

A THRILLING COMPLETE DETECTIVE NOVEL, introducing
SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER, & PEDRO.

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PEDRO ON
THE TRAIL

FENTON
LEAVES
THE
TRAIN.

TRACKED
TO THE
OLD
BARN.

The Mystery of the
9-12 Express.

THE MYSTERY OF THE 9-12 EXPRESS.



A Magnificent Mystery and Adventure Story, introducing **SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER, His Young Assistant, and PEDRO, the Bloodhound.**

(The Yarn is Told in Correspondence from Tinker's Letter-File.)

Illustrated by . . . HARRY LANE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Letter from Sexton Blake to Nelson Lee.

Baker Street, London, W.
February 23rd.

MY Dear Lee,—In your capacity of Housemaster at St. Frank's College, I realise that you are somewhat out of touch with the happenings of the outside world, and that you are always eager to learn the details of any particularly interesting or unusually mysterious problem such as it is occasionally my privilege to investigate. Tinker, too, takes great delight in corresponding with Nipper on these matters, and I remember that some few weeks ago it was one of his letters to Nipper which gave you the facts of an amazing affair in Suffolk.

Strangely enough, the peculiar incidents I am about to relate also had their origin in an eastern county—Essex, to be exact. But on this occasion the scene is laid on the railway.

However, I had better give you the whole story as it occurred—but I cannot promise to conclude the narrative completely. Tinker will have that pleasant task, in all probability. But so long as you obtain a complete account of the strange mystery it is really immaterial whether Tinker or myself acts as your informant.

It frequently happens that really important cases are first brought to my notice purely by accident, and no doubt you have experienced the same sort of thing yourself, Lee. It was so on this occasion.

Last night I happened to be chatting with an old friend of mine—Mr. Henry Bryant, one of the chief officials of the Great Eastern Railway—in his office at Liverpool Street Station. I had just dropped in to pay a friendly call and have a little talk. Tragedies and criminals were completely forgotten for the time being, and I spent quite a pleasant half-hour.

"Well, my dear fellow, I shall have to be making a move," I observed, glancing at my watch. "It's gone nine, I see, and—"

"Excuse me a moment, old man!" interrupted Bryant, as the telephone bell tinkled shrilly. "Sha'n't keep you long!"

He sat down at his desk and placed the receiver of the instrument to his ear. He held a short conversation over the wire with somebody, his face meanwhile assuming an expression of excitement and dismay. Then he jammed the receiver back on its hook and turned to me quickly.

"Something in your line, by all accounts, Blake!" he said excitedly. "The 9.12 express from Norwich has just arrived, and there's a dead man aboard of her. I'm told he's been murdered!"

"By Jove, that's bad!" I commented. "Who gave you the information, Bryant?"

"One of the porters," he replied. "The guard of the train sent him to ring the news through to me immediately. If you're interested at all, perhaps you'd care to come along to the train and look into things?"

"Certainly!" I answered. "I'll come with you at once, my dear fellow. Murders on railways are not of frequent occurrence, and they're generally worth inquiring into. Did the porter give you any of the facts?"

"No," said Bryant, reaching for his hat and making for the door. "The man wanted to do so, but I told him I'd come along at once. We can get all the details from the guard, I expect. Come on, Blake!"

I followed my friend out of the office, and we made our way through the crowded station to the main line arrival platforms, alongside one of which the 9.12 express was drawn up.

Passing through the barrier, we strode along the platform briskly, and I saw at once that a great crowd had gathered near the centre of the long train. It's really wonderful how quickly people throng to the scene of a crime, Lee, isn't it?

Bryant grunted with annoyance. "Just look here!" he exclaimed, eyeing the surging crowd ahead. "It's always the same, Blake. People always gather in large numbers when anything of this nature occurs, and they're a confounded nuisance. They hinder everybody."

I smiled. "People are very much alike the world over, Bryant," I said, "and nothing will

ever alter the curiosity of a crowd. But this affair appears to be causing a most unusual commotion, by all appearances. Surely there are sufficient policemen in the station to control this handful of people!"

"Oh, yes; there are plenty of policemen about," said Bryant. "But I don't see any of them here at the moment. The interest seems to be centred upon that first-class compartment."

"Obviously," I agreed. "We'd better force a way through here, Bryant."

"All right, Blake—let me go first!" answered my friend. "I am well known to all the railway servants."

Bryant is a determined sort of fellow, and he was soon shouldering his way through the noisy and excited crowd of humanity surging round the compartment which contained the body of the murdered man. I followed him with some difficulty, but eventually we reached the door.

"Clear the way here!" cried Bryant, addressing the crowd sternly. "Stand back!"

His words had very little effect upon the eager and curious mob, who all seemed to be anxious to catch sight of whatever the fatal carriage contained.

The guard of the train, with the assistance of a couple of porters, was doing his best to keep the crowd back. But this proved to be no easy matter, as I could plainly see.

"Have any of you men sent for the police?" demanded Bryant, addressing the porters.

"Yes, sir," said one of them. "They ought to be 'ere now."

"That's all right, then," said Bryant. "We'd better wait a moment, Blake," he continued, turning to me. "No use our trying to enter the carriage yet. I doubt if we could open the door, even, with this crush at our backs."

I nodded, and faced the curious crowd. "Kindly stand back a little way," I said quietly. "You are seriously interfering and impeding the railway people, and in any case you will not be allowed to see into the compartment. Ah!" I broke off, as I perceived two tall, blue-clad figures. "Here come the police!"

At that moment two policemen came hurrying up, and they forced the throng of excited and gaping passengers to back



away from the fatal carriage in a very short time.

"Great Scott! That's better!" gasped Bryant, in great relief.

He produced his handkerchief and mopped his brow as he turned to one of the railwaymen.

"Are you the guard of this train?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the man respectfully. He was rather an old man—one of the faithful and reliable railway servants which are fast disappearing—and his weather-beaten and wrinkled face wore a worried and anxious expression.

"Well, what do you know about this business?" went on Bryant, jerking his thumb in the direction of the carriage. "Murder, I understand?"

"Looks like it, sir," said the guard. "Terrible affair! I wouldn't have had this happen on my train—not for a quarter's wages, I wouldn't! But I don't know nothing about it, sir!"

"Who first discovered the crime?" continued Bryant.

