeg* was grinding her broken hull to pieces on the cruel rocks.

For fully an hour I lingered on the quay, but the wind was cold, and at last I was glad to return to the inn and get a cup of hot coffee before going up to bed. Perhaps it was the coffee that kept me wakeful; certainly it was a long time before I fell asleep. As I lay looking out at the stars, I turned over in my mind the things I had heard in Bideford and here in Clovelly. Somehow, it seemed that we had been pursuing the movements of Wilfred Thornleigh rather than those of the ill-fated young man whose identity remained such a baffling problem.

Beyond the forming of a vague surmise that he had cherished some enmity against Seth Lee, and had probably followed the gipsies to Barracombe, we had learned nothing concerning the nameless wanderer which we did not already know before we started. But concerning Wilfred Thornleigh I had learned at least two facts which were alike new and discreditable. One was that he had told a deliberate and needless falsehood in regard to the manner in which



he had been saved from the wreck; the other was, that for some reason best known to himself he had written to the harbour-master in a handwriting that was obviously disguised.

Puzzle over the matter as I might, I could not even guess at his reason for perpetrating this latter deceit. To assure myself that I had made no mistake, I even got out of bed and lighted my candle to examine the letter once again. I began to be doubtful about the handwriting, remembering that Wilfred must be clever with his pen, since twice to my knowledge he had dared to exercise his skill in forgery. But there could be no plausible excuse for his misspelling the name of his own father's estate. I asked myself if this letter could have been written by someone else than Wilfred Thornleigh. But this was far from being probable. No one but himself could have had any purpose in writing thus to the Clovelly harbour-master. Furthermore, as I looked at the letter in the candle-light, I recognised the notepaper, and knew that it had been taken from a supply which I myself had left in the desk in Wilfred Thornleigh's room.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE STEERAGE PASSENGER.

THE morning was bright and the tide full in when I looked from my bedroom window at about seven o'clock. It was too cold to think of having a swim, but I decided that a half-hour's pull at the oars in one of the small boats that I saw at their moorings in the tiny harbour would be an exhilarating preparation for breakfast. So I dressed quickly, and went out upon the quay.

The first person I met was Harper, the coastguard, with his telescope under his arm. He touched his cap to me in greeting.

"They don't know nothing up along at the constabulary, sir," he reported. "There doesn't seem to be anyone missing in this part of Devon. I reckon the young chap must have tramped from the south coast, unless he were from inland. You could soon get down to Falmouth in that electric car of yours, if so be you intend to make further search."

"Thank you," I said. "I am afraid it would be useless to do anything more. We can only trust to

his friends finding out about him from the newspapers. I wonder if I could hire a boat for half an hour's row?"

Harper smiled.

"They don't let their boats out on hire at this time of the year, sir," said he. "Take whichever one you like. That's a nice one at the foot of the steps there, with the oars and rowlocks all ready to your hand. Dick!" he called aloud to a fisherman who was mending his trawling gear at the stern of a smack that lay against the quay, "lay along there, and loose the painter of that white dinghy, will ye? This young gentleman would like to have a pull in her afore he has his breakfast of those fish you've just taken to the inn."

"Right you are," responded Dick, and he dropped his work and jumped ashore.

I noticed that his smack bore the name *Nelly*, of Westward Ho, and I wondered if he might chance to be the fisherman who had rescued the steerage passenger on the night of the late storm.

"You are not Dick Cruse, I suppose?" I questioned, as he held the boat steady for me to get in.

"You'm not far out, sir," said he. "That's the name I were baptized by fufty year ago in Clovelly church."

"Indeed!" I said. "Then I'm in luck. I was thinking of going along to Westward Ho to see you some time to-day."

"You wouldn't have found I there, sir," he smiled. "I be goin' out to the trawlin' again on the top of the ebb. Mought it be anything particular you wanted to see I for, sir?"

"I was only intending to ask you something about a young fellow who was taken ashore from the wreck the other day," I told him. "It was you, wasn't it, who picked him up in the bay?"

"Ay, you'm right there," he nodded. "Us pulled en out just as er were at the last gasp, as you might say."

I stood in the boat, holding on by one of the stone steps, and looking into his honest, weather-beaten face.

"I wish you would tell me about it," I suggested. "You looked after him well, I hear."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I did but a Christian man's duty by en, that be all," he responded lightly. "I allow 'twere a simple matter to pull the poor fellow aboard, though 'twere a cruel bad storm, and us had hard work to weather it, I can tell ye. Us only saw him by chance just as a streak of daylight come into the sky. My mate Bob were forra'd at the jib-sheet, and sang out that there were a dead cow to the leeward of us. Then near the cow us caught sight of the man, and bore down to un and dragged un aboard. He'd no clothes on, barrin' a suit of blue and white flannels. But us heard arterwards that er'd been a passenger aboard





“WAIT!” I CRIED. “WHAT ARE THOSE INITIALS ON THE BOX?”—Page 276.



the cattle boat as run aground on Hartland—the *Wine-peg* by name.”

“Wait!” I laid my hands on Dick’s knee. “Did you say he wore blue and white flannels—trousers and a loose sort of jacket?”

The fisherman looked at me curiously, seeming to wonder at my eagerness.

“They do say that some men have a fancy for goin’ to bed in clothes like they,” he said. “And bein’ as this one were in his bunk in the steerage when the ship struck, why, ’tis in reason that he were dressed so.”

I stepped out of the boat.

“You can tie her up again,” I said. “I want to talk with you, instead of going out in her. Come up to the top of the steps.”

We stood together leaning over the sea wall.

“Was he wearing a gold ring?” I interrogated excitedly, for I felt that I was on the brink of an important discovery.

“You’m a friend of his, then?” cried Dick Cruse. “You do know en, anyhow? Yes, I allow er wore a ring—a gold one, I b’lieve ’twas—on one of his little fingers, though I dedn’ take much account on it. What were it like? Well, ’twere not an ordinary ring, I allow. There wasn’t no precious stones in it—no di’monds or pearls. ’Twere a wide one, I mind,—as wide as three weddin’ rings stuck alongside of one another,—and there were carvin’ on’t,



some readin' I lay it were, though I never looked at it close enough to make out the words."

I trembled with inward excitement. Vague though the fisherman's description of the ring was, I had a presentiment that it was the one I had seen on the finger of the dead tramp. And, taking it in conjunction with Dick's mention of the blue and white pyjamas, I could not doubt that at last I had come upon a clue which would lead to the nameless stranger's identification. Yet before jumping to a rash conclusion, I wanted to know more.

"How old was he—and what was he like?" I cried.

Dick Cruse idly fingered the strings of a herring net that was hung out to dry across the wall against which he was leaning.

"I'd say he were not more'n five-and-twenty," he answered. "But bein' as er'd a nasty wound on's face and were weak and ill from bein' in the water so long, I allow 'twere not easy to tell the age of en."

"A wound on his face!" I echoed. "Was it a new wound? And was it on the side of the nose? And was one of his front teeth broken?"

"Ay, you do know en," was the fisherman's assuring response. "He were a tall, well-set-up young chap, with dark hair and a moustache. My missis her would have it as he were a gentleman, for all that he'd come from America in a old cattle boat,

and her took pity on he, and gave he clothes to wear, and lent him two sovereigns out of our savings. I dedn' mind the clothes, but the money—well, us have never seen it back again yet, and I reckon us won't, neither; for the chap er went away as soon as er'd got all er wanted, and never so much as left a name or told us where he were going to. I allow they'd ought to give I er's box that were washed ashore, to pay I back for they two sovereigns."

At this moment Harper strode along the quay towards us, surprised at my delay in taking out the boat.

"I have just made a discovery, Harper," I told him. "I have discovered through Cruse here that the young fellow we buried in Barracombe yesterday morning was the steerage passenger who was picked up after the wreck and landed at Westward Ho."

Harper's astonishment was hardly less than my own had been.

"Then you will lay claim to his box that's in the shed here?" he recommended.

"Yes," I said. "We shall want to search it, anyway, and see if it can tell us anything about him—his name, and where he came from. Perhaps you could get it taken up to Clovelly Court for me, could you? I shall be going there as soon as I have had some breakfast."

"Certainly," said he. "I shall be off duty

in half an hour's time, and will take it up myself."

Waiting only to pay Dick Cruse the two sovereigns which he had lost, and leaving Harper to tell him of the sad fate of the youth he had rescued, I hurried to the inn.

I was eager to communicate my discovery to Mr. Weldron, and, hungry though I was from the effects of the fresh morning air, I could scarcely command patience to eat my breakfast, or to wait to settle my account with the landlady. When at length I went out, I found Harper waiting for me with the green painted box at his feet. He was about to lift it to his shoulder, when I stayed him.

"Wait!" I cried, clutching at the box. "What are those initials painted on the lid?"

Amazement and inexpressible wonder seized me as with a physical grip when I gazed upon the painted letters—the two mysterious initials that had so puzzled and perplexed me when I had first seen them in conjunction. What did they stand for? What was their significance—those two letters 'L M,' marked here on this box as they had been marked in indigo on Wilfred Thornleigh's arm?

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### WHAT WE FOUND IN THE BOX.

STRANGE, inexplicable thoughts and conjectures fought against each other in my excited brain as I gazed dumbly upon that box with its two painted initial letters.

There could be no question now that Wilfred Thornleigh, in spite of his so positive denial at the inquest, had been acquainted with the victim of the Barracombe crime. They had sailed together in the same ship across the Atlantic, and although one was quartered in the steerage and the other aft in the cabin, yet it was impossible that they could not have seen each other frequently during the voyage. Yes, and there must assuredly have existed a closer and more intimate knowledge of each other than was implied by the circumstance of their having been passengers in the same ship, or why did it happen that Wilfred Thornleigh bore indelibly upon his arm the initials of his fellow-passenger's name? They had known each other. Of this I was now positive. And yet Wilfred Thornleigh had sworn

upon his solemn oath that they were absolute strangers!

What was at the root of this extraordinary and mysterious reticence? I could not guess. My brain was in a whirl. I was forced to own that I was baffled.

Trembling with the agitation of my discovery, I rose to my feet.

"Come!" I said to Harper. "I must see Mr. Weldron at once."

"Beant this he?" said the coastguard, glancing behind me up the steep path that did service as the village street. I turned, and there, sure enough, was Mr. Weldron himself striding towards me. I ran up to him.

"I have found out everything!" I cried excitedly, without even acknowledging his morning greetings. "Our mysterious tramp was a passenger by the *Winnipeg*, and this is his box!"

Mr. Weldron stared at me blankly for several moments.

"I don't understand," he said, glancing confusedly from me to the green painted box. "Have you been stealing a march on me, and making discoveries on your own account? Come into the inn and tell me all about it quietly. The box can remain where it is for a while. No one will run away with it."

"Better take it back into the shed, Harper," I nodded to the coastguard. "We can open it there presently."

Mr. Weldron's amazement was intense when I explained to him the simple process by which I had made my discoveries concerning the steerage passenger; but when, in referring to the green box and the painted letters on its lid, I mentioned for the first time the indigo initials on Wilfred Thornleigh's arm, his amazement gave place to a strange consternation, and he walked to and fro in the inn parlour in restless perplexity.

"The whole thing is most mysterious!" he muttered repeatedly. "What can be the meaning of it, Saintsbury?"

"One thing is quite clear," I remarked, "and that is that Wilfred Thornleigh perjured himself at the inquest."

"Perjury is a mild term to describe his despicable duplicity," returned Mr. Weldron warmly.

He halted by the window, and stood for many minutes looking out upon the sea. I supposed that he was bringing the magisterial side of his mind to bear upon the intricate problem that was now presented to him by the new evidence, and I did not venture to disturb him. He was accustomed to dealing with complicated legal cases, and I did not consider that any arguments or theories of mine could materially assist him. So I left him alone to his cogitations, and remained within the warmth of the fire, puzzling over the mystery on my own account.

Our silence was broken by the entrance of the



landlady, who came in to inquire of me if my friend would like some breakfast brought in. Mr. Weldron had already had his breakfast, and I told her so. As she was going out again, I called her back.

"Do you happen to have the address of Mr. Adams?" I asked her.

"Yes, sir," she answered. "He lives in Barnstaple. Rose Villa is the name of his house. It's just on the outskirts of the town, on the Bideford road. I had a letter from him only this morning, and he's ever so much better, he says."

"Thank you very much," I returned; and she quitted the room.

"Who is Mr. Adams?" inquired Mr. Weldron. "Some friend of yours?"

"No. He is one of the survivors of the wreck who was brought ashore here. He was Wilfred Thornleigh's fellow-passenger in the cabin of the *Winnipeg*. I was thinking that he might be able to tell us something."

"Saintsbury," cried Mr. Weldron, "you're a good deal smarter than I am. You have hit upon the one thing that will help us." He took up his cap from the sideboard. "Come," he urged, "the car is ready waiting up at the top of the village. Let us go off at once."

"But we've got to open that box first," I objected. "There may not be much in it, but if it has the owner's name inside, that will be a good deal."

“ Ah! That’s another alert idea,” said he. “ Yes, we’d better open the box.”

Harper was standing guard over it when we entered the coastguards’ shed.

“ We shall have to force the lock,” I said. “ Have you got a chisel, Harper?”

With considerable difficulty, the lid was broken open, and we proceeded to examine the contents. They were of extremely small value, and but for the supposition that they had been in use during the voyage, one could hardly consider them to be worth taking on board. It was evident that their owner had been very poor. Two pairs of threadbare trousers, one Norfolk jacket in rather good condition, a seedy frock-coat and vest to match, an old Panama hat, several soiled collars and handkerchiefs, three pairs of much-darned stockings, two grey flannel shirts, and a pair of boots; these made up all that we found in the way of clothing, and they were crushed and tumbled about, and wet with sea water. Among them, we came upon a rusty Colt’s revolver and a packet of cartridges, a leather belt with pouches, in which there were a few loose coins, two or three wooden pipes, some sopping wet tobacco, and a long envelope.

This last-named article seemed to give promise of the information we sought. I took it out of the box and opened it, finding only a few shipping advertisements and sailing bills concerning the *Winnipeg* and other steamers of the same Company; but with them

there was a written receipt for the payment of the fare from Montreal to Bristol of one steerage passenger. The passenger's name was inscribed upon it in a clear business hand—"Lincoln Marsh."

"Here you are!" I cried exultantly. "Here is his name—Lincoln Marsh. They are the same initials. See! L M!"

I handed the receipt to Mr. Weldron, who examined it critically.

"Yes, you are right," he agreed. "That is surely his name. And here is his address, too—Brookfield Street, Toronto. We had better take this receipt along with us, so that we may communicate with his friends."

Leaving the green box and its worthless contents in charge of the coastguards, we walked away up Clovelly Street, pausing only at the little shop that was called the post-office, whence we despatched a telegram to Mr. Adams, saying that we proposed calling upon him at about noon.

"You see, Saintsbury," said Mr. Weldron, as we turned into the narrow lane leading up to the place where the car had been left, "my instincts were right when I resolved to bring you with me. You have already discovered more than any London detective would have done in the time, and have left very little yet to investigate."

"It seems to me that there is a good deal yet to be done," I returned. "We have found out the name of

our gentlemanly tramp, and where he came from. But we have yet to discover why it was that he followed Wilfred Thornleigh to Barracombe, and we are no nearer than we were before to fixing the guilt upon the person who took his life. Perhaps we shall clear up that point when we come upon Seth Lee. Old Joe Lee, you remember, was interested in Canada, and, in spite of all denials, Lincoln Marsh may have been known to the gipsies. But," I added, "there is one thing beyond all others that I for my own satisfaction am anxious to know, and that is the answer to the question which has been troubling me all this morning: What part did Wilfred Thornleigh play in all this business?"

Mr. Weldron stopped abruptly in his walk and looked straight into my face with a penetrating gaze.

"Yes, Saintsbury," he said with emphasis. "That is what I too want most particularly to know; for, depend upon it, it is only through that knowledge that we shall find the key of the mystery."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE KEY OF THE MYSTERY.

IT was barely twelve o'clock when, after driving at a speed which at many moments considerably exceeded the regulations, we came to a sudden stop at the gate of Rose Villa, in Barnstaple. We both alighted, and were shown into a very tidy drawing-room, where a middle-aged man reclined on a comfortable couch in front of a bright coal fire, with one of his legs in splints and a bandage about his head.

"Good-morning, sir," began Mr. Weldron, bowing politely. "You are Mr. Henry Adams, I presume?"

"Yes," returned the invalid. "And you, I understand, are the gentleman who sent me a telegram from Clovelly this morning? Pray be seated."

We both sat down in chairs near him.

"I am sorry to disturb you," pursued Mr. Weldron, "but our business in Clovelly was in connection with a sad and terrible fatality which took place in Barracombe last Thursday evening. You have a newspaper beside you, I see. It is possible

that you have been reading the report of the inquest at which I presided as coroner."

"That is so," bowed Mr. Adams. "I was reading it for the second time when I heard your motor car stop at the gate. It is indeed a terrible affair. And to me it is peculiarly interesting, for the reason that Mr. Wilfred Thornleigh was one of the witnesses. Mr. Thornleigh was a fellow-passenger with me on board the *Winnipeg*, which was wrecked on Hartland Point a week ago. But surely, Mr.—er—Mr. Weldron, you cannot have any suspicion against him in connection with the crime?"

Mr. Weldron glanced at me warningly, as if to impose silence.

"There are certain points in the evidence which require still to be elucidated," he responded in his serious magisterial tone. "You may not have given very close attention to the newspaper report, or the report which you have there may not be a very full one; but you appear, in any event, to have formed no surmise as to the identity of the victim of this crime."

Mr. Adams started visibly.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "The victim! The young fisherman! Why, but how can you imagine that *I* should know anything about him? Kindly explain yourself, Mr. Weldron. I do not understand your drift."

Mr. Weldron drew his chair nearer, and rested one arm on the end of the couch.



“Until this morning,” he went on, “we were in absolute darkness as to the identity of the poor young fellow. We were ignorant of his name; we did not know where he had come from, and all our efforts failed to lift the veil that made everything dark and obscure and mysterious. But in Clovelly, by a fortunate chance, my friend here made the important discovery that the deceased young man was also a passenger—a steerage passenger, I believe—on board the *Winnipeg*.”

“What!” cried Mr. Adams, starting forward in astonishment and putting his hand to his forehead. “You don’t mean young Marsh?”

“Ah! I see you know his name,” commented Mr. Weldron.

“You amaze me!” rejoined Mr. Adams. “Then you think—you believe——?”

Mr. Weldron shook his head dubiously.

“We hardly know what to think—what to believe,” said he. “Indeed, it is simply because of our perplexity that we have ventured to come here—disturbing you very much, I am afraid—in the hope that you might be able to throw some light upon the matter.”

Mr. Adams leaned back in his couch.

“I see,” he murmured. “Yes, I see. Let me think for a moment.” He closed his eyes. “Dear me! how very terrible!” he muttered. Then he sat up quickly and took hold of the newspaper, at-

tentively scanning its columns. "There was no direct evidence against Thornleigh, I think?" he questioned slowly. "No, I see there was not. It would be strange if there was. He could have no possible motive, and he was not at all the kind of young man to take to violence, even in self-defence. And Marsh was more than a match for him, if it came to blows. No. Thornleigh is obviously innocent. And although he might do worse things, yet I don't think he would tell a lie. There was always an undercurrent of gentlemanhood about him."

I coughed uneasily. Mr. Adams evidently did not know Wilfred Thornleigh particularly well, or he would not have considered him incapable of falsehood.

"Now, if it had been the other way about," he went on, arguing to himself rather than with Mr. Weldron, "it would have been a good deal more likely. Marsh was anything but a favourite on board, and I always marvelled at young Thornleigh's familiarity with him. But they had worked together on some cattle ranch out in Canada, and that may account for it. It always struck me, however, that Marsh was a dodger, if not a positive scoundrel. He knew that Thornleigh was heir to a baronetcy and to great wealth, and, if I may say so, he was perpetually pumping Thornleigh concerning his private affairs. So that by the time we were in

the Channel I am certain he knew just as much about Aunt Mary and Roy, and Sir Brian and Barracombe Manor, as Thornleigh did himself. And——”

Mr. Adams stopped abruptly. He leaned forward again and stared wildly into the fire, with his fingers stroking his forehead, as if to subdue an acute pain.

“Pardon me, Mr. Weldron,” he said presently. “But I was stunned on the rocks, you know. I was unconscious for three days, and I am only now recovering my clear memory of the incidents of the wreck. And just at this moment one incident in especial has recurred to me—an incident in which the two young men we are talking about were the actors.”

He drew himself up again, facing us both.

“It is as clear to me as if I were now witnessing it,” he declared very slowly.

We listened, without interrupting him by a word or a murmur.

“The storm was a bad one,” he went on, “but I have been in worse. Our chief difficulty was with the steering gear, which had broken down; and we were on a lee shore. It was about four o’clock in the morning, when I was awakened by hearing the firing of the rockets. I sprang out of my berth, and ran up on deck. Just as I got there the ship struck, and I heard the first mate cry out for all hands to man the boats. I helped them for a bit, and

wondered why Thornleigh was nowhere about. I had seen him when I passed his cabin; he was sitting in his berth, preparing to jump down, and he could not fail to be aware of our danger. But he had not yet come on deck, and I was rather anxious about him. I was running along the deck to call him, when someone passed me quickly. It was Marsh. I saw him clearly by the light of a rocket. He stopped in the companion-way, and just at the same moment Thornleigh came up the stairs, carrying his leather bag and a life-belt.

“‘Come along, Thornleigh!’ I cried. ‘We’re on the rocks!’

“Suddenly and without an instant’s warning, Marsh leapt at him and struck him a violent blow. Thornleigh fell back, dropping the bag and the life-belt, which were immediately seized upon by Marsh, who made straightway for the captain’s boat. I ran after him, but a wave lifted the ship, and I was flung along the deck.”

Mr. Adams paused, holding his hand to his head. Presently he resumed—

“By some means or other—by the help of one of the stokers, I believe—I got upon my feet and managed to climb over the side and drop into the first mate’s boat. We were pushing off, when the boat was swamped. I clung to it for a time, and then swam to the rocks. I saw no more either of Thornleigh or of Marsh. If I thought of them at all, it was

to believe that both were drowned. Certainly I never believed that Thornleigh could save himself, for the last thing that I saw of him was when he staggered back from the blow, with his face bleeding— What are you looking at me that way for ? ”

Both Mr. Weldron and I were staring at him in blank astonishment.

“ Are you sure, Mr. Adams, that it was Wilfred Thornleigh who was struck in the face ? ” Mr. Weldron asked.

“ Absolutely certain, ” was the firm response. “ I can see him now, in his blue and white pyjamas, with a cut on the side of his nose and his mouth bleeding. ”

Mr. Weldron thrust his hand into his breast pocket and brought out a photograph. It was a photograph of him whom I had seen lying dead in Barracombe plantation, taken after death as an aid to possible identification.

“ Look at this portrait ! ” cried Mr. Weldron. “ That is Lincoln Marsh, is it not ? ”

Mr. Adams examined it for an instant, then handed it back. His face showed his inward perturbation.

“ No, it is certainly not a portrait of Lincoln Marsh, ” he declared. “ *That is a portrait of Wilfred Thornleigh.* ”

## CHAPTER XXXV.

PROOF ADDED TO PROOF.

“**T**HAT is a portrait of Wilfred Thornleigh.”

The astounding declaration was too positively and confidently made to admit an instant's doubt as to its absolute truth. As in a flash, I understood its full and terrible significance.

The dead tramp was no vagrant stranger, after all. He was Wilfred Thornleigh!

I was staggered by this new knowledge.

My own first instincts concerning him had been right, and he who had passed himself off as Wilfred Thornleigh was in reality Lincoln Marsh. Everything was now explained. The whole mystery was solved. I could see through it all now as through clear glass, and every little perplexing detail, every puzzling circumstance, every subterfuge and trick and cunning device, fell into its place in the complete design of subtle intrigue and treachery!

The audacity of the whole plot was amazing. And he had so nearly been successful! I did not wonder now that he had failed to recognise the portrait of



Sir Brian, at his hesitation in making his way into the billiard-room, at his momentarily mistaking me for Roy, at his ignorance of certain items of family history. I only marvelled at the cleverness by which he had contrived to escape the many pitfalls which must have crossed his path at every turn during the first few hours of his being in the house. How astonishingly adroit he had been in making use of the information in the Barnstaple letter! How adroitly he had adopted the real Wilfred Thornleigh's peculiar walk! It was clever of him, too, to assume the faults of his victim, and to admit his guilt in the matter of the forgery which had been the cause of Wilfred's flight to Canada.

Doubtless he had been aided immeasurably in his scheme by the fact that he had for so long been intimately acquainted with Wilfred Thornleigh in Canada, and thus enabled to acquire a knowledge of the things with which he would be expected to be familiar. A less clever impostor would quickly have betrayed himself; but Lincoln Marsh had proved himself a consummate actor, and had succeeded so far in blinding the household to his fraud that his trickery had not been detected.

Had he felt no remorse for the crime by which he had usurped the position of his companion? I remembered now the incident of the funeral wreath—the tribute which his better nature had prompted him to pay to the memory of his victim. Nor did I

forget that at the grave-side I had seen a tear upon his cheek. But his tears and his tributes could not bring the dead back to life, and whether he felt remorse or satisfaction at what he had done, he stood revealed in all the blackness and awful infamy of his guilt!

There was no need now to search for further evidence or proof. His blood-guiltiness was as clearly proven as if he had confessed it and explained the whole process of his crime from beginning to end. Nothing remained now to be done but to confront him with a direct accusation and bring him to speedy justice.

Our return journey to Barracombe was accomplished with express speed. We dashed in a cloud of dust along the moorland roads, through quiet villages and wooded lanes, nor halted once until we swept round the curve of the carriage drive and pulled up at the porchway of the Manor House, near to which Gladiator and Roy's cob stood saddled and bridled in charge of a groom.

Flinging off our dusty overcoats, we entered just as Miss Thornleigh was crossing the hall towards the drawing-room, where she occasionally took afternoon tea. Before greeting us, she took a letter from the silver salver which Tony Middlewick presented to her, and while she asked us if we had yet taken lunch, her thin fingers were breaking open the envelope. She unfolded the letter, and a slip of paper fell from it. I

picked it up and handed it to her, observing that it was a bank cheque. She glanced at it hurriedly, read the letter, then closely examined the cheque. A queer look of indignation came into her face.

"Good gracious!" she gasped, and her cheeks reddened. She sat down helplessly on one of the hall chairs.

"I trust you have not received bad news, Miss Thornleigh?" Mr. Weldron went nearer to her. His eyes rested on the letter that she held in her trembling fingers, and he raised his eyebrows in interested surprise. "Pardon me," he added, "but the cheque you have there—I think I know something about it."

Miss Thornleigh looked up at him through her gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Yes, Mr. Glynn tells me that you do," she responded, handing the letter to him. "You may examine it, and you will see that my precious nephew Wilfred has been repeating one of his old tricks."

At this moment there was a burst of boisterous laughter from the dining-room, and then he whom we had called Wilfred Thornleigh bounced out into the hall, followed by Roy and Austin Pride.

"Wilfred, I have something serious to say to you," said Miss Thornleigh in a voice of stern command. "Come into the housekeeper's room, please."

He cast a glance of sly curiosity, first at Mr. Weldron and then at myself.

"All right, aunt," he said hollowly. "I shall be there presently."

But instead of doing as Miss Thornleigh requested, he turned into the billiard-room.

I stepped aside to where Tony Middlewick stood waiting to speak to his mistress.

"Tony," I ordered, "put on your cap and go at once down to the village, and tell Inspector Blower that he is wanted here immediately. Tell him not to forget his handcuffs."

Tony went off without question, but he knew there was something in the wind.

Then I ran upstairs, to lock Wilfred Thornleigh's bedroom door and secure the key. There were many things in that room which it was advisable that we should impound. And among them there was a certain book which, for my own satisfaction, rather than as an article of conviction, I desired to take possession of. I entered the room, and found the volume on the shelf where I had seen it many times before. But now it showed signs of having been most thoroughly read and studied. It was, as you will have surmised, the manuscript diary kept by Wilfred Thornleigh—the real Wilfred Thornleigh—before he went to Canada. And in it he had written a record of his daily doings at school and at home during some two years of his life.

I opened it at random, and came upon an account of the adventure in the Smugglers' Cave, narrated in

almost precisely the same words in which it had been told to us in the library on Sunday afternoon. Here, too, I was certain, were many other items of information which had been similarly drawn upon by Lincoln Marsh as material for conversation. This was the book, I did not doubt, which the impostor had so industriously been reading on that first night of his arrival; and from it, most assuredly, he had gathered all those little facts and circumstances which, when alluded to by him, gave one the impression that they had naturally recurred to his retentive memory. How cleverly he had deceived us all! Here, indeed, was an example of his skill in remembering things which he had never known!

“Ah! Caught you again, have I? What the mischief are you doing here in my room?”

I started guiltily and shut the book, turning round upon him in confusion. But it was more his silent entry into the room than his actual presence which had startled me, and I quickly recovered my composure.

He closed the door behind him and faced me accusingly, his eyes flashing in anger.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded savagely.

My heart was beating furiously. The situation was a critical one, requiring tact and presence of mind. For a moment I was uncertain how to proceed, but I determined to keep cool at all costs.



“I did not expect you to come here and find me examining this book—this book which you have consulted so often and to such useful purpose,” I said, tucking the volume securely under my arm. “I thought that you had gone into the housekeeper’s room to explain to Miss Thornleigh your alteration of her cheque.”

He caught his breath.

“What!” he cried huskily.

“Oh, I know all about the cheque,” I answered him. “You altered the figures very cleverly that time in Clifford’s shop—as cleverly, indeed, as you disguised your ignorance of the road to Barnstaple. My only wonder is that you did not alter the amount to seventy pounds instead of seventeen. It would have been equally easy.”

He muttered a curse and clenched his fingers nervously.

“Clear out of this room!” he commanded. “Yes, and out of the house. You’ve been in it long enough, you hateful, interfering busybody!”

“Quite long enough for *your* comfort, I don’t doubt,” I retorted, moving round him as if with the intention of leaving. But my purpose was only to get between him and the door, so that he should not escape before I had completed my accusation, and before the arrival of Inspector Blower. “As for my being a busybody,” I continued, “well, you have certainly given me plenty to be busy about. I am



glad to say, however, that there is very little more for me to discover concerning you. For I believe I have now found out everything—everything, at least, in connection with the black crime which had brought you masquerading into this house.”

He had stood some distance from me, but now he crept stealthily nearer, panting audibly, eyeing me maliciously. At my last words he flung out his hand to grip my coat collar. I shrank back to avoid his evil touch.

“Clear out of this, before I chuck you out!” he cried furiously.

“Not yet,” I returned coolly. “Not yet. I have a lot more to say to you first. Stand back! No violence. See! I have my hand on the electric bell. Move a step from where you are, and I will summon help.”

He drew away from me, breathing heavily.

“Well,” he asked, with affected lightness, “what little mare’s nest have you found, I wonder?”

“First,” I resumed, still keeping my finger on the bell-push, “I have found out that you are not Wilfred Thornleigh. Your name is Lincoln Marsh.” He staggered back, shuddering, and clutched at the rail of the bed for support. His face had turned to an ashen grey, his pale lips quivered. I went on quickly. “You were a steerage passenger in the *Winnipeg*. When she struck on the rocks, you ran aft to prevent Wilfred Thornleigh from saving himself. It was the

blow you gave him that broke his tooth and brought that wound upon his face. You stole the life-belt from him, so that he might drown, and you be saved. You coward! Already you had made up your mind to personate him, to pass yourself off in his place as Sir Brian Thornleigh's heir. You did not know that he was rescued. You knew nothing of his letter from Barnstaple. You never guessed that he saw you in Bideford in possession of his bag, wearing his clothes. Not till he passed the caravans at Bittadon did you know that he was still alive. But even then you thought it was not too late to put your vile plans into execution."

I paused. He was moving impatiently, preparing to leap at me, perhaps to deal me such a blow as he had dealt to poor Wilfred Thornleigh in that moment of the wreck. I pushed the bell, and then gripped the door-key and turned it.

"Stand back!" I cried. "I tell you that I know everything. I know that you bribed the gipsies not to admit that you alighted at the plantation path at four o'clock, that it was you who found Roy Thornleigh's knife at the stile, and lay in wait for Roy Thornleigh's brother. Yours was the guilty hand that took Wilfred Thornleigh's life. And, having brutally murdered him, on the very threshold of his home, it was you who robbed him of his ring and of all else that might lead to his identification. Ah! you shrink from me now, like the low craven that you are!"

Silently I again turned the key, hearing footsteps on the stairs. Lincoln Marsh must also have heard them, and scented his impending danger. With a curse, he flung himself upon me fiercely, lifted me bodily from my feet and hurled me back into the room. With such force was I flung against the wardrobe that the looking-glass in its panel was smashed, and the heavy piece of furniture swayed with the impact.

My hand was cut with the splintered glass, and the back of my head was badly bruised. As I turned over to regain my feet, I found among the débris a broad gold ring. It had fallen from the top of the wardrobe, where Lincoln Marsh had hidden it. I picked it up and thrust it into my pocket without examining it. There was no need to examine it, indeed, for I had already recognised it as the zodiac ring which had been stolen from Wilfred Thornleigh's finger.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE LAST FATAL ERROR.

“STOP him, Gedling! Catch him!”

It was Mr. Weldron and Crabtree who had come to the bedroom door just as Lincoln Marsh rushed out, and, passing them, bounded down the wide staircase.

“Stop him, Gedling!” cried Mr. Weldron, as I came out upon the landing and clutched at the balustrade.

Gedling certainly made a pretence of intercepting the fugitive on the half landing, but I for one should have been greatly surprised if he had wilfully detained him.

“What’s up?” I heard the secretary ask, struggling with Marsh for an instant.

“The game’s up!” cried Marsh, with an awful oath. “Let me go!” And, freeing himself, he dashed off down the stairs and through the hall, where he snatched up a cap, and ran out by the front door, with Gedling in mock pursuit.

I thought of the two horses waiting outside.

Would Marsh leap on the back of one of them and escape?

The tumult and the shouting brought Roy Thornleigh and Austin Pride out of the billiard-room, and Miss Thornleigh from the servants' hall.

"What's the row about?" cried Roy, in total ignorance of all that had transpired.

I could not stop to explain. I ran out, hatless, and Mr. Weldron quickly followed.

For an instant Marsh had gone aside to mount one of the horses, but only for an instant. Even as he crossed the step he had caught sight of the motor car, and had speedily decided that a horse was useless while such a vehicle could be employed in pursuit.

Running across the front lawn, he plunged in among the rhododendron bushes. In the four days during which he had lived under false colours in the Manor, he had acquired a scout's knowledge of the geography of the grounds, and he had made off by the shortest cut for the field path which would lead him to the main road. He was quick of foot, and as I saw him for an instant there was no lingering sign of his assumed limp.

Gedling, who was close behind him when he entered the path, made a grab at him, but missed, tripped over a tree root, and fell sprawling. Before he regained his feet, Mr. Weldron had laid hold of him.

“Follow Marsh!” he called to me. “See which way he goes. I’ll look after this rascal.”

He evidently guessed by this time that Gedling had been in guilty collusion with Lincoln Marsh; guessed, as I now did, and as we were able subsequently to prove, that it was Gedling who had written to him in Canada, putting him up to the trick of answering Sir Brian Thornleigh’s advertisement, and then suggesting the criminal plan by which Marsh might come over to England and pass himself off as the prodigal Wilfred Thornleigh. He had himself, as I afterwards discovered, been in Canada, and was a cousin of Lincoln Marsh’s, and knew that there was a certain correspondence in age and personal resemblance between Marsh and Sir Brian Thornleigh’s missing son.

Marsh had known all along that Wilfred Thornleigh was not dead when he claimed the reward for information, but this fact had not deterred him from carrying out his foul plot. He had plotted even in Canada to compass Wilfred’s death, so that he might never return to Barracombe Manor. When Thornleigh resolved to come home to England, Marsh had taken a passage in the same steamer, still hoping that accident would help him to get rid of the man who stood between him and his audacious ambition. Failing to achieve his purpose on the voyage and at the time of the wreck, he had still boldly followed his evil design. Circumstances aided him, and he suc-



ceeded in frustrating Wilfred's return, just at the very door, as it were, of his home. And Gedling, taken into his secret, had helped him to cover the traces of his crime, to maintain his disguise; had coached him with facts as to the ways of the house and the things that he would be expected to remember.

Lincoln Marsh was clever—marvellously clever. He had acted his part with supreme skill and coolness, and but for one or two unintentional slips by which he betrayed his ignorance, he might even have succeeded in blinding Sir Brian Thornleigh himself to his daring fraud. But his scheme was too ambitious, too stupendous, to be executed without detection. And now he had been unmasked, his guilt was disclosed, and the whole fabric of his crime had collapsed like a house of cards.

“Follow Marsh!” cried Mr. Weldron.

At a turn in the path I lost sight of him. But I saw him again as I gained the open field. He was some fifty yards in front of me, running like mad. He gained upon me steadily, and at the end of the field had doubled the space between us. I saw him leap the stile, cross the road, and take cover in the copse beyond. I plunged in by the gap he had made, but among the bushes it was impossible to track him, and I made my way through to the ploughed field, and there caught sight of him once more disappearing over the

brow of the higher land. He seemed to be making either for the cliffs or the village.

I made a slant across the field into Frog Lane, and came out plump against Inspector Blower and Tony Middlewick.

Quickly, breathlessly, I told them what had happened, and we followed the chase in three several directions. Blower ran back to the village, and set two constables on the trail. Tony made his way to the sea cliffs, while I ran round by the lower slopes of the combe to cut off all possible escape by way of the beach.

I spent an hour in fruitless search, and was about to return in despair, when Tony Middlewick ran up to me.

"It's all right, sir," he cried. "'E've taken refuge in one of the caves, and the tide's a-comin' in fast. We've got 'im as safe as a rat in a trap. Blower and Jawler they've gone round in a boat. If you comes down to the 'arbour, sir, you'll be in time to see 'im nabbed."

I guessed at once what cave it was in which Marsh had resolved to hide. And when, after some delay, I got a boat and joined the police in their pursuit, I found that they too had fixed upon the Smugglers' Cavern as being the escaped criminal's most likely refuge.

All night we continued the search without success. He was not in the Smugglers' Cavern, nor in the

underground passage connecting it with Barracombe Manor.

Crafty to the last, he had evaded pursuit, and we were forced to own ourselves outwitted.

It was not until an hour after sunrise that I returned, tired and bruised, from the fruitless chase. An hour's sleep refreshed me, and at breakfast I was fit to renew the pursuit. We discussed the whole mystery, which was a mystery no longer—Miss Thornleigh being as keenly interested in it as either Roy or Pride, albeit she was evidently piqued at having permitted herself to be deceived. When I produced the ring which I had found on the bedroom floor, she examined it curiously.

“Poor Wilfred!” she sighed. “It was for my sake that he kept this ring. I gave it to him many years ago, and he said that nothing would induce him to part with it.” She turned to Roy, handing it to him. “You remember it, don't you, Roy?”

“Why, yes!” he exclaimed, “I remember it. But I never knew that those were the signs of the zodiac on it. If I'd seen it on his finger when he was lying there in the plantation, I should have guessed who he was.”

“But I described the ring at the inquest,” I reminded him.

“So you did,” nodded Miss Thornleigh; “but I also was not aware that those were the signs of the zodiac. I believed that it was a Persian inscription, because

my cousin William, who gave it to me, had travelled in Persia."

"I wonder where the fellow has escaped to!" reflected Roy, looking across at me. "Are you sure that the cave was thoroughly searched, Saintsbury?"

"I am quite certain it was well searched," I assured him. "He couldn't be hiding there without our finding him. But if you like, we can go down there again, and take proper lanterns and torches with us."

Pride and Roy both supported the proposal, and, when breakfast was finished, we went down to the quay and got a boatman to take us round to the cliffs.

We pulled first into the Smugglers' Cavern, and searched its every nook and cranny, but to no purpose. Then we entered one of the smaller caves—a cave which the sea flooded at each high tide. And there, at its farthest extremity, on a shelf of rock, we discovered the drowned body of Lincoln Marsh.

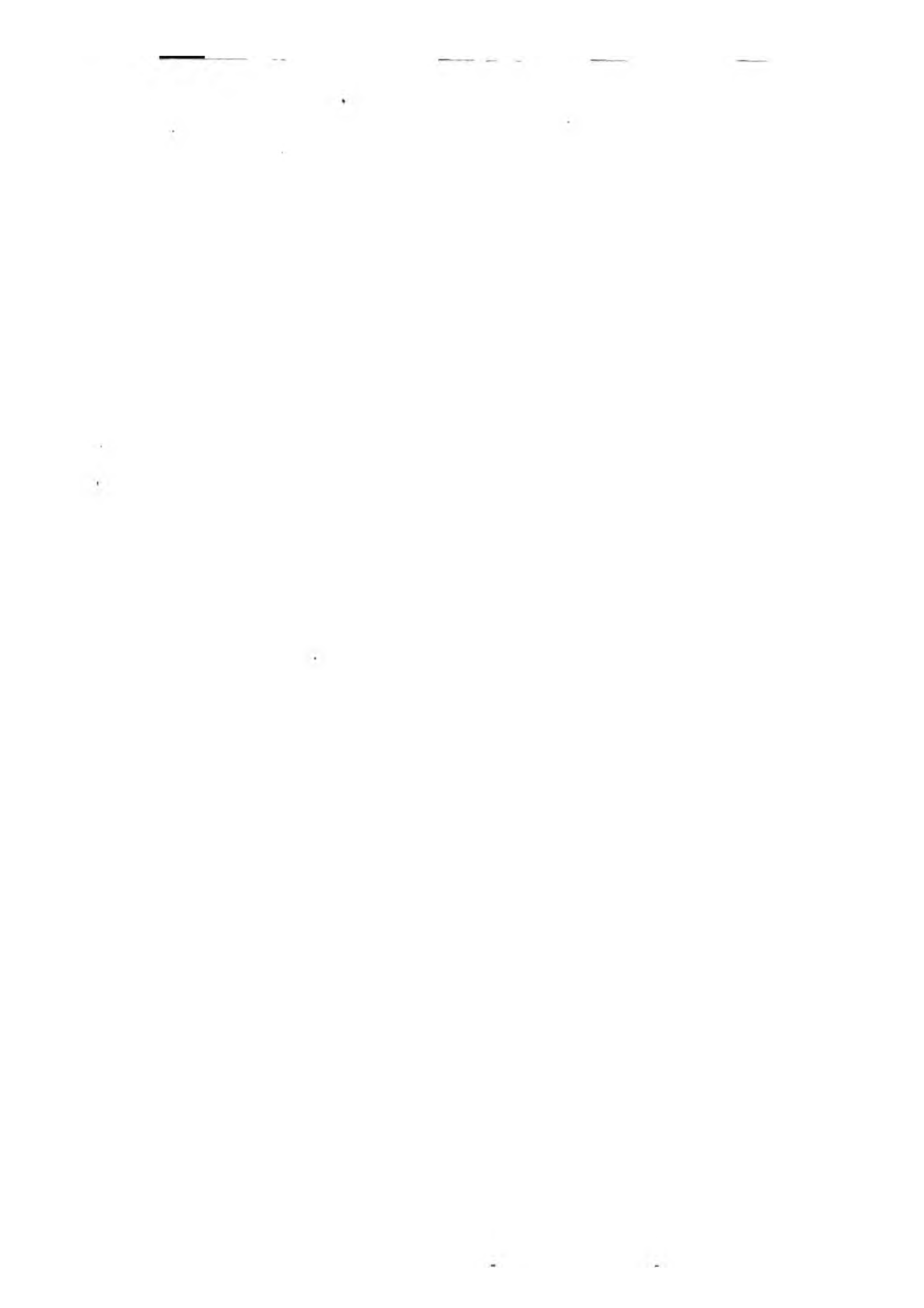
Ignorant of the locality, Marsh had committed his last fatal error, and had entered the wrong cave. He had retreated far in as the advancing tide swept round him, and then at length his final foothold on the narrow shelf of rock had itself been submerged and he had given up his ill-spent life to the hungry sea. And that was the end of him, and the end of the whole sad business.

We found out many things afterwards, and Gedling

made a full confession to the magistrate when he was brought to trial as an accessory. But all that we learned was merely a corroboration of what we already knew or had already guessed.

The body of Wilfred Thornleigh was exhumed and re-interred in the family vault, and that of his enemy was buried in its stead in a neglected corner of Barra-combe churchyard.

THE END.





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