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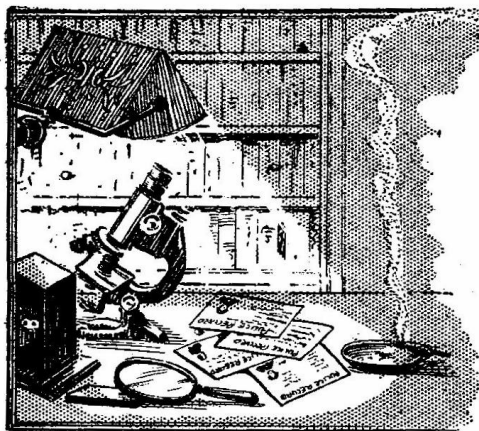


Football Competition

Hooray!

I've won a TUCK HAMPER

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.



THE PHANTOM FORTUNE!



A Grand, Long Complete Detective Story introducing Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

Ferrers Locke, the Wonderful Detective, Solves Another Big Mystery.

The Robbery in Russell Square!

"THANK Heaven you've come, Locke!" Mr. Septimus Stacpoole, solicitor, rose eagerly from his chair as the famous detective was shown into the room in his house in Russell Square. He came quickly towards the detective.

"I've been waiting, Locke—" "I came as soon as I received your message, Mr. Stacpoole," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "Yes, yes; but it seemed an age to me. You do not know what has happened. Please sit down."

The stout, elderly solicitor sank down into his own chair, and Ferrers Locke dropped into a seat opposite. Mr. Stacpoole was evidently labouring under a strong agitation. He had been eager for the detective's arrival; but now Ferrers Locke had arrived the old gentleman seemed at a loss for words. Twice he cleared his throat to speak, and each time he hesitated and stopped.

Ferrers Locke regarded him rather curiously. He knew Mr. Stacpoole as a quiet, methodical man of business, and he had never seen him under the stress of emotion before. It was clear that something of a very unusual nature had happened in the quiet, usually humdrum existence of the solicitor. Locke waited patiently for the old gentleman to control his agitation.

"I'm going to speak in confidence, of course, Locke!" said Mr. Stacpoole, at last.

"That is understood."

"It concerns my nephew—you have met him, I think—" Locke nodded.

Once or twice he had come into contact with Philip Stacpoole, a rather sportive youth, very much unlike his staid, elderly relative.

"He has robbed me!" said Mr. Stacpoole, in a stifled voice.

"I am sorry to hear that," said Ferrers Locke. "You are sure of what you say?"

"There is, unhappily, no doubt about it. You understand why I have called you in, instead of the police, Locke. I would rather lose the money than incur the public disgrace of acknowledging my nephew a thief. But—but it must be recovered, if possible, before the wretched boy has made ducks and drakes of it."

"What is the sum?" "A thousand pounds."

"You had better give me the details," said Ferrers Locke. "From what I have observed of Mr. Philip, the money is not likely to remain in his pockets very long, and there is consequently no time to be lost. When did the robbery take place?"

"Last night."

"And where is Philip now?"

"Fled!"

"You do not know, or guess, where he has gone?"

"I have no idea. I only know that he has gone, and that the money has gone with him. That it should come to this!" muttered the old gentleman, his features working. He calmed himself with an effort. "I will tell you exactly what has happened, Locke. Philip has always been a little wild—gambling has been his inveterate weakness. I have paid his debts more than once, and more than once he promised to reform, and I believe intended to keep his word. But—but—"

"I understand."

"Yesterday evening," continued Mr. Stacpoole, "we had a talk—here in this room. He told me that he had some new prospects, and that with a small capital he would be able to make his own way, and cease to be a burden upon me. He

refused to tell me what these new prospects were, and I concluded, of course, that it was some hare-brained scheme—probably backing a favourite horse, or something of the kind. He asked me for five hundred pounds, which I naturally refused to give him. He was unusually earnest, and he argued for a long time, but he refused to say one word as to the purpose for which he required the money. I have not the slightest doubt that it was a gambling venture of some kind."

"Most probably!" said Locke, with a nod.

"He went to his room at last," continued Mr. Stacpoole.

"He was angry and resentful. I have always been fond of the boy, but I was angry, too, and we parted on angry terms. I did not for a moment suspect, however, what was in his mind. Whether he was aware that I happened to have a large sum of money in the safe, I do not know—possibly he knew, or possibly he simply intended to take what he could get, and, as the money was there, he took it."

"When I came down to breakfast this morning I learned that Philip had left the house early, taking a suit-case with him. I supposed that he was still resentful, and did not wish to meet me, and had gone off on a visit to some of his sporting friends. I thought no worse than that till I went to the safe, to take out some documents I required to take with me to my office. Then I found—"

Mr. Stacpoole paused, gasping.

"You found—"

"I found that the door of the safe had been forced, and that the bank-notes had been taken away."

"And you are sure—"

"The wretched boy has as good as admitted it. He left a note in the safe. It is here."

The solicitor passed a scrap of paper across to Ferrers Locke.

Locke glanced at it.

A single sentence was scrawled on it in pencil.

"In a couple of days I shall return and repay everything."

"This is Philip's hand?" asked Locke.

"Yes."

"And this paper was left in the safe?"

"In the same pigeon-hole from which the bank-notes had been taken?"

"Then there is not much doubt about the matter," remarked the detective. "The foolish fellow has some scheme in his mind, and doubtless he regards taking the money as a sort of temporary loan."

"I am glad you take that view, Mr. Locke," said the solicitor, with a look of relief. "Philip is wild and reckless, but he would not be a thief, if he realised what he was doing. He believes that he will return and repay the money. But—"

"But he will not do so," said Locke. "Evidently it is some gambling scheme that he has in his mind. He expects to win a large sum of money, and that expectation, of course, will not be fulfilled."

"He must be found, and the money recovered," said Mr. Stacpoole. "It is not many hours since he left. Do you think there is any chance, Mr Locke?"

"Undoubtedly," Ferrers Locke considered for a moment.

"Have you any idea whether he has left the country?"

"Not in the least."

"Had he a passport in his possession?"

"Yes; he spent a holiday in August in the north of France and, of course, he had to have a passport to travel there."

"Then there would be no impediment in the way of his crossing the Channel to-day if he wished."

"None."

"A telegram to the police at Dover or Folkestone would stop him, Mr. Stacpoole. He can scarcely have crossed yet."

Mr. Stacpoole shuddered.

"I know—I know; but that means shame and indelible disgrace. I cannot brand my brother's son as a thief. I have hopes of him yet."

"I understand. I will do my best," said Ferrers Locke.

"Of course, he may not have left the country; his scheme is probably in connection with some racing affair. You cannot form a guess as to what the scheme actually was?"

"Only that I am assured that it was a gamble of some kind."

"He was addicted to betting on horses?"

"Yes. I imagine that the foolish boy has selected some horse that he fancies is certain to win, and intends to back it for a large sum," said Mr. Stacpoole. "That is the only conclusion I can come to. In that case, of course, he would not leave the country."

Locke nodded.

"There is no time to lose," he said. "Let me see his room, and I may find some clue there as to the direction he has taken."

"Come with me, Mr. Locke."

And Ferrers Locke followed the solicitor from the room and up the staircase.

A Mysterious Clue!

PHILIP STACPOOLE'S room in his uncle's house was a large and pleasant apartment overlooking the square. Ferrers Locke glanced round it, with the keen eyes that nothing escaped, as he entered. The room showed evident signs of confusion and of the young man's hurried departure.

"I ordered the servants not to enter the room or touch anything, Mr. Locke," said Mr. Stacpoole. "Everything here is just as Philip left it."

"Very good," said Locke. "That was prudent."

The Baker Street detective proceeded to make an examination of the room in his methodical way. Mr. Stacpoole standing near the door and watching him with anxious eyes.

Everything betokened the haste and agitation of the young man at the moment of departure.

The bed, which was in an alcove, had been slept in. The bedclothes had been tossed carelessly aside. Half a dozen cigarette stumps lay on the floor near the bedside. There was the brown scar of a burn on the rumpled pillow. Evidently the young man had sat smoking in bed, thinking over his plans. On the floor in the middle of the room were scattered several neckties, an odd slipper, and a couple of collars. They indicated where the fugitive had hastily crammed things into his bag.

There was a desk under one of the tall windows, and Ferrers Locke bent over it. It was locked.

"Have you the key to this?" he asked, glancing round at the old gentleman by the door.

Mr. Stacpoole shook his head.

"No. Philip has probably taken it with him."

"You have no objection to my forcing the lock?"

"None. Pray do so."

The Baker Street detective drew his bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, and in a couple of minutes the desk was open.

Inside the desk, when the lid was raised, the same signs of confusion could be seen. Letters and papers lay in a heap, and one or two currency notes were scattered among them. Ferrers Locke examined letters and papers with searching care.

Several of the letters were demands for money from tradesmen, evidence that Master Philip Stacpoole owed a good deal on many sides. Some of them were from sporting acquaintances, and referred to racing matters. But there was none that gave a clue to the young man's present movements.

"Ah! what is this?" ejaculated Ferrers Locke suddenly.

It was a sheet of paper containing lists of numbers, written in ink. Locke held it up, and fixed his eyes upon it curiously.

"Have you seen this before, Mr. Stacpoole?"

"No. Is it of consequence?"

Mr. Stacpoole adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses, and stared at the paper in astonishment. It was as follows:

1	2	4	3	5	7	9	8	6	4
3	7	5	5	5	7	7	9	1	1
3	3	3	5	5	3	7	9	8	8
3	7	6	4	5	5	2	2	4	5
8	8	8	7	4	4	9	3	2	2
2	3	4	2	3	6	8	9	8	7
2	1	1	1	1	8	6	5	7	7

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Stacpoole, "that is a very curious paper, Locke. What can possibly be its meaning?"

Ferrers Locke did not reply for a moment.

His eyes were fixed upon that apparently meaningless array of figures, and his brow was contracted with deep thought.

"Can it be some kind of cryptograph?" asked the astonished old gentleman.

"It is possible, of course."

"The figures appear to have no meaning, otherwise."

"True."

"Is it possible that this document has any bearing upon my nephew's flight?"

"That is what we have to discover," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "As the paper was locked in your nephew's desk, it undoubtedly belongs to him."

"That is certain, of course—and, besides, I know my nephew's hand," said Mr. Stacpoole. "Although there are no words on the paper, I am quite certain that those figures were written by Philip."

"And you have never seen anything of the kind in his possession before?"

"Never."

"I will keep this paper for the present," said Ferrers Locke. "It may help me. I think there is nothing else to be discovered here, Mr. Stacpoole. Let us go down."

They descended the stairs again.

Locke's face was very thoughtful, and the solicitor glanced at him several times with anxious inquiry.

"You think there is a chance, Mr. Locke?" he asked at last.

"I hope so, at least. I shall leave London at once, and I hope to get on the track of Master Philip before he has had time to make ducks and drakes of the thousand pounds—all of it, at all events," said Ferrers Locke. "I shall return to Baker Street now, to get my bag and to call for my assistant, and then I shall start."

"You are sure, then, that Philip has left London already?"

"I think so."

"And that you will find him upon some racecourse?"

Ferrers Locke smiled enigmatically.

"I cannot say, at present, that I shall find him at all," he said; "but I hope to do so. I have at least a clue."

"In that list of numbers?"

"Yes!"

"It is utterly meaningless to my mind," said Mr. Stacpoole; "and even if the lists of figures have some meaning, I cannot see any connection between them and Philip's flight."

"That is for the future to tell," answered the detective.

"I will not lose another moment, Mr. Stacpoole. I can only say that I hope for the best, and will do my utmost to find your nephew and the stolen bank-notes. Good-morning, my dear sir."

A minute later Ferrers Locke stepped into his car, which was waiting in the square, and from the window the troubled and anxious solicitor watched him depart.

In the car Ferrers Locke took the mysterious paper from his pocket again, and studied it carefully. There was a slight smile on his face as the car drew up at the house in Baker Street. Evidently that strange document, meaningless as it looked, had a meaning for Ferrers Locke, and had furnished the famous detective with a clue.

The Track of the Thief!

JACK DRAKE jumped up as Ferrers Locke came quickly into the consulting-room at Baker Street.

The famous detective was as quiet and calm as usual; but there was an indication of haste in his manner.

"Something on this morning, sir?" asked Drake.

"Yes, my boy," Locke looked at his watch. "Our train leaves Charing Cross at twelve, and it is now eleven-twenty. We have to pack our bags for a visit to France, and to catch the train in forty minutes. And I have two telegrams to send." He smiled. "So there is no time to lose."

"By Jove, there isn't, Mr. Locke," said Drake. "I'll get to the packing at once."

"Do so, my boy."

Jack Drake hurried from the room. Ferrers Locke sat down at the telephone, and dictated a couple of telegrams over the wires. The car was waiting outside in Baker Street, and at half-past eleven Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake came down the steps and entered it.

The chauffeur had his instructions, and he started off at once. The car glided swiftly up Baker Street and across Oxford Street, heading for Charing Cross Station.

Jack Drake stole a curious glance at his chief as the car threaded the traffic; but Ferrers Locke did not speak. Drake could not help wondering what was the reason for this sudden journey; but he did not ask a question.

The car stopped at Charing Cross Station with ten minutes to spare for the train.

Ferrers Locke and his boy assistant entered a first-class compartment in the boat-train for Folkestone.

Conversation on business was impossible in the compartment, which was nearly full; and the detective and his assistant sat in silence as the express tore away through the smiling countryside of Kent.

Ferrers Locke read his newspaper, and Jack Drake contented himself with the "Gem," to while away the journey.

At Folkestone Harbour Station they alighted from the train, their bags in their hands. Their luggage was small; Ferrers Locke was accustomed to travelling light.

The boat was waiting, and the passengers for the Channel crossing made for it; but Ferrers Locke stopped and looked about him.

A police-inspector came across to him, saluting the famous detective very respectfully.

Locke evidently expected the meeting; and Jack Drake remembered the telegrams the detective had despatched before starting.

"Your man crossed by the morning boat, sir," Drake heard the inspector's muttered words.

"From Folkestone?"

"Yes!"

"For Boulogne?"

"Yes!"

"Thanks."

The detective passed on with Drake.

After the usual delay to fill in the forms giving the particulars contained in their passports, Locke and Drake crossed down the gangway to the deck of the boat.

They sat down in deck-chairs, with their bags at their feet. It was a calm, sunny day, and Drake looked forward to an agreeable crossing.

There was a roar from the siren, and the Channel boat started.

It was not the first time that Jack Drake had crossed the Channel, but he looked about him with interest and pleasure as the steamer throbbed out upon the blue waters.

Ferrers Locke glanced at his boy assistant with a smile.

"I suppose you are curious to know where and why we are going, Drake?" he remarked.

"Well, sir, I know we're going to Boulogne, as the boat stops there," said Drake. "Why, I can't guess, of course. We are after somebody, from what I heard the inspector say to you in the harbour station."

"Exactly."

Ferrers Locke gave his boy assistant a brief account of what had happened at the house in Russell Square.

Drake listened attentively.

"Then we are after Philip Staepoole?" he said.

"That is it."

"How do you know for certain that he has crossed the Channel, sir?" asked Drake with interest.

"I have a clue."

Ferrers Locke took from his pocket-book the list of figures he had taken from Philip Staepoole's desk at Russell Square, and passed it to his boy assistant.

Drake stared at the paper in blank astonishment.

"I found that in the young man's desk," explained Locke.

"There is no doubt that it was written by him."

"But what does it mean, sir?" exclaimed Drake blankly.

"It is a list of numbers," said Ferrers Locke.

"Some weird kind of a cryptograph?"

Locke shook his head.

"No, my boy. It is a list of numbers taken at a gaming-table!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Drake.

"Your experience has not yet extended to the gaming casinos of the Continent, my boy," said the Baker Street detective with a smile, "and, but for my confidence in your strong character and good sense, I should not have brought you with me on this journey. But if I have judged you correctly, what you are going to see will do you no harm, and it will be a useful experience for you."

"I'm not likely to want to dabble in gambling on the green table, sir," said Drake with a laugh. "Too much sense, I hope."

"I am sure of it," said Locke.

Drake looked at the paper again.

"I have heard of people making up systems to play at Monte Carlo," he said. "Is this a list of roulette numbers?"

"No. In the game of roulette there are thirty-six numbers. In this list, as you will see, no number is higher than nine. There are ten columns of figures, and although numbers are constantly repeated, nine is the highest, and there is no occurrence of 0—zero. It cannot, therefore, be roulette 'permanence,' as it is called."

"Then what—"

"In August Philip Staepoole spent a holiday in the north of France," continued the detective. "I have no doubt that he visited the casino then, at Boulogne or Calais or Wimereux, and tried his luck on the green table, and took down the numbers. Doubtless he lost his money, but, with the

perennial hope of the gambler, he looked forward to winning on another occasion. He stated to his uncle yesterday that, with a certain capital, he expected to make a large sum of money. That statement, taken in conjunction with this list of numbers, is a pretty definite clue."

"The awful ass!" ejaculated Drake.

"The foolish fellow has evidently pondered over his 'permanence,' and believes that he has succeeded in evolving a system," said Ferrers Locke. "As his uncle refused him money he helped himself, with the belief that in a couple of days he would return a rich man, and repay what he had taken."

"Which is impossible, of course."

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"A casino is an expensive place to keep up," he said. "It is not kept up on losses, Drake. In theory a successful system could be invented; in practice there is no such thing, for the simple reason that if a player succeeded in 'skinning' a bank, trickery would be resorted to, and what the croupiers could not gain by fair means they would gain by foul. If Philip Staepoole takes the stolen money into a la boule casino, he will leave it there. I hope to be in time to prevent him."

"You are sure he has crossed over into France to play?"

"Quite. The game is, of course, illegal in England; and though it may be played secretly in certain gambling dens, it is much more probable that a player testing a system would proceed to a place where he could play without the fear of feeling a policeman's hand on his shoulder at any moment. But I am trusting nothing to chance. As you are aware, travellers cannot leave the country without passports; and at the port of departure they have to give their names, which must, of course, be the names on their passports. I telegraphed both to Dover and Folkestone before starting. The information I needed was ready for me when I stepped from the train. My friend, Inspector Gibbons, had made the necessary inquiry. Philip Staepoole's name was given this morning, in the usual way, when he took the boat from Folkestone to Boulogne."

"Oh, good!" said Drake.

"He crossed by the early boat," resumed Ferrers Locke.

"Possibly he feared that his uncle might set the police on his track, rather than lose so considerable a sum of money. In any case, he would be anxious to get to the green table and set his darling scheme in operation. I think we shall find our gentleman in Boulogne."

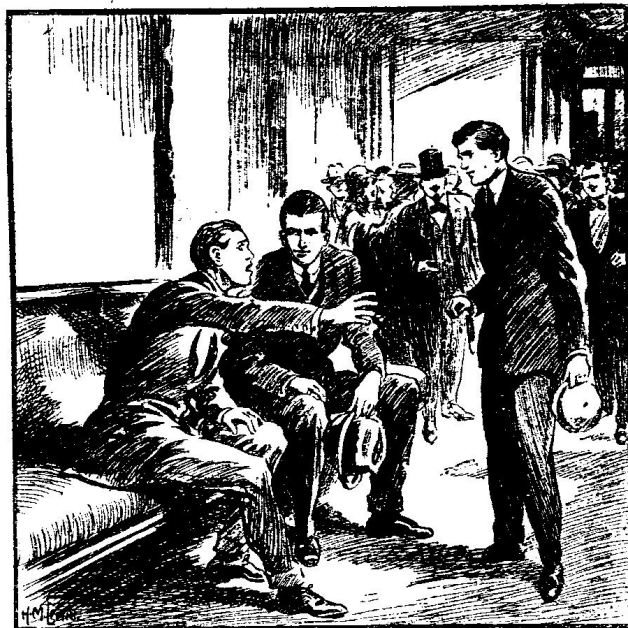
Drake looked thoughtful.

"There are crowds of these casinos in France—are there not, sir?"

"At nearly every seaside resort."

"Might he not, then, have gone on from Boulogne to one farther afield?"

"It is possible, of course," said Ferrers Locke. "In that case we shall have to follow him farther. But I think it very probable that he has remained in Boulogne. There is a casino in that town which would answer his purpose; and he was certainly anxious to get to work at the earliest pos-



"Will you hand the money into my keeping, and return to England with me by the night boat!" "I—I—can't," muttered Staepoole. "Very good," said Ferrers Locke. "Drake, go into the hall and send the porter for a gendarme." "Stop!" said Staepoole hoarsely, "I'll come!"

sible moment on his precious system. His statement that he would return in a couple of days shows that he did not intend to go far afield."

"True!" said Drake.

"It is evident, I think, that he believes that he has discovered a winning system," resumed the Baker Street detective. "Doubtless he hopes that by this evening he will have doubled his capital, or trebled it. There is more folly than wickedness in the wretched fellow. I am sure he will be astonished when he finds his capital dribbling away, instead of doubling and trebling."

"The silly ass!" said Drake. "But there's one more point, sir—"

"What is that, my boy?"

"We're a good many hours behind him—four, at least," said Drake. "Isn't that time for him to have lost the money?"

"Ample."

"Then—" said Drake.

Locke glanced at his watch.

"He has not played yet," he said.

"How can you know that, sir?"

"It is my business to know a good many things, Drake," said the Baker Street detective with a smile. "The gambling does not begin at the casino until three o'clock."

"Oh! I see."

"Our young friend has doubtless lunched, and is now haunting the casino waiting for the tables to open," said Ferrers Locke. "We shall be in Boulogne soon after three, and I hope we shall come upon Mr. Philip before he has gone very deep into his uncle's money. I know him by sight, and if he is at the tables I shall pick him out easily enough."

"And then?" said Drake.

Locke shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Stacpoole does not want any public scandal in the affair," he said. "He still cares for his scapegoat nephew, and does not wish him to be disgraced by a charge of theft. Otherwise, a telegram to Boulogne, to the Bureau of Police, would have done the business. I shall have to take my own measures when I see Master Philip."

And the Baker Street detective's face set grimly.

The Channel boat glided on over a sunny sea, the cliffs of France rising from the waters in the distance ahead.

It was soon after three o'clock that the Baker Street detective and his boy assistant stepped ashore on French soil.

A little later, they were at the gate of the ornamental gardens enclosing the extensive building of the casino.

Ferrers Locke stopped at the ticket-office.

"Deux!" he said briefly.

He handed over a five-franc note for two tickets of entry, and Drake followed him up the gravel path to the entrance of the casino.

The Plunger!

"**F**AITES vos jeux, messieurs!"

The gaming room was crowded.

It was a warm afternoon out of doors; and in the apartment of the casino devoted to the god of chance it was stiflingly hot.

Heedless of the heat and the heavy atmosphere, crowds of punters were gathered round the long, green table marked with the yellow numbers.

In the centre of the long table was the wide, deep bowl, with the numbers one to nine inscribed round its rim.

The numbers occurred twice in the circle, and to each number there was a slot into which the ball might roll.

A greasy-faced croupier, with cunning eyes and an ironical mouth, stood by the bowl, with a rubber ball in his hand.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs!" he repeated, in the dull, droning voice of the bored croupier. "Marquez vos jeux!"

Counters of various colours clicked down on the green cloth on all sides.

There was no money on the tables, as in the palmy days before the war. Neither were the stakes so considerable as in those old palmy days. Even in the Continental casino, where money almost seems to lose its value, the general poverty which has followed the war made itself felt.

The red counters, which represented twenty-franc pieces, were comparatively few; the yellow, which represented five-franc pieces, were much more common; but the majority of the punters played with the little metal counters which stood for francs.

Punters who remembered pre-war days noticed a very distinct diminution in the amount on the table at every spin of the ball. Which, of all the results of the war, is perhaps the very least to be regretted.

But there was at least one reckless plunger at the table.

He sat in one of the chairs nearest to the croupier who was spinning the rubber ball, and he watched the man with hungry eyes at every spin. There was a great pile of red counters on the table before him; he evidently disdained to play with smaller pieces. There was also a card before him, on which he was keeping the numbers as they turned up—the only player at the table who was taking the trouble to do so.

Sometimes the croupiers glanced at his occupation, and exchanged ironical glances with one another.

"Keeping the numbers," common enough at Monte Carlo, is rare in the la boule casinos, and is only done by those hopeful punters who fancy that they can evolve a system from the conglomeration of numbers. Which hope has about as much chance of being realised as the hope of catching a will-o'-the-wisp.

The young man, heedless of the ironical smiles of the croupiers, and of the curious glances turned upon him by

(Continued on next page.)

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the other punters, kept his list of numbers with sedulous care, and played with twenty-franc pieces at every spin of the ball.

The game was yet early, and hope had not yet died out of the young fellow's face; but it was evident from his looks that his system was not panning out as it ought to have done.

The pile of red louis before him was steadily diminishing.

He had started with a hundred red pieces, which represented two thousand francs; and one, two, or three of them vanished at every spin of the ball; and the game was so rapid that there was at least one spin to the minute.

Once or twice the young man missed a spin, while he coned over his numbers very carefully, and made notes with a pencil on the margin of his card.

Then he would begin again; and every time a winning number came up for him his face brightened with new assurance.

But his wins were few and far between.

The red pieces went in ones and twos and threes, until the foolish fellow found himself throwing his last piece on the table.

He threw it upon the number seven, and watched the spin of the ball with a thirsty, concentrated stare. For a moment the ball lingered over the slot in the bowl numbered seven, as if to tantalise him, and then it jerked away and rolled into five. The drone of the croupier was heard again.

"Le cinq!"

The young man set his lips, his weak face paling with dismay. But he gave a shrug of the shoulders, and his hand went to an inner pocket, evidently for a further supply of cash.

The chef-de-partie, seated on a high stool from which he could watch the whole extent of the table, had an eye on the plunger.

"Changeur!" he rapped out at once.

A little fat man came bustling through the crowd, to the side of the punter. This was the changer, who was prepared to supply limitless quantities of bone counters in exchange for cash.

The young man glanced up at him, and handed him an English fifty-pound note.

He did not even trouble to count the stack of counters he received in return for it.

Even before "le changeur" had finished handing out the pieces, the eager punter had thrown two or three of them on the green cloth, as if he could not endure even to wait a few moments.

It was seven this time, and seven was not one of the numbers the plunger had selected.

His pieces were swept away by the ruthless rake of the croupier.

He consulted his list of numbers again with anxious brow, and, apparently deriving new hope from it, began to back the number seven, steadily, with a louis at each spin.

A tall man with clean-cut features and clear eyes sauntered into the gaming-room, and moved in a leisurely way through the crowd towards the table.

It was Ferrers Locke, and his keen eyes scanned every face in search of the man he wanted. Jack Drake was with the Baker Street detective, keenly interested in all he saw. It was Drake's first experience in a Continental casino.

Locke's eyes fell upon the young man, whose shaking hand was tossing a louis upon "cinq" as Locke sighted him.

He made a gesture

"That's the man," said Drake, following the detective's glance.

Locke nodded.

"Le cinq!"

Philip Stacpoole had won, and the croupier tossed over seven louis to him. It was but a fraction of what he had lost; and it brought a new flush of hope to the young man's troubled face. He breathed more freely, sat more upright in his chair, and was evidently prepared for a new plunge in quest of the fickle goddess Fortune, when a hand that felt like iron dropped on his shoulder.

The plunger gave a convulsive start, and stared round.

"Come with me!" said Ferrers Locke quietly.

"What do you mean?" Philip Stacpoole panted. "How dare you touch me? Leave me alone."

"I am a detective."

Stacpoole trembled.

"I remember you now—Mr. Locke! What do you want with me?"

"You can guess," said the Baker Street detective quietly. "Will you come with me, or shall I call a gendarme?"

Philip Stacpoole drew a quivering, sobbing breath. Then, rising from his chair as unsteadily as a drunken man, clutching up his stack of counters with trembling hands, he quitted the green table.

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CURIOUS glances followed the plunger as he left the crowded table, Ferrers Locke's hand within his arm. But a new player dropped into the vacated chair. The game went on; the croupier's dull tones droned through the room again—"Faites vos jeux, messieurs!"—and the attention of the reckless, dingy crowd was concentrated once more on the spinning ball, the green cloth, the glimmering numbers.

Ferrers Locke led the young man to one of the ottomans along the side of the great apartment. He signed to him to sit down, and Philip Stacpoole sank down weakly.

"You know why I am here?" said Locke.

Stacpoole nodded without replying.

"How much have you left?"

"I don't know."

"How much have you won?" asked Ferrers Locke, with a touch of irony in his voice.

Stacpoole breathed unevenly.

"Luck's been against me," he muttered thickly. "I—I have a system, Mr. Locke—a system that is a practical certainty. For mercy's sake, don't stop me now. I think I'm about eighty or ninety pounds out so far. But that's a mere trifle. It's all coming back, and a lot more with it. Give me an hour, and I will swear to take back every shilling my uncle has lost—"

"An hour, and you probably would not have a shilling to take back, if you had even enough to pay your fare home," said Ferrers Locke.

"I tell you—"

"Listen to me," said the Baker Street detective, coldly. "You have your choice, Mr. Stacpoole. You will either leave the casino with me, or with a French gendarme. In either case you will not play again. Your uncle wishes to be merciful, if you give him the chance; but you will not be allowed to play with stolen money on any terms whatever."

Stacpoole panted.

"It's not stolen; I borrowed it. And I'm going to return it, every shilling, when—when—"

"That is enough. Will you hand the money into my keeping, and return to England with me by the night boat?"

"I—I can't. I—"

"You refuse?"

Stacpoole clenched his hands convulsively.

"Yes, I refuse."

"Very good," Ferrers Locke turned to his boy assistant. "Drake, you will go into the hall, and send the porter for a gendarme."

"Yes, sir."

Stacpoole shivered.

"Stop!" he said hoarsely.

Drake hesitated, and looked at his chief. Ferrers Locke fixed an icy look on the wretched gambler.

"This is your last chance," he said. "Will you come quietly with me?"

"Yes," said Stacpoole huskily. "I've no choice. I'll come! A thousand curses upon you, Ferrers Locke. You've robbed me of a fortune. Another hour's play—"

"Enough! Come with me."

With Ferrers Locke's hand resting within his arm, Stacpoole approached the "caisse," where what remained of the counters were changed for money. Then, in company with Locke and Jack Drake, and with stony desperation in his white face, he quitted the casino.

The three were passengers on the night boat to Folkestone. In Ferrers Locke's pocket-book were bank-notes for nine hundred pounds—the remainder of the stolen money. Philip Stacpoole sat apart from the other two, and did not speak a word during the passage of the Channel under the stars. Still silent and desperate, he took his place in the train with the detective.

At Charing Cross, Jack Drake started home to Baker Street, but Ferrers Locke stepped into a taxi with Stacpoole, and was driven at once to Russell Square. There was a light in Mr. Septimus Stacpoole's window; the old gentleman had not been to bed that night. On the doorstep, as Locke rang, Philip turned on him, breaking his sullen silence at last.

"Let me go now!" he muttered thickly, "I cannot face my uncle—"

"Your uncle is your best friend, and you must face him!" answered the Baker Street detective quietly.

And a couple of minutes later Philip Stacpoole, with hanging head, stood in the old gentleman's presence, and watched Ferrers Locke hand over the nine hundred pounds that remained of the stolen thousand. And then the Baker Street detective quietly took his departure, leaving uncle and nephew together.

THE END.

Look out for next week's grand, long detective story. You will enjoy it!