"A porter, sir," replied the old guard. "He saw something was the matter on this 'ere carriage, an' sent for me right away. This is the man that told me about it, sir."

He indicated one of the porters, who at once stepped forward.

"That's right!" he said. "I noticed that something was wrong before the train stopped, sir."

"Oh! How was that?" asked Bryant. "Well, sir," went on the porter, "as I walked down the platform I saw a man lying on the floor of this carriage, an' I jumped on the footboard an' tried to open the door."

"Tried to open the door?" repeated Bryant. "Do you mean that it was locked?"

"Yes, sir," declared the porter. "You're sure of that, my man?" said Bryant.

"Certain, sir," said the man positively. "The windows was up, too. Then I unlocked the door, an' went in, an' I saw that the man on the floor was dead—murdered! He's been battered about somethin' awful, sir!"

"Well? What did you do then?" questioned Bryant.

"I rushed to the guard, sir, an' told him," answered the porter, who was looking a little white and scared. "He sent a man to telephone to you."

"That's right, sir," agreed the guard. "An' since then I've been standin' by the door, holdin' the crowd back."

"And that is all you can tell me?" asked Bryant.

"That's all, sir," declared the guard. "We don't know no more."

Bryant evidently concluded that nothing more was to be learned from the railwaymen, and he turned to me.

"We'd better go into the compartment, Blake," he said, opening the door. "The police have got the crowd well in hand now— Good heavens! What a ghastly spectacle!"

I looked over Bryant's shoulder as he made that excited exclamation. Then I stepped into the carriage, and the sight which confronted us was not at all a pleasant one.

A rather elderly, well-dressed man lay upon the floor. He was a somewhat stout, coarse-looking man, and he was in a most shocking condition, having been brutally attacked, by all appearances. His eye was blackened, his lips were badly gashed, and his collar was unfastened and torn.

I looked round keenly.

"It is quite obvious that a grim battle has taken place in this compartment, Bryant," I said, after a moment. "This man has had a terrible struggle with somebody during the journey."

"Yes, Blake, that seems pretty evident," agreed Bryant. "I see that the man's luggage has been tampered with, too. That Gladstone-bag and attache-case have both been wrenched open and ransacked."

"So I see, Bryant," I observed.

"Looks uncommonly like robbery, doesn't it, Blake?" he asked.

"Undoubtedly," I replied, crossing to the other end of the carriage. "H'm! This door is also locked, I find. Peculiar—most peculiar!"

I turned thoughtfully, and bent over the dead man. Apart from the signs of the fatal struggle, of which the body bore many traces, I discovered a fearful wound upon the side of the head, which was most certainly the cause of the man's death.

"Look here, Bryant," I said, pointing out the injury. "I don't think we need look any farther for the cause of this poor chap's death. A heavy, knobbed stick would account for it, I should think."

"Good heavens! That's a terrible wound, Blake!" exclaimed Bryant. "But there is no weapon here that I can see."

"No. But that is not at all surprising, my dear fellow," I answered.

"What is easier than to throw the weapon—whatever it was—out of the window of a moving train? Personally, I did not expect to find it."

Bryant nodded.

"Perhaps you're right," he agreed. "I expect the murderer threw his weapon out of the window when he'd done his foul work. There seems no doubt that this affair is the result of robbery."

He again pointed to the dead man's luggage, which merely consisted of a Gladstone-bag and a small attache-case. Both were now lying open, and their contents were scattered upon the cushions. It was easy to see that a hurried search had been made of the various articles and papers which the bags had contained.

After a moment, I turned my attention upon the murdered man's clothing, and soon found that his linen bore the initials "H. G." Searching in the pockets brought to light a bulky pocket-book and various other articles.

"Probably we shall learn the name of the unfortunate gentleman from this wallet," I remarked, standing upright once more. "We were assuming a moment ago, Bryant, that robbery was the cause of this man's death."

"Yes, of course," agreed Bryant. "That's self-evident."

"And yet there are several hundred pounds in this pocket-book," I said quietly, as I looked into the wallet.

Banknotes and Treasury notes were there to the tune of about four hundred pounds, I judged, and this circumstance seemed to upset the idea of robbery. Of course, it was just possible that the murderer, in his hurried search, had concentrated his whole attention upon the bags, and overlooked the person of his victim. But this seemed really too absurd. Still, murderers have been known to do stranger things.

"Well, this is simply astounding!" exclaimed Bryant, in a surprised tone.

"I certainly thought that the man's money would be missing. This seems to make the mystery all the deeper. Is there anything in that wallet to show who the man is?"

"Yes," I replied, extracting a card from the interior of the pocket-book. "This card bears the inscription, 'Mr. Horace Grayson.'"

"Is that all?" demanded Bryant. "Is there no address?"

"None at all," I answered, frowning. "Grayson—Grayson! I seem to re-

member that name, anyhow. Ah, I've got it! Mr. Horace Grayson has an office in the Strand, and he is a well-known moneylender!"

Bryant whistled softly.

"By George!" he said. "That puts a different complexion upon the whole matter, Blake. There are usually hundreds of people quite anxious for the sudden death of various members of the money-lending profession, I believe."

"You're quite right, Bryant," I agreed, smiling. "Some of these gentry are quite fond of playing the part of blackmailers, and people who are unwise enough to get into their clutches live to regret it. Some of them occasionally take matters into their own hands, and exact a terrible vengeance upon their tormentors. But in this instance, of course, there may be nothing of that nature in the case."

"Possibly not," replied Bryant grimly. "But, all the same, I must say that appearances seem to point that way. It's evident that this is not an ordinary robbery. Otherwise, the thief would certainly have taken that wallet—especially after murdering his victim. This is a case of deliberate revouge, in my opinion."

"Well, my dear chap, if we have patience we shall probably get at the truth sooner or later," I observed, placing the wallet down and looking round keenly again.

Whatever might prove the solution of the unfortunate man's death, it was very evident that a terrible struggle had taken place within the compartment. For, apart from the ransacked bags, other signs of the conflict were apparent on all sides.

One of the cushions had been wrenched from its position; a blind was torn down, and the end of one of the luggage-racks had been forcibly pulled from its socket. Altogether, the carriage presented an appearance of great disorder, which amply testified to the deadly struggle which had been enacted within the confined space.

I made a thorough search of both seats and the floor, Bryant looking on interestedly meanwhile. But I found scarcely anything of importance, and nothing which would throw any light upon the identity of the murderer of Mr. Horace Grayson.

"Well, what are you going to do, Blake?" asked Bryant at last.

"I think I'll have a few words with the guard before the Scotland Yard people arrive," I answered. "I suppose they have been notified?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Bryant. "In cases of this kind the station police always inform Scotland Yard immediately, and they take charge."

I nodded, and beckoned to the guard, who was still at the door.

"I want to ask you a few questions, guard," I began, as the man looked up. "What station did the train stop at before you reached London?"

"Ipswich, sir. We're non-stop from there," he replied.

"Oh, I see!" I said. "Now, I want you to think carefully, guard. Do you remember seeing this gentleman in the train at Ipswich?"

"Yes, sir," answered the guard at once. "An' he wasn't alone, neither."

"Can you recall the appearance of his fellow-passengers?" I asked quickly.

"Well, sir, there was only one," said the guard slowly. "He was a young, smart, gentleman—about twenty-seven or eight years' old, I reckon. I noticed him first at Stowmarket, an' he was laughin' an' talkin' with this gentleman, quite friendly-like."

"And when you passed their compart-



ment at Ipswich they were still on good terms with one another?" I asked thoughtfully.

"Yes, sir. I didn't see no evidence of no quarrel," declared the guard. "If that young chap killed this gentleman, he must have done it between Ipswich an' London."

"But you say that the train is a non-stop from Ipswich?" I reminded him.

"Yes, sir, that's true," agreed the guard.

"Well, if both men were in this compartment when the train left Ipswich, how could the murderer have escaped if the train has not stopped?" asked Bryant, who was listening interestedly.

"And don't forget that both doors were locked when the train arrived here," I said. "The quarrel must have occurred soon after the train left Ipswich, and after the young man had killed his companion, he either got through one of the windows, or else made his exit by the door and relocked it after him. Then he dropped from the train, presumably. Did the train slow up at all, guard?"

"Yes, sir—between Shenfield an' Brentwood, in the deep cuttin'," answered the man. "We very often slow up there."

"Then the murderer must have left the train at that spot," I commented. "There is no other explanation, unless, of course, he entered another compartment."

"That ain't at all likely, sir," objected the guard. "Several passengers were in the compartments next to this 'ere, an' they would have seen the man."

"Yes, of course," I agreed. "Had they been empty, the case would have been very different. So we can take it as pretty certain that the young man dropped from the train between Brentwood and Shenfield. Hallo! The Scotland Yard men, I presume!"

A slight commotion made itself apparent upon the platform, and the next moment Detective-Inspector Morley of the Yard made his appearance at the carriage door.

"Well, I'm hanged—you here, Blake?" he cried, shaking me by the hand cordially. "I'm bothered if you're not always on the spot before I even get a look in! Rather a nasty business here, I'm told?"

"Yes," I agreed, introducing Morley to Bryant. "This crime is certainly an appallingly brutal one. You'd better have a look round yourself, Morley. I have touched nothing with the exception of the dead man's pocket-book, which is lying upon the cushion. He is Mr. Horace Grayson, I see."

"What! Grayson, the moneylender?" asked Morley, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes. Did you know him?" I queried.

"Not personally," replied Morley. "But I'm not altogether surprised at this, Blake. I always expected Grayson to meet with violence sooner or later, and apparently I wasn't far wrong. He had a shady reputation."

The inspector entered the compartment and busied himself for a time with his investigation in the interior, whilst Bryant and I chatted together. After Morley had thoroughly examined the compartment and the body of the unfortunate moneylender, he had a few words with the guard and the porter, nodded his head wisely, and then came up to where Bryant and myself were standing.

"Pretty clear case of robbery and murder, Blake," he commented. "There's no trace of a weapon in the carriage, I see. Grayson's murderer evidently threw it out of the window, U. J.—No. 870.

or took it with him when he left the train in the cutting between Shenfield and Brentwood."

"So you have come to the conclusion that the ruffian jumped from the train when it slowed down in the cutting, inspector?" asked Bryant.

"Yes, certainly," answered Morley. "There's no other explanation that I can see. Don't you agree, Blake?"

I nodded. "Of course!" I said. "That is the only possible point on the journey at which he could have made his escape from the carriage."

"Rather a peculiar thing that both doors were locked, isn't it?" asked Morley, with a puzzled frown. "I can't see any reason why the fellow should have locked the door when he left the compartment."

"No. That point certainly seems a little obscure," I remarked. "What do you say to a run down to the cutting at once, Morley?"

The inspector looked up quickly. "Not much good, I'm afraid, Blake," he said dubiously. "Still, it can do no harm, and we might pick up the murderer's trail there. How do you suggest going?"

"Special train!" I said shortly. "Well, that's a matter that can easily be arranged," put in Bryant. "I'll give orders immediately for a special to be prepared at once, if you like."

"Thanks, Mr. Bryant," said the inspector. "A special will certainly be the quickest way of travelling. I suppose it'll be about half an hour before the train is ready, won't it?"

"Yes, about that," replied Bryant. "In the meantime I'll have the body removed from the carriage," said Morley briskly. "What about you, Blake?"

"Oh, I'll go and ring up Tinker," I replied. "He may as well come with us."

"By all means," agreed Morley. "The party wouldn't be complete without that cheeky young assistant of yours!"

I strolled along the platform with Bryant, chatting over the case. Detective-Inspector Morley was busy superintending the removal of Mr. Horace Grayson's remains, and I did not envy him his gruesome task.

The affair appeared to be a straightforward case of robbery and murder, and Morley was convinced that the moneylender had been killed by one of his victims.

I accompanied Bryant to his office once more, and got through to Tinker from there. After a few minutes' conversation with the lad I turned to Bryant.

"Well, my dear fellow," I said. "I'm very glad that I happened to be with you this evening, for this case interests me exceedingly. I have an idea that it is not quite so simple as it appears at present."

Bryant looked surprised. "Why, what on earth do you mean, Blake?" he asked.

"I'll explain more fully after we've investigated the cutting," I said evasively. "By the way, are you coming with us on the special?"

"No," he answered, shaking his head. "No use my coming on an expedition of that sort. I should simply be in the way!"

I nodded. "Perhaps you're wise, Bryant," I agreed. "There's certainly not much fun to be gained from a man-hunt—especially on a dark night. And it might possibly prove to be an all-night affair. You never know exactly what to expect in a matter of this sort."

After a few more words with my

friend, I left the office and watched the police at work on their gruesome task of removing the body from the carriage. Tinker would be along presently, and I strolled up and down while I waited.

And as to what happened subsequently, Lee, I leave Tinker to record in his letters to Nipper. You will get the facts just the same, as I know that Nipper always hands Tinker's letter to you for perusal.

When you have gained an insight into the whole matter, I think you will agree that the extraordinary incidents and happenings were well worth recording.

With kindest regards and all best wishes,—Yours as always,

SEXTON BLAKE.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Letter from Tinker to Nipper.

78, Benmore Gardens,
Fulham, S.W.

February 23rd.

MY DEAR OLD NIPPER,—The guv'nor has written a long letter to Mr. Lee to-day, telling him about the murder of Mr. Horace Grayson in a railway carriage. And what I am about to write is really a continuation of the same yarn. So it's up to you to read the guv'nor's letter before you read this.

In the same way, you must show my remarks to Mr. Lee, so that he, also, can get the hang of things—sort of swop letters, as it were.

You'll discover later on why I'm addressing you from the above locality. I only mention this because I don't want you to think that the guv'nor and I have moved from Baker Street to Fulham—we haven't!

And now, after those few preliminary remarks, I'll get busy on the main object of this letter.

Well, just before ten o'clock last night Pedro and I were lolling by the fire in the consulting-room. I was feeling a bit hungry, and wondering when the guv'nor would turn up for supper.

It often happens like that. If ever I'm particularly hungry, Sexton Blake is sure to be late home. He doesn't seem to have any thought at all for meal-times, but just goes about his business in the most unconcerned manner. And then, when I give him a gentle reminder that he's about two hours late, he appears to be tremendously surprised.

"Well, Pedro, old boy," I said, stroking the dog's broad back, "if the guv'nor doesn't soon turn up, I'm jolly well going to have my supper and clear off to bed. What do you say?"

I believe the old blighter understood every word, for he wagged his tail, and glanced hungrily up at the table, which was already laid in readiness for the meal.

"You artful old scoundrel!" I said reprovingly. "We'll wait a bit longer, anyhow. Perhaps the guv'nor will be in soon, and— Oh, rats!"

The telephone bell rang, and I crossed the room impatiently.

"Hallo!" I called, taking up the receiver. "Hallo! Who is— That you, sir?" I added, as I recognised Sexton Blake's voice. "Yes, this is Tinker speaking. What's up, guv'nor?"

"Nothing particular, my boy," answered the guv'nor over the wire. "There's been a rather brutal murder in a railway carriage, and I'm looking into the matter. Detective-Inspector Morley and I are going in a special train to a cutting near Brentwood in a few moments, and I want you to bring Pedro along immediately."

"Right, sir," I said briskly. "Liverpool Street, I suppose?"

"Yes, Tinker," replied Sexton Blake.



"I'm not certain of the platform, so I'll wait for you under the big clock."

"I'll be there as soon as possible, guv'nor," I replied cheerily.

"You had better come in a taxi, my lad," said Sexton Blake. "And tell the driver to hurry. The special train is being prepared to depart as soon as possible, and I do not want to keep it waiting. And I want Pedro most importantly."

"What about me, guv'nor?" I demanded indignantly. "Don't I count?"

I heard a chuckle at the other end of the wire.

"Probably you would prefer to return home and partake of supper, Tinker?" suggested Sexton Blake. "I expect you've been waiting patiently for my appearance, haven't you?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" I said. "But blow supper now. If there's work to be done, I can easily go without it for a bit. I'll be with you in about two ticks. Good-bye!"

I rang off, hurried into my overcoat, grabbed my cap and a handful of ham sandwiches from the table, and glanced at Pedro.

He knew that something was in the wind, for he pricked up his ears alertly, and a look of eagerness was in his eyes. The fact that I had donned my overcoat told him that I was going out, and he wanted to accompany me.

"Coming, old boy?" I asked, pausing. "There'll be some work for you to do, Pedro."

That was enough for the old bounder. He made a dive for the door, and bounded down the stairs ahead of me, with a low bay of pleasure. I fixed a leash to his collar in the hall, and then we left the house.

I soon found an empty taxi in Baker Street, and told the driver to go for all he was worth. The man took me at my word, and simply buzzed to Liverpool Street in record time.

"How's that, sir?" asked the cabman, as I stepped out with Pedro. "Fast enough for you?"

"Yes, rather—jolly good!" I replied, handing the man double fare. "Come on, Pedro—get a move on!"

Running through the booking-hall, I saw the guv'nor's well-known figure in the vicinity of the big electric clock. He was leisurely chatting with Detective-Inspector Morley, and they appeared to be quite at their ease, and apparently in no hurry.

Pedro's keen eyes must have spotted the guv'nor at the same moment, for he suddenly jerked the leash out of my hand and made a bee-line for Sexton Blake.

"Hi, come back, you old scamp!" I yelled.

But the dog took no heed of me just then. He rushed onwards, with the evident intention of giving the guv'nor a warm greeting.

Detective-Inspector Morley, as he chatted with Sexton Blake, was resting in a free-and-easy fashion upon his walking-stick, which was supporting the weight of his leaning body.

Unfortunately for the inspector, Pedro failed to notice the projecting stick, and the dog's lumbering body sent it flying as he bounded up to Sexton Blake.

The result was disastrous—for poor old Morley.

He waved his arms wildly in the air in a vain endeavour to keep his balance, and then sat down upon the hard platform with great suddenness. The expression of amazed surprise upon his face was worth quids!

"Ha, ha, ha!" I roared, as I ran up. "What's the matter, inspector—fed up

with standing? I've never seen you sit down so quickly!"

Detective-Inspector Morley looked up somewhat dazedly.

"What—what happened?" he asked blankly. "I believe I'm severely injured! Oh, it's you, Tinker, is it? Did—did you actually have the audacity to kick my stick from under me, you cheeky young demon?"

"Me?" I said indignantly. "Why, Mr. Morley, have you ever known me to do a dirty trick of that sort?"

"Well, I wouldn't trust you any farther than I could see you!" growled the inspector, as he painfully rose to his feet. "But if you didn't do it, who the dickens is responsible— Ah! Pedro is the culprit, eh? The clumsy old scoundrel! I'm bruised all over!"

The guv'nor was smiling, in spite of himself, as he patted Pedro's great head.

"All right, old boy—be quiet!" he said, with a chuckle. "What do you mean by knocking my friend over like that, you bad dog?"

Pedro merely wagged his tail, apparently highly pleased with himself. He looked up at Morley as innocently as possible, and the inspector had to grin.

"Well, that blessed dog's the limit for

"Oh, ring off, Mr. Morley!" I grinned. "What about this special train business? Is it ready yet?"

"Very nearly, Tinker," said Sexton Blake. "You have been much quicker than I anticipated, and now you have come we may as well go along to the departure platform, and get into the special at once."

"Where are the rest of the party, guv'nor?" I asked, as we walked towards the barrier. "You don't mean to say that only us three are going?"

"No, Tinker. Morley is taking several men with him, I believe," answered Sexton Blake.

"And we're going to a cutting near Brentwood, guv'nor, aren't we?" I went on. "What's the idea—hunting for a murderer?"

"Yes, my lad," replied the guv'nor. "I'll give you an outline of the case while we are travelling."

The inspector by this time had regained his usual good-nature, and we had quite a pleasant run in the special, which soon started. And during the trip Sexton Blake related all the facts of the case.

"Well, guv'nor," I said, when he had



"You swindling scoundrel!" cried Grayson, leaping from his seat.

cool cheek!" he grunted, as he dusted himself down. "He calmly bowls me over like a ninepin, and then winks at me! If he belonged to me, Blake, I'd teach him better manners!"

"Oh, Pedro's all right, Morley!" remarked the guv'nor. "He rather enjoys a little excitement now and again, you know."

"That's all very well," grumbled Morley. "But what about my feelings—to say nothing of my clothes?"

"Never mind, inspector," I said soothingly. "Poor old Pedro didn't mean to hurt your feelings—or you, either. He yanked the leash out of my hand as soon as he spotted the guv'nor. And, in any case, it was your own fault that you were bowled over!"

"My fault!" roared Morley, glaring at me savagely. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, you shouldn't use your walking-stick as a prop," I replied. "If you do, you must expect accidents to happen."

"Why, you cheeky young beggar!" shouted the inspector indignantly. "I've a jolly good mind to—"

finished, "it seems all straightforward and simple—just an ordinary case of robbery and murder. The only thing which puzzles me is what on earth the murderer locked the door after him for. Seems such a useless thing to do."

"Yes; that certainly is queer," commented Morley thoughtfully. "The train seems to be stopping, Blake. Surely we haven't arrived at the cutting already?"

"I think it quite likely, my dear fellow," murmured Sexton Blake. "The train has been travelling very fast, and the distance is not great. Yes; this is certainly a cutting, Morley," he added, looking out of the window. "I presume your men have provided themselves with lights of some sort?"

"Yes, of course," said Morley. "We've all got powerful electric torches."

The train stopped, and we all descended to the permanent way. The engine-driver had previously received orders to pull up at a point in the cutting where the Norwich express usually travelled the slowest. And Morley and



his men at once began to search for footprints.

"What are we going to do, gov'nor?" I asked, holding Pedro's leash tightly.

"We will allow the police to get well ahead, Tinker," answered the gov'nor. "We can then carry out our investigation more privately. The first thing to do is to find the exact spot where the murderer jumped from the train."

"Of course," I agreed. "But old Morley will find that spot as easily as we do, gov'nor."

"We shall see, Tinker," murmured Sexton Blake. "In any case, let Morley go his own way. You have brought your torch, I suppose?"

"Rather, gov'nor!" I replied promptly. "I always carry that on me."

"Well, use it, my lad; and look particularly for the impression which the murderer must have made when he alighted from the train."

Morley and his assistants were just ahead of us, and they looked rather a weird party as they progressed along the embankment, flashing their torches hither and thither in the darkness.

The gov'nor and I did the same. But I could see no indications whatever that the man who had jumped from the express had been along the line. Sexton Blake was keenly on the alert, and now and again he stopped, and carefully examined certain spots.

After a while I noticed that the police were returning, and I concluded that so far they had drawn blank, and were now retracing their steps with the object of extending the search in the opposite direction. As the little party drew level with us, I saw that Morley looked a bit fed up.

"Any luck, Blake?" he asked.

"So far I have found no trace whatever of the murderer's track," answered the gov'nor calmly. "This is a task where patience is required, Morley."

"I should think it is!" grunted the inspector impatiently. "We're going down the line a bit now, Blake. Hope we're a bit more lucky that way. Can't waste the whole blessed night here!"

"Stick it, inspector!" I grinned. "It's a dead cert that the man jumped from the train somewhere about here, and he must have left some traces. So if we search long enough we're sure to find 'em."

Morley grunted again, and went off down the embankment with his men towards the special, which was, of course, waiting for us. The gov'nor and I also retraced our steps, and recommenced the search in the opposite direction.

"It is fairly certain, Tinker, that the man must have alighted somewhere about here," remarked Sexton Blake, after a while. "We have thoroughly searched the Brentwood end of the cutting, with no result. Therefore, I am confident that we shall very soon find what we are looking for."

"I hope so, gov'nor!" I said heartily. "It's thundering cold on this line, and I shall be glad when we've finished. Hallo! The inspector has struck something, gov'nor! He and his men are crawling up the embankment now."

"So I see, Tinker," murmured Sexton Blake, who had stopped suddenly, and was carefully parting the long grass. "Well, let them go, my lad. But I am sorely afraid that Morley will find himself on the wrong track."

"Why? What do you mean, gov'nor?" I asked quickly.

"I mean that Morley has gone off on a wrong trail entirely, my lad," replied Sexton Blake decidedly.

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"How the dickens do you know, sir?" I demanded, in surprise.

"Simply because I have found the right one," he said. "At least, I'm fairly certain. Look here, Tinker!"

Sexton Blake pointed to a couple of deep impressions in the soft ground, which had been almost hidden by the long grass.

"By gosh!" I said excitedly. "This must be the spot where the murderer jumped!"

"Precisely, Tinker!" agreed the gov'nor. "And it is from here that we must begin our search."

"Then what on earth has Morley found, sir?" I asked.

"I don't know—probably a set of footprints, which they are determined to follow," answered Sexton Blake.

I grinned.

"Poor old Morley will be jolly wild when he finds out that he's made a bloomer!" I said. "But I suppose there's no doubt that these impressions are actually those made by the scoundrel when he jumped, gov'nor?"

"I think not, Tinker!" murmured Sexton Blake, as he again examined the marks in the earth. "You will observe that these impressions are close together and very deep—exactly as I expected them to be. When a man jumps from a moving train he naturally strikes the ground heavily, therefore his boots must sink to a certain depth into the earth."

"Yes, of course, sir," I agreed, looking keenly at the ground before me. "And just here the grass looks a bit flattened—as if the chap blundered over headlong after he landed."

"Exactly, my lad!" said the gov'nor.

"What are you going to do, sir? Follow the footprints?" I asked. "That won't be an easy matter in this tangled grass."

"Oh, I think Pedro will manage that for us!" remarked Sexton Blake, feeling in his overcoat-pocket.

"Pedro!" I repeated, in surprise. "But how on earth can Pedro follow the trail, sir?"

"I took the liberty of pocketing a necktie from the compartment in which the tragedy occurred," answered the gov'nor calmly. "I have every reason to think that it was worn by the murderer—since Mr. Horace Grayson's collar and tie were intact. And Pedro can easily pick up the scent from it, and lead us upon the track."

"Well, I'm blowed!" I ejaculated. "So that's why you wanted old Pedro brought here—and also why you wanted Morley to go on ahead!"

The gov'nor smiled, and held the tie under Pedro's nose.

"Find him, Pedro!" he said. "Find him, boy!"

The old dog knew exactly what was required of him, and he sniffed eagerly at the scrap of coloured silk. Then he lowered his nose to the ground, and cast about in all directions.

He whined once or twice in disappointment, but when he sniffed at the edge of the deep impressions, he uttered a deep-throated bay, and commenced straining at his leash.

"He's got it, sir!" I said excitedly. "You were right—in both cases. For it's certain that the tie was the murderer's, and it's also certain that these are the tracks of the same man."

"Yes, that is now evident," agreed Sexton Blake.

Pedro made off up the steep embankment rapidly, and the gov'nor and I had all our work cut out to keep up with him. But we scrambled along somehow, and soon found ourselves at the top.

Then the dog hurried along in a straight line for a short distance, and abruptly turned off into a field.

"Of course, the blighter would choose a ploughed field to go over!" I grunted disgustedly. "Why the dickens couldn't he keep along here until he reached a decent meadow?"

"Don't grumble, my lad," said Sexton Blake. "You ought to be thankful that the trail is so fresh and easy for Pedro to follow."

"Yes, I suppose I ought, sir," I admitted. "But I wonder where we're heading for?"

"I have no idea, Tinker," said the gov'nor. "But we shall probably be led for some miles to-night. A murderer in flight is not very particular about how far he travels, so long as he reaches a place of safety."

"That's right, sir—be cheerful!" I remarked. "If we're going on for miles, as you say, it's a cert that we sha'n't go back to London in the special."

"Probably not," agreed the gov'nor. "But that won't matter much. So long as we locate the murderer I shall be perfectly satisfied."

"So shall I, sir—rather!" I said. "But I hope we shall locate him somewhere near here."

But we didn't, Nipper, old son.

And the gov'nor proved to be right in his surmise. For we had to tramp miles and miles, mostly across country—over fields and meadows, through woods, over plank bridges, and goodness knows what else. The night was fairly dark, although the stars were shining brightly, and in some places we found it anything but an easy matter to find our way. But Pedro kept on and on, never wavering from the trail.

After covering five or six miles in this manner—and that distance seemed much greater owing to the nature of the route—we eventually emerged on to a quiet road. We appeared to be completely to ourselves, for not a house or building of any sort was to be seen anywhere.

I looked at Sexton Blake inquiringly.

"This seems to be a jolly lively spot, gov'nor," I said. "I wonder where the dickens we are?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, my lad," answered Sexton Blake cheerfully. "And I don't particularly care. We're out to-night following a hot scent, and all we've got to do is to go where Pedro leads. Quite simple, you see!"

"But Pedro looks as if he's going on for ever, sir," I grumbled. "I'll admit that this road is better than crossing fields, but there's no telling how far that beastly murderer walked. Perhaps he's gone to London on foot!"

Sexton Blake smiled.

"I should hardly think so, Tinker," he replied. "Pedro is now leading us along an ordinary road, and that looks hopeful. Probably the man we're after has taken lodgings somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"Let's hope so, gov'nor," I said.

I was beginning to get rather fed up. As a rule I like a good long walk, but this one had begun to get tedious—it was so uneventful. Nothing whatever happened at all, and we simply kept on walking.

After about another mile of this, I was greatly cheered by the sight of an old farm-building, standing quite by itself, just off the roadway. It looked like a barn, and I felt a little thrill of excitement run through me as I noticed that Pedro was making straight towards it.

"This looks more like business, gov'nor!" I said, in a low tone. "Perhaps the chap we're after is hiding in that old barn."

"I hope so, Tinker!" murmured Sexton Blake. "If he is not there now, it is certain that he has been there. We



had better approach the place as quietly as possible, my lad."

Old Pedro didn't hesitate, but trotted forward confidently, his muzzle close to the ground all the time. He went straight up to the ancient, rotting door of the place, and passed through a gap in the lower part of it.

"Can you get through without opening the door, sir?" I breathed.

"Yes, I think so," answered the gov'nor. "I'll go first!"

He squeezed through the opening, and I followed immediately behind him. As soon as he was on the other side of the door, Sexton Blake produced his torch and pressed the switch.

The beam of light revealed nothing but an untidy litter of straw, hay, bits of wood, and numerous other odds-and-ends. But there was no sign of any living being in the barn.

"Not many murderers about here, sir," I whispered. "But look at Pedro, gov'nor. He's trying to jump up that ladder in the corner. There may be a loft over this, and the man we're after must be up there!"

Sexton Blake glanced over at Pedro. The old dog was not whining, but he was making heroic efforts to climb the rungs of an old ladder, set upright in one corner of the barn.

"Yes, Tinker," breathed the gov'nor in my ear. "It is quite evident that the man we want is up in the loft. I will go up first as quietly as possible, and you must follow."

He drew his revolver from his pocket, and noiselessly began to mount the ladder. I whispered to Pedro to keep quiet, and then followed Sexton Blake up to the loft.

When I reached the upper floor the gov'nor was standing a few paces from the top of the ladder, flashing the light from his torch around the place. I gazed round, and then looked at Sexton Blake.

"Why, it's empty, sir!" I whispered disgustedly. "Well, of all the blessed frauds! After all this trouble, too! I wonder—Hullo! Did you hear anything, gov'nor?"

Sexton Blake nodded.

"Yes, Tinker," he said quietly. "If I'm not very much mistaken, the sound we both heard was a sneeze!"

"That's what I thought, sir," I answered.

We looked round curiously, and then I saw an untidy pile of hay in one of the far corners. I understood the meaning of the sneeze in a flash. The murderer of Mr. Horace Grayson was hiding beneath the hay!

Sexton Blake nodded grimly, and walked towards the other end of the loft quickly, his revolver held ready. I was close behind him. And as we reached the hay-pile the gov'nor halted.

"Now, then," he said sternly: "you will oblige me by coming out of that hay at once!"

Nothing happened; there was no sound or movement.

Without a word Sexton Blake suddenly thrust his torch into my hand, and bent down quickly. He groped about with his hands amongst the hay, and then abruptly dragged something forcibly from beneath it.

"Great Scott!" I gasped excitedly. "What—what is it, sir?"

"It's a man, Tinker—the man we're after," answered the gov'nor sternly.

It was a man—a young chap of about twenty-eight. But what a sight! He had a black-eye, his cheek was gashed, his hair was all over the place in an untidy shock, his tie was missing, and altogether he looked a pretty complete wreck as he blinked into the rays of the torch.

He rubbed his eyes, and ran his fingers through his hair, and then scrambled to his feet, looking surprised and somewhat dazed.

"What in thunder's the matter?" he demanded at last. "I'm doing no harm here that I can see. You're the farmer, I suppose? Well, I don't care if you are! I'm simply having a sleep, and—"

"No, I'm not a farmer," interrupted the gov'nor sternly. "I have traced you here from the railway, and you may as well know at once that you're under arrest!"

"Arrest!" repeated the man. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"You are wanted for the murder of Mr. Horace Grayson!" said Sexton Blake.

"Mur—murder of Horace Grayson!" gasped the man, staggering back dazedly. "Good heavens, you must be mad! I know nothing whatever about any murder! My name is Edward Fenton, and I swear that I'm innocent! I know nothing—nothing at all about a murder!"

"It is absolutely useless for you to plead ignorance," replied Sexton Blake, eyeing the young man curiously. "We have tracked you direct from the railway embankment—"

"I tell you you've made a mistake!" shouted the man desperately. "I came from Romford by road, and I had my bicycle smashed up completely—"

"I've heard quite enough of that sort of talk!" cut in Sexton Blake sternly. "Lies will not help you in the least."

"You may as well know," I said, "that the gentleman you're speaking to is Mr. Sexton Blake!"

"Sex—Sexton Blake!" gasped the man faintly. "Sexton Blake, the famous detective?"

The gov'nor bowed.

"That is my name," he said quietly. "And you must realise that your best course is to make a clean breast of the whole matter. It is quite useless for you to beat about the bush, for I know that you are the man who jumped from the Norwich express this evening."

Fenton—as he called himself—passed a hand across his forehead, and looked at us resignedly. He evidently realised that the game was up, and that no good purpose would be served by lying.

"All right, Mr. Blake," he said weakly. "I will tell you the truth. But when you spoke about murder, I was staggered. I know nothing whatever about any murder!"

I looked at Fenton in surprise.

"Is that what you call telling the truth?" I demanded.

"Yes, it is!" declared the young man stoutly. "I travelled with Grayson from Norwich—I don't deny that—but I know nothing about murder."

The gov'nor again cast a look of curiosity at the man. He seemed to be sincere in what he said, and I began to get puzzled.

"You certainly surprise me, Fenton," said Sexton Blake. "However, tell your story in your own way; but stick to the truth!"

"What I have already told you is the truth," declared Fenton. "I travelled with Grayson from Norwich, as I said. He is a dirty, swindling scoundrel, Mr. Blake, and after a time we got talking together. I didn't want to converse with him, but I was forced to do so."

"It was after the train left Ipswich that he drew me into an argument, and very soon I found myself quarrelling with the rotter. Eventually he flew at me like a tiger, and we had a terrific struggle. But Grayson is a flabby sort of man, and I soon knocked him out,

and sent him crashing to the floor of the compartment."

"Well?" said Sexton Blake, as the other paused.

"Well, after that I got scared a bit," admitted Fenton. "Grayson looked pretty nearly a wreck, and I feared that he would take proceedings against me for assault. But I didn't care, really. He owns a pretty black record himself, I reflected, and he wouldn't dare to make use of the courts. So I opened his bags, and searched for some papers which are my rightful property."

"After a few moments I found what I wanted, and then I realised that the train was slowing down. And on the spur of the moment I determined to jump off the train. I feared that Grayson would inform the police, probably, in his present rage, when the train reached Liverpool Street."

"But if I wasn't anywhere on the train, he would have some difficulty in bringing the assault home to me, I thought. Anyhow, after I had obtained the papers I was looking for, I glanced at Grayson. He was beginning to move, and I knew that he would recover very shortly."

"So I opened the door and stepped out upon the footboard. Then I locked the door, and jumped clear of the permanent-way, and landed easily upon the grass bordering the track."

"What did you lock the carriage door for?" I asked.

"Well, I hardly know," replied Fenton. "As I said, I saw that Grayson was rapidly recovering, and I suppose I had a hazy sort of notion that he might follow me. But, of course, he wouldn't have done that—he wouldn't take the risk."

"After I left the train I simply tramped on aimlessly, until I found this barn. I was tired out, and I crawled into this hay for a sleep. And that's all I know, Mr. Blake. Everything I have told you is the absolute truth."

He paused, and looked at the gov'nor earnestly.

"You said just now that Grayson has been killed," he went on. "Well, I swear that I know nothing about it—nothing whatever! Don't you believe me, Mr. Blake?"

"No; I'm afraid that's impossible," declared the gov'nor. "Nobody but yourself could have killed Grayson. Both doors of the carriage were locked, and the train was travelling very fast all the way from Brentwood to London. On your own showing, Fenton, you are the only possible culprit."

"But I am innocent, I tell you!" exclaimed the young man warmly. "Everything looks black against me. I can see. But I swear to you, on my honour, that I had no hand whatever in Grayson's death!"

"Perhaps you can explain who is responsible for the murder?" suggested the gov'nor, a little sarcastically.

"No, I have not the faintest idea," declared Fenton. "When I left the train Grayson was showing every sign of returning consciousness, and how he met his death is just as much a mystery to me as it is to you. Won't you believe me, Mr. Blake? I swear that I know nothing more than I have told you!"

The man seemed to be sincere in what he said, and I was very surprised. Sexton Blake, I could see, scarcely knew what to make of the young fellow's statement, and for a few moments he was silent.

"I find it extremely difficult to take you at your word," he said at last. "Everything points directly to you as



the murderer, and no other explanation appears to be at all possible."

"And yet I am as innocent as you are!" cried Fenton desperately. "Some solution will be found, I am sure—it must be found! Don't—don't give me up to the police, Mr. Blake—for goodness' sake, don't! Sooner or later you will find that what I have told you is true, and that I had no hand whatever in Grayson's death."

"But, under the circumstances, it is quite out of the question for me to allow you to remain at liberty," declared the gov'nor. "I must admit, Fenton, that you do not appear to be lying, and you certainly do not look like a brutal murderer. But—"

"Thank you, Mr. Blake, for what you say!" said Fenton gratefully. "I am not at all anxious to have my liberty, but I can't stand the ordeal of being arrested for a murder of which I am absolutely innocent!"

"Then what do you suggest?" asked Sexton Blake.

"Well, could you not place me in some safe retreat, Mr. Blake, guarded night and day?" said Fenton eagerly. "Then, if nothing can be done to prove my innocence within a week, you can surrender me to the police. But if within that time you or the police find the real murderer, I shall be quite safe, and my name will be completely cleared."

I looked at the gov'nor quickly, and I could see that he was wavering. It was a most extraordinary position, and I wondered what Sexton Blake would do.

"If I agree to what you suggest," he said, eyeing the young man queerly, "will you give me your solemn word of honour that you will make no effort to escape?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake, I swear it!" declared Fenton earnestly. "If I really were the murderer, there would be no possible object in asking you to do this for me. For in that case my guilt would very soon be proved, and I should be handed over to the police at once."

This was undoubtedly true, and I began to believe that Fenton's yarn had some truth in it. But it was a puzzling affair, and I could see no possible solution.

"Very well, Fenton," said the gov'nor, "I agree. You will accompany Tinker and myself to London, and I will place you in a position of safety for one week, during which I will make every effort to get to the bottom of this most singular mystery."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Blake—thank you!" exclaimed Fenton, with genuine gratitude. "You will find that what I have told you is true in every particular."

"But how are we going to get to London, gov'nor?" I asked. "We're miles from anywhere, and we've got no means of travelling!"

"Our best plan will be to walk to the nearest town," said Sexton Blake. "We can then probably hire a motor-car."

Well, Nipper, that's what we eventually did. After trudging a few more miles we struck a garage, and the gov'nor managed to hire a car. In this we drove straight to the house in Fulham, and I'm here on guard over Fenton.

He seems quite cheerful, and appears to be a jolly decent sort of chap, really. But I don't know what to make of the business. Fenton must be the murderer, in my opinion, for there is no one else who could possibly have done it.

Anyhow, it's a puzzle, and the gov'nor's tearing his hair over it. But I believe he thinks Fenton's story is true.

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I'll write again soon, and let you know any fresh developments. This guarding job is a bit tedious, but it gives me plenty of time to write letters, that's one consolation.

Send me one of your usual cheery epistles as soon as possible, and give my kindest regards to your chums.

Your affectionate pal,

TINKER.

CHAPTER THREE.

Letter From Sexton Blake to Nelson Lee.

Baker Street, London, W.,

February 24th.

MY DEAR LEE,—By the time this letter reaches you at St. Frank's I think it most probable that you will have read Tinker's letter to Nipper, of yesterday's date. Therefore you will have gained a complete insight into the singular mystery of the 9.12 express murder, so far as it has progressed.

The affair is most puzzling, and it worries me considerably. Young Fenton talks like an absolutely innocent man, and yet everything points to him as the only possible person who could have had any hand in the killing of Horace Grayson.

As Tinker wrote, we have placed Fenton in the house at Fulham, and Tinker is guarding him continually. It is true Fenton gave me his solemn word that he would not try to escape, but it is better to be on the safe side. And it is his own suggestion that he be kept under observation.

I came along here in the morning, after satisfying myself that everything was quite satisfactory at Benmore Gardens, and that Tinker had everything that he might need during his period of wardership.

I told Mrs. Bardell to bring me some breakfast, and then glanced at the morning papers. As I had anticipated, the headlines were staring and sensational—"Train Murder—Well-known Man Battered to Death in Express—Murderer Still at Large," and others to the same effect.

A brief outline of the case followed, which I may as well repeat here.

"A gruesome and sensational discovery was made last night at Liverpool Street Station upon the arrival of the 9.12 express from Norwich. As the train drew up to the platform a porter noticed the body of a gentleman lying on the floor of a first-class compartment, and the man at once made investigations.

"Opening the door, which proved to be locked, the porter was horrified to see that the unfortunate gentleman was quite dead, having been brutally murdered. A wound upon the side of the head testified to the nature of the crime, and death must have been instantaneous.

"The body was quite alone in the compartment, but two bags upon the seat had the appearance of having been hurriedly torn open and searched, thus proving that the murdered man had been done to death for the purpose of robbery.

"Later it was found that the victim's name is Mr. Horace Grayson, the well-known London financier, with offices in the Strand. Mr. Grayson has been established at his London address for over twenty years, and his untