

A TRAITOR IN THE CLUB!

The BOYS' HERALD

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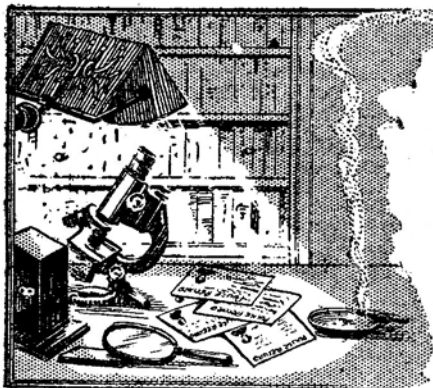
Oct. 1, 1921.



THE ENEMY AT WORK!

The mysterious person had been busy with knife and scissors once more, and had cut and ripped the clothes of the Norchester players into strips. Stringer pointed dramatically to a sheet of paper pinned to the wall. "What is that?" he asked.

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.



BY A HIDDEN HAND!

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

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

Ferrers Locke, the Up-to-Date Detective with New Methods

Almost A Tragedy.

JACK DRAKE glanced up lazily as there was a rustle in the underwoods.

Ferrers Locke's boy assistant was far from Baker Street on that sunny autumn afternoon.

The famous detective had been called to Paris, and during his absence he had insisted upon Drake taking a holiday. Drake, not at all loth to get away from the dust and turmoil of the great city for a few days, had gone down into Kent to revisit some of the old haunts he had known as a school-boy at Greyfriars.

The boy detective was taking it very easy that afternoon. After a long ramble through the brown autumn woods, he had thrown himself down in the thick grass, amid the under-wood, and stretched himself there luxuriously with the "Gem" to keep him company. There he rested and read, with only the hum of insects breaking the silence of the woods around him, till a rustle close at hand made him look up from his page.

Through the openings of the bushes he caught a glimpse of a man in shooting clothes passing within six feet of him.

Only for a moment did Drake see his profile as he passed—the profile of a young man's face, not ill-looking so far as the features went, but with a hard, set, bitter expression. The teeth were set, the lips drawn hard, the dark, heavy brows knitted. If ever a face betrayed evil intention, a mind fixed upon an evil deed, the face Drake was looking at betrayed it at that moment.

It was only for a few seconds that the boy detective saw it. The man passed on, evidently without noting his presence as he lay in the grass behind the bushes.

Only a rustle or two reached Drake's ears as the man passed on.

He was treading cautiously, and his footsteps made no sound. Drake caught a momentary glimpse of a gun as the figure disappeared. The man was carrying it, not under his arm, but in his hands, as if ready for instant use.

Drake sat up.

His book lay unheeded in the grass beside him.

The black, evil expression on the face he had seen haunted the mind of the boy detective. What was the man doing there? He might be shooting rabbits in the wood; but that black, evil look was not the look of a man shooting game.

Drake rose silently to his feet.

The thought was in his mind that the black-browed sportsman would bear watching. If some grim tragedy was impending, in the shady autumn woods, the boy detective was quite prepared to intervene.

Taking care to keep well in cover, which was easy enough in the thick wood, Ferrers Locke's boy assistant followed the sportsman.

Through trees and bushes he caught sight of him several times, and several times there was a faint rustle as he moved cautiously on. But no rustle betrayed Drake as he shadowed the man; he was too careful for that. The boy detective's heart was beating hard. The man ahead of him was stalking game—but it was not four-footed game, Drake was certain of that. Suddenly he halted, and Drake, from behind a tree, watched him silently, his fingers closing hard on the loaded stick he carried.

The man with the gun cast a quick, suspicious look round over his shoulder. Evidently he did not know or suspect Drake's presence; it was the suspicion of an evil conscience that made him give that furtive, lurking look round and behind him. But Drake was well in cover, and when he looked again the man's back was towards him once more, and the gun was at the man's shoulder.

Drake's heart throbbed.

The man had halted almost on the edge of an open glade, but screened from the open by a belt of high hawthorns.

Through the straggling screen the muzzle of the gun looked into the glade, and the man's eye was glancing along the barrel.

Drake ventured to step nearer.

He could see past the black-browed man now, and through interstices of the hawthorn screen into the glade.

Far in the distance an elderly man, with a white moustache, was leaning against an oak tree, with a dog at his feet. Drake started a little as he saw him. He had seen the old gentleman before several times during his holiday rambles. It was Sir Henry Pulteney, of Friardale Court, a well-known figure in the neighbourhood. Drake had heard some of the village gossip on the subject of the old baronet, who had succeeded to the estate late in life owing to the deaths of several relatives who stood between him and the title. Drake had heard, too, that there had been trouble between Sir Henry and a gang of poachers. But the man who was lurking on the edge of the glade, with the muzzle of his gun directed towards the baronet, was certainly not a poacher. He was well dressed, expensively dressed, and looked like a gentleman sportsman.

But there was no doubt whatever as to his intention.

He was taking careful aim at the old gentleman who, standing against the dark trunk of the oak, offered an easy target.

Drake felt a chill of horror at his heart.

It was murder that was about to be done—the black-browed man was taking steady aim, and his target was the unconscious man in the glade. A few seconds more and a death-dealing bullet would have sped.

But a few seconds were enough for Ferrers Locke's boy assistant.

There was no time for him to reach the intended assassin—the trigger was rising already.

But Drake acted promptly.

His hand swept up, with his loaded stick in it, and the stick whizzed through the air with unerring aim.

Crash!

There was a sharp cry as the loaded stick struck the scoundrel on the back of the head, pitching him forward into the hawthorns. The gun exploded as he fell, but the shot struck only into the grass.

The old gentleman across the glade glanced up as he heard the shot, but evidently without a sense of the danger he had escaped.

Drake ran forward.

The black-browed man had leaped to his feet. His gun had fallen several feet away, and his hands were empty as he swung round towards Drake.

"You villain!" panted the boy.

Without a word, with his teeth set and his eyes glittering, the man rushed at him. A savage blow swept the boy aside, and the man rushed on and vanished into the trees, fleeing.

Drake reeled from the blow, half dazed.

In a second the black-browed man had disappeared. There was a rustle in the distance, and then silence. He was gone.

Jack Drake rubbed his head. A bruise was forming there, where the savage blow had fallen.

He picked up his stick, in case the rascal should return; but there was pretty plainly no danger of that. Discovered in his villainy, the rascal was evidently thinking only of flight.

Drake pushed through the bushes into the open glade, taking the gun the man had dropped with him. The baronet came towards him with a frown upon his brow.

"What are you doing here?" he exclaimed. "Poaching, what? I heard a shot—"

"The shot was fired at you," said Drake sharply. Sir Henry Pulteney started.

"At me? What do you mean, boy?"

Jack Drake hurriedly explained.

The baronet's brow grew as black as thunder as he listened. He took the gun from Drake and looked at it.

"One of those poaching scoundrels!" he exclaimed, when the boy had finished.

Drake shook his head.

"The man wasn't a poacher, sir. He was too well-dressed for that."

"Describe him to me."

Drake did so, and the baronet listened attentively.

"It must have been one of the poaching gang," he said at last. "No one else would be likely to attempt my life. I have sent several of them to prison, and this is an attempt at revenge. I am very much obliged to you, my boy—you seem to have saved my life. You must come with me to the police-station at Courtfield, and give a description of the scoundrel, and of what you saw."

"Certainly, sir," said Drake. "But I am sure that the man was not a country poacher."

"Nonsense!" said Sir Henry brusquely.

And Drake said no more.

A Trail Of Crime.

FERRERS LOCKE leaned back in his deep armchair, in his den at Baker Street, stretched out his rather long legs, and lighted his pipe. It was evening, and Locke, after a strenuous week's work, was taking a rest. He had returned that afternoon from Paris, and he was tired. The evening was rather chilly, and a bright fire burned in the grate. On the other side of the fire Drake was seated. He, too, had returned that day from his holiday in the country—and he had news for his chief, though he had not as yet mentioned the matter.

Locke looked at his boy assistant with a rather quizzical smile.

"And now for your news, Drake," he said.

Drake started a little.

"I haven't told you that I had any news, sir," he answered.

"I think I have read as much in your face, my boy."

"Well, it's true," said Drake. "I have some rather queer news—I don't know whether it will interest you."

"Something has happened during your holiday down in Kent?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what it was."

"An attempted murder, sir."

"Phew! That is quite interesting," said Ferrers Locke.

"And you were mixed up in the affair, I presume?"

"I saved a man's life."

"Good!"

"Only what worries me, sir, is that the man's life is still in danger if that rascal chooses to go for him again," said Drake. "He's rather an obstinate old beggar, I think, and he won't listen to any opinion but his own. He thinks the attempt was made by some member of a poaching gang he has been down upon, and I am sure not."

"Tell me all about it, Drake," said Ferrers Locke quietly.

Jack Drake proceeded to give a minute account of his adventure in the Friardale Woods.

Locke listened attentively, while the smoke curled from his briar.

He did not interrupt the boy detective once, and he remained for some moments in thought after his assistant had finished.

"You are certain that the man was not a poacher, Drake?" he asked at last.

"Quite, sir."

"Your reasons?"

"He was expensively dressed, in very well-cut shooting clothes," said Drake. "His boots alone could not have cost less than five guineas. Poachers don't get themselves up like that."

"That is true. Anything else?"

"His hands were white, and looked as if he had never roughed it, and he wore a diamond ring."

"You are learning to observe detail, my boy," said Ferrers Locke approvingly. "And his looks?"

"He was rather good-looking in a way," said Drake.

"His nose was a bit beaky. He was clean-shaven. And his brows were very dark, almost black, and very thick. I should know him again anywhere, I think."

"But Sir Henry Pulteney is convinced that the attempted murder was by a poacher?"

"Yes. The local police down there are hunting out the poachers to find the man."

Locke nodded slowly.

"I dare say you have heard of Sir Henry Pulteney, sir?"

added Drake.

"My attention has been drawn to him, as a matter of fact, my boy," answered the Baker Street detective. "The way he succeeded to the title and estates was somewhat

remarkable, and was commented on in the newspapers last year. A series of remarkable events led to it, and but for Sir Henry's well-known high character some suspicion might have attached to him. I made some notes at the time, as the affair interested me. Give me the portfolio marked '44b,' under the letter 'P' in the cabinet, Drake."

Jack Drake rose, crossed to the cabinet, and unlocked it. In a minute or less he found the portfolio in question, and handed it to his chief.

Ferrers Locke glanced over the papers it contained, his clear-cut face very thoughtful. He smoked for some minutes in silence, Drake waiting in keen curiosity.

"It was a strange sequence of affairs, Drake," said Ferrers Locke, leaning back in his chair again. "The suspicion of foul play was in my mind at the time, but I had no connection with the matter, and certainly Sir Henry's own character placed him far above suspicion personally. But he would never have succeeded to title or estates but for a series of strange accidents and crimes."

He paused for a moment.

"Three years ago Friardale Court, and the fortune of the Pulteneys, belonged to Sir Gilbert Pulteney. He had held the title and estates for more than twenty years. He was drowned in a yachting accident just after the war, and how he came to fall overboard during the night has remained a mystery. His son, Sir Arthur, succeeded him, but held the property only a few months; he, too, disappeared in the night from on board the same yacht in much the same manner. The coincidence was much commented upon at the time."

Locke refilled his pipe.

"The estates went to Sir Gilbert's nephew, an officer in the Air Force. He was killed in a flying accident. That was the third fatality within a year."

"It was an accident?" said Drake.

"Nothing could be found to the contrary, at all events," said Ferrers Locke. "The Pulteney fortune—which consists of a great sum invested in trustee stock, as well as Friardale Court—went to a cousin, who became Sir Percival Pulteney. He died while shooting in Scotland; he was found dead at the bottom of a cliff, with his neck broken. He was alone at the time, and had apparently lost his way in a Highland mist, and fallen over the cliff."

"And then—"

"Then the present baronet succeeded. He was a rather distant relation, but next in the line of descent. He had never, of course, expected to succeed with four good lives between him and the title. He had been an officer in India, and had retired to Cheltenham to live on his pension when he suddenly found himself master of Friardale Court and thirty thousand a year."

"A stroke of luck for him," said Drake.

"Sir Henry is a man of unimpeachable character," said Ferrers Locke. "But for that, so strange a series of accidents would certainly have excited suspicion. There was not one of them that might not have been a murder. What was your opinion of Sir Henry, Drake?"

Drake smiled.

"A stiff old ramrod of a man, sir, obstinate and a bit unreasonable, but as honourable as a man could be."

"Exactly," said Ferrers Locke. "Yet if a series of terrible crimes had been committed while he stood to benefit from them. As you see, I made notes on the matter; it interested me. Now you have let in the light on the subject that I wanted, Drake."

"I have?" exclaimed Drake.

"Undoubtedly. The attempt to murder Sir Henry is the link in the chain that was wanted."

Drake paled a little.

"Then you think that someone to whom the fortune will pass at Sir Henry's death—"

"What does it look like?" said Ferrers Locke. "Four violent deaths occur, and Sir Henry succeeds to the estate. Now he has had a narrow escape of a violent death, which, if it had happened, would have been attributed to a revengeful poacher. The murderer's tracks would have been covered, as in the four previous cases."

"Then the next heir to the estate—" Drake shivered.

"Why, sir, if there is a man so dastardly as to plan such a scheme there may be half a dozen lives at stake."

"There might be," said Ferrers Locke. "But so far as I have been able to ascertain, Sir Henry is the last but one of the Pulteneys of Friardale. He had a son, but the son went to the bad and died abroad long ago. There exists now only one heir to the Pulteney fortune—a young man named Vernon Pulteney."

"And he, then, is the only man who stands to benefit by so many crimes if Sir Henry were added to the list."

"He, and he only," said Ferrers Locke. "I know a little of him, as I made it a point to inquire a little into the history of the Pulteneys when the affair attracted my attention. Mr. Vernon Pulteney was once fairly wealthy, and he still contrives to keep up good appearances; but he is a gambler, a blackguard, and an associate of extremely shady characters. He has been expelled from a well-known club for cheating at cards, and he is said to be deep in the

clutches of the moneylenders. That is all I know of the man—but it is enough."

"He was the man I saw in the wood," said Drake.

Locke nodded.

"I have very little doubt of it," he said. "And the question arises, what step ought I to take now? It will be difficult to make Sir Henry believe that a Pulteney could be capable of a series of desperate crimes, and that his own life is in peril from a relative. At the same time, I cannot leave him in such danger unwarned. I shall have to think this out, Drake."

There came a tap at the door as Locke smoked in silence, and Sing-Sing, the Chinese servant, looked in, with a card on a salver.

Locke glanced up.

"I can see no one this evening, Sing-Sing," he said. "You may leave the card there."

"Yes, Missa Locke."

Drake took the card from the salver, and as he glanced at it he uttered a sudden exclamation.

Locke looked at him.

"What is it, Drake?"

"It's jolly queer, sir," said Drake. "It's Sir Henry Pulteney's card."

"Sir Henry Pulteney!" Ferrers Locke's manner changed at once. "You may show the gentleman in, Sing-Sing."

"Yes, Missa Locke."

The Chinaman glided away, and a few moments later the ruddy, white-moustached baronet was shown into the presence of the Baker Street detective.

The Story of the Beachcomber.

SIR HENRY PULTENEY sank into the chair pushed forward for him by Jack Drake. He did not glance at the boy, and evidently did not recognise him as the lad he had met in the wood at Friardale. Drake withdrew to a little distance, leaving Ferrers Locke and his client by the fireside, but remaining within hearing. The baronet accepted a whisky-and-soda, and a cigar, and made several desultory remarks, but he seemed to hesitate to come to the object of his visit. Ferrers Locke was patient. Sir Henry coloured a little, meeting the detective's keen eyes, and spoke abruptly at last.

"I want you to help me, Mr. Locke."

"With regard to the attempt on your life a week ago, Sir Henry?" asked the Baker Street detective.

"You have heard of that?" said the baronet, in surprise.

"As a matter of fact, that is partly the reason why I have decided to ask you to help me, Locke—but it is not on account of that incident. The local police have that matter in hand, and I have no doubt they will find out the poaching rascal who fired at me, if the scoundrel has not fled from the neighbourhood already to save his worthless skin."

"You think your assailant was a poaching rascal?"

"I know it," said Sir Henry. "I have been rather severe—justly severe—upon the poaching fraternity, and it was an attempt at revenge by some cowardly rascal. But I am not here to discuss that. Whoever the man was, Mr. Locke, I had a narrow escape from death or serious injury, and that has made me think more seriously of a matter that has been in my mind for a very long time. It concerns my son."

"Your son?" repeated Locke.

"My son, Walter Pulteney," said Sir Henry. "Whether he is alive or dead, I have no knowledge; the last I heard of him, ten years since, he was living—in one of the Solomon Islands, I think. I had better tell you the whole story. Walter was a reckless young rascal; there is a wild strain in the Pulteney blood, and it came out in him. He was sent down from Oxford, and he went from bad to worse, and finally became involved in an affair—I need not go into details—that made it necessary for him to leave the country in a hurry. That was twenty years ago. I cast him off, and declined to have anything further to do with one who had disgraced his name and my own." The baronet's jaw set grimly. "I still think I was right."

Locke waited in silence.

"At that time, of course, I had not the remotest prospect of succeeding to the Pulteney title and estates," continued the baronet. "There were several younger men than myself in the way, and the thought of it never crossed my mind. My means were limited then, and had been rendered still more straitened by Walter's extravagance. When he fled from the country, I handed him a hundred pounds, and told him plainly never to expect anything more from me, and never to write to me; I wished to have done with him, and I commanded him never to return to England, where he had disgraced the name of Pulteney. Quite recently a series of strange fatalities wiped out the lives that stood between me and the succession, and after I became master of Friardale Court I began to take a new view of the position. For in spite of Walter's miserable career, he is heir to the baronetcy, and at my death he will be master of the estate, and a rich man. The only heir after Walter is a cousin, Vernon Pulteney."

Locke gave no sign.

"If Vernon Pulteney," continued the baronet, "were a man likely to uphold the honourable traditions of the family, I should leave the matter where it stands, and allow him to succeed me without trouble. I should do this for the sake of my name. Unfortunately, the man is a scoundrel. I have had very careful inquiries made, and have learned that he lives by his wits, has incurred disgrace that excludes him from the society of all decent men, and is, in fact, a ten times worse character than poor Walter was at his very worst. This has turned my thoughts to my son more than ever. Unless he returns to England, and resumes his name and position, Vernon is my heir—a disaster that must be prevented at all costs. Hitherto, Mr. Locke, I have allowed it to be supposed that my son is dead—that he died abroad. I was glad that people should believe so. But now—"

The baronet paused, and looked at the Baker Street detective.

"Now you wish to find your son," said Ferrers Locke.

"Exactly. I have little hope that he has reformed," said Sir Henry, with a sigh. "But at the worst, he will take my place more worthily than that gambler and card-sharper, Vernon Pulteney."

"You last heard from him—"

"Ten years ago."

"Where was he then?"

"He was living in a Pacific island some distance from Honolulu, an island called Lai-Lai. He was what is called, I believe, a beachcomber." Sir Henry flushed painfully. "He had gone from bad to worse, as I feared, till he had sunk to the level of the loafers on the beach in the Honolulu islands."

"How did you hear from him?"

"A letter came by the captain of a trading vessel that had touched at Lai-Lai. It was the first and the last time that Walter wrote to me for money, in spite of my prohibition. Perhaps with some faint hope of hearing better news of him, I questioned the trading captain, who described to me the man who had handed him the letter—described him as a drunken wastrel, living a drunken life among the natives on the beach at Lai-Lai. He did not know that the man he described was my son. Learning this, I did not answer the letter, and I have heard nothing since."

"Your son passed under his own name at Lai-Lai?"

Sir Henry shook his head.

"He had decency enough to drop his name. He was known in the islands as Toffy Jack, so the trading captain told me. I have made an inquiry lately through an agency at Honolulu, and have been informed that Toffy Jack, the beachcomber, disappeared from Lai-Lai a year or two ago, and nothing is known of him since. Mr. Locke, I want you to find him for me. My recent narrow escape has warned me that I may not have much time. I am an old man, Mr. Locke, and the end may come at any time. I want my son found, and I can only hope that the responsibility of a new position in life may have a good effect upon him. At all events, he is heir to my estates and title, and must have his rights."

"I understand."

Ferrers Locke understood probably more than the baronet intended to convey; he read in the old man's face that his



"Stand back!" cried Ferrers Locke. He flashed the light into the thicket. It flashed upon a still form—upon an upturned face with a white moustache. Locke bent over the inert figure for a moment. "The neck is broken," he said, quietly. "Sir Henry has been dead for more than an hour."

heart, in his old age, had softened towards his outcast son, and that he yearned to see him again, in spite of the dark shadows of the past.

"How old would Walter Pulteney be now?" asked Locke. "Forty," said Sir Henry. "He was twenty when he left England, and that was twenty years ago."

Ferrers Locke knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"To undertake this case, Sir Henry, would necessitate a journey to Honolulu—half across the world," he said slowly. Jack Drake's eyes sparkled. "Such an adventure was attractive, at least, to the Baker Street detective's boy assistant."

"I know it, Mr. Locke. I know that you are a busy man," said Sir Henry. "Yet I ask you to find my son. Money need not be spared. You shall name your own fee, whether you succeed or fail. My intention is to place a thousand pounds in your hands at once, and you will draw upon me for all expenses. I ask only that you find my son."

Locke looked very thoughtful. "It will not be easy for me to leave London for so long a time," he said. "I must think over this, Sir Henry."

The baronet looked deeply disappointed.

"I was relying upon you, Mr. Locke," he said. "I do not ask you to leave at once. Choose your own time—follow your own methods. Only tell me that you will find my unhappy son and bring him home to me."

Ferrers Locke was silent for some minutes. It was hard to resist the appeal, and the prospect of change and adventure in a wild quarter of the world was not without its attraction to Ferrers Locke. The baronet watched his face anxiously.

"I will undertake the case," said Locke at last. "I cannot promise to leave for some weeks—I shall have much to arrange—but I will do my best, Sir Henry. That is all I can promise."

"I am more than satisfied." Sir Henry Pulteney opened his pocket-book, and laid a cheque on the table. It was for a thousand pounds, drawn to Ferrers Locke.

"That is for the preliminary expenses, Mr. Locke. You will draw on me for all that is required, and I shall add instructions in my will that your expenses are to be met up to five times the amount, if necessary, in case of my death, so long as you search for my son."

"I trust that event may be far off, Sir Henry," said Ferrers Locke. "And on that subject I have a warning to give you. Your life is in danger, not from poaching roughs at Friardale, but—I firmly believe—from your cousin, Vernon Pulteney."

"Impossible!"

"If you will listen—"

The baronet waved his hand impatiently. "Vernon Pulteney is a scoundrel, Mr. Locke, I am sorry to say; but there never yet was a Pulteney who would stain his hands in blood for money. That is quite impossible."

"Nevertheless, let me explain my views," said Ferrers Locke. "It will cost you nothing to listen to me, Sir Henry."

"I will listen, if you insist, Mr. Locke," said Sir Henry, but with evident impatience.

Ferrers Locke proceeded quietly to explain; but there was strong incredulity in the baronet's rugged, ruddy face as he listened. When the detective had finished, Sir Henry rose, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"You have worked out a very ingenious theory, Mr. Locke," he said. "But I cannot believe anything of the kind. And, as a matter of fact, I understand that Vernon Pulteney is not in England now at all, but at Monte Carlo, his favourite resort. It is certainly impossible that it was a Pulteney who fired at me in my own woods. Really, Mr. Locke, I wonder that you venture to make such a suggestion."

Locke compressed his lips a little. "In making the suggestion, I speak to you in confidence, of course," he said. "I have no proof to offer—only a very strong probability. It was my duty to warn you. I beg of you, Sir Henry, to take care."

Sir Henry Pulteney smiled impatiently.

"I shall certainly be on my guard against the poaching rascals at Friardale," he said. "I have no belief in any other danger. You are asking me to believe that a man with my blood in his veins has been guilty of a series of fearful crimes. I cannot believe that, Mr. Locke."

"I am asking you to keep on your guard, that another crime may not be added to the series," said Ferrers Locke quietly.

"Please say no more."

"Very well. One question, however—your son is generally believed to have died abroad. Is this belief held also by Vernon Pulteney?"

"Undoubtedly. He cannot know more than anyone else on the subject. I have no communication with him."

Sir Henry took his hat and stick. Ferrers Locke accompanied him to the door, and saw him into the taxi that was waiting to drive him back to his hotel. The Baker Street detective returned to his den with a thoughtful brow.

Drake gave his chief a questioning look. "His fate is in his own hands, my boy," said Ferrers Locke. "I have warned him, and I hope that reflection may yet incline him to heed my warning. Otherwise—" He paused. "If he should fall a victim to a plotting scoundrel, there is still another man between Vernon Pulteney and what he seeks, and if only to baffle a designing villain, Walter Pulteney shall be found, if he still lives. The beachcomber of Lai-Lai shall be the new master of Friardale Court and thirty thousand a year."

And the Baker Street detective returned to his brier.

The Fate of the Baronet.

FERRERS LOCKE was very busy during the following days.

He had decided upon the voyage to Honolulu, and he had decided that his boy assistant should accompany him, much to Jack Drake's delight. But Ferrers Locke was a man with many irons in the fire, and as he had told Sir Henry Pulteney, it was impossible for him to take up the case immediately. There were many things to be seen to first.

Busy as he was, however, Ferrers Locke did not forget the danger that hung over his client. Within twenty-four hours of Sir Henry's visit to Baker Street one of the famous detective's agents was shadowing, Vernon Pulteney. That sportive young gentleman was, as Sir Henry had stated, at Monte Carlo, and he was soon under observation by a French detective in whom Locke had confidence. Monsieur Tucquet, the detective, did his work well. In a few days Locke received a full report, with a snapshot of the shadowed man. Locke handed the photograph to Drake.

"Is that the man you saw in the Friardale Wood, Drake?" he asked.

Drake examined the photograph carefully. It was that of a man of about thirty-four or five, with a somewhat beaked nose, and heavy, dark brows.

"I believe so, sir," said Drake. "The resemblance is very great, at least."

"You could not swear to him in a court of law?"

Drake hesitated. "I feel certain enough, sir," he answered. "But I had such a brief glimpse of him that if it were a question of swearing, in a case where a man's life was at stake, I should not care to do so. But to the best of my belief that is a photograph of the man I saw in the wood."

"That is good enough," said Ferrers Locke. "It is not a question now of charging Vernon Pulteney with the attempted crime, but of our own guidance. I believe that he is the man—everything points to it."

Drake glanced at the French detective's report again. "Monsieur Tucquet says that Vernon Pulteney arrived at Monte Carlo six weeks ago, and is still there," he said.

"That is so."

"It was only three weeks ago that Sir Henry was fired at in Friardale Wood, sir."

"Exactly; and Monsieur Tucquet mentions that three weeks ago Mr. Pulteney was missed from his usual haunts for several days. He has learned from one of Mr. Vernon's casino acquaintances that the young gentleman was confined

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"THE SPORTSMAN - - AND THE SLACKER!" By William E. Groves,

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GET READY!

to his villa with an attack of influenza. I have no doubt whatever that that attack of influenza was a cloak to cover his real movements—a visit to England."

"So long as he remains at Monte Carlo, sir, Sir Henry will not be in danger," said Drake thoughtfully, "and he is now being watched by your man, who will let you know immediately he leaves."

"That is what I hope," said Locke. "But if he should carry out his schemes through an agent we are helpless. I have a man down at Friardale watching Sir Henry, without his knowledge, and that is all I can do." Ferrers Locke smiled slightly. "Sir Henry handed me a generous fee, and I am devoting a part of it to securing his own safety. He would not thank me for it if he knew, but he does not know."

It was a week later that Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake took the train at Charing Cross for the final interview with Sir Henry Pulteney before leaving on the voyage to Honolulu. It was early evening when they stepped out of the train at Courtfield Junction.

A man in the dress of a mechanic spoke to the detective on the platform at Courtfield.

"Nothing so far, Anstey?" asked Ferrers Locke quietly, and Drake understood that this was the detective's agent who had been watching over the safety of the baronet at Friardale Court.

"Nothing, sir," answered Anstey, in a low voice.

"There are no strangers staying in Friardale?"

"None."

"And in Courtfield?"

"There are always a good many coming and going there, sir—it's a market town. Generally a few commercials at the railway hotel. I keep my eyes open, of course."

"And there's nothing to report?"

"Nothing, Mr. Locke."

"Very good: Sir Henry does not know, of course, that you are interested in his affairs?"

Anstey smiled slightly.

"He found me once loitering in his woods, sir, and ordered me out. He is—ahem!—a rather irascible old gentleman, sir."

"I am sure you have done your best, Anstey, under difficult circumstances," said Ferrers Locke.

The Baker Street detective left the station with Drake, and they stepped into a taxi. As the vehicle carried them on to the road to Friardale Court, it passed the gates of Greyfriars School, now closed for the night. Jack Drake cast a glance at his old school as he passed, and thought of the fellows within the walls—now probably at evening prep. The taxi turned at last into the gates of Friardale Court, and stopped at the great door of the rather imposing mansion.

Ferrers Locke was expected, and he was shown in at once. But the butler informed him that Sir Henry Pulteney was not within.

"Sir Henry told me you would be here about eight, sir," said the butler, "and I am sure he intended to be here at the time. But he went out to smoke his cigar after dinner, and has not come in yet. If you like, sir, I will send a servant to look for him, and inform him that you are here."

Ferrers Locke reflected for a moment.

"Is your master in the habit of smoking out of doors after dinner?" he asked.

"When the weather's fine, sir, as it is this evening."

"It is rather odd that he should not have returned, as he was well aware of the time I should arrive, and the interview is a somewhat important one," said the Baker Street detective thoughtfully. "I think you had better send someone to tell him that I am here."

"Very well, sir."

Ferrers Locke sat down with a thoughtful brow by the fire in the baronet's library. The detective and his assistant had dined on the train, and Locke now proceeded to smoke his after-dinner cigar. But Drake could see that he was in an uneasy mood.

When a quarter of an hour had elapsed, Locke touched the bell, and the butler came in.

"Sir Henry has not returned?" asked Locke.

"No, sir. Jenkins has come in, and says he is nowhere near the house," said the butler, with a rather troubled look. "Once or twice, sir, Sir Henry has fancied he's seen or heard poachers in the woods after the game, and has gone to look. Sir Henry is very stern about the poaching, sir. That may have happened this evening, sir."

Locke compressed his lips.

"If Sir Henry had an impression that someone was lurking in the woods, would he be likely to investigate himself in the dark?" he exclaimed.

"I think so, sir; he's done it before."

"Even after the late attempt upon his life?"

"Sir Henry doesn't seem to know what fear is, sir," said the butler. "I tried to warn him once, sir, but he snapped me very short—very short indeed, sir. I only hope, sir, that nothing has happened."

"You have heard nothing since Sir Henry went out—a shot—"

"Nothing, sir."

Drake looked at his chief. Locke's face expressed little, and Drake wondered whether the detective shared the disquietude that he himself was feeling. Locke drew the curtains aside and looked from the window over the terrace. It was very dark now without.

"I think your master had better be searched for," he said quietly to the butler. "Let lights be brought, and I will take part in the search myself. It is only too possible that there may have been an accident."

"Very good, sir."

In a few minutes Ferrers Locke and Drake were on the wide lawn before the house, with the butler and two or three menservants carrying lanterns. Beyond the lawn was the park, and as the searchers advanced towards the trees the lights gleamed into a wide, shady "ride."

"Sir Henry sometimes strolled here, smoking his cigar, sir," said the butler.

"Keep on!" said Locke shortly.

He took one of the lanterns and led the way. Drake closed behind him. The detective spoke in a low voice to his assistant.

"Sir Henry was a difficult man to protect," he said. "I cannot help fearing that something has happened."

"But Vernon Pulteney—" muttered Drake. "There was a wire from Tuetet this morning, sir, and he said—"

"That Mr. Vernon was still at Monte Carlo," said the Baker Street detective, with a grim nod. "I know. His alibi is complete enough if there has been an 'accident' here in the dark. If he has acted, he has acted with the hands of others—as I feared, after the scare you gave him when you saw him in the wood a month ago, Drake."

They pressed on down the long "ride."

Ferrers Locke stopped suddenly, and picked up the stump of a cigar. It was cold; but Locke could see that it had been recently smoked. Close at hand a narrow footpath ran between the great trees.

"Where does this path lead?" Locke asked.

"To the Park Cliff, sir," answered the butler. "Sir Henry wouldn't be likely to go that way. It's dangerous ground in the dark. There's a fall of about thirty feet, sir, to the lower ground, close by."

Without answering, Ferrers Locke turned into the path and followed it flashing the lantern before him.

The path descended a little, and it came to an end by a wooden fence. Beyond the fence was a sharp declivity.

"There's a good view from there in the daytime, sir," said the butler. "The fence was put up because it wasn't safe to— Good heavens, sir, the fence is broken—there's a rail gone. If somebody has been leaning on it—" The man broke off, his face pale and his teeth chattering.

Ferrers Locke's look was very grim. He flashed the light round him, and, stooping, picked up a hat that lay in the grass.

He held it out to the butler without a word.

"That is Sir Henry's hat, sir," said the man.

Locke flashed the light over the verge of the declivity. But he could see nothing but darkness below.

"Is there a way round?" he asked sharply.

"Nearly half a mile, sir, through the woods."

"Lead the way."

It was half an hour later that the searchers arrived at the foot of the woodland cliff. Trees and bushes grew thickly there.

Holding his lantern before him, Ferrers Locke plunged into the dewy-wet thickets. He glanced up, flashing the light. Over him the woodland cliff towered, with a white glimmering of chalk in the light of the lantern.

"If he fell, sir, he would be about here," said the butler.

Ferrers Locke did not answer. He knew that if the unhappy baronet had dropped from the cliff above he had not fallen—a murderous hand had hurled him to his death. It was the final crime of the terrible series—the last of the price a callous villain was prepared to pay for the Pulteney title and estates. There was a sudden exclamation from Jack Drake as he stumbled in the darkness of the thickets. Locke swung round.

"Here, sir," said Drake thickly. "I—I stumbled on it—something—something in the bushes—here—"

"Stand back!"

Locke flashed the light into the thicket. It flashed upon a still form—upon an upturned face with a white moustache. Locke bent over the inert figure for a moment.

"The neck is broken," he said quietly. "He has been dead for more than an hour."

Sir Henry Pulteney had been found at last. But he had been found too late, and between the man who had caused his death, and the prize for which he had stained his hands with crime, stood only a beachcomber on a far Pacific island—and Ferrers Locke!

THE END.

Another of these magnificent yarns dealing with Ferrers Locke, the world-famous detective, will appear in next week's "Boys' Herald." Look out for it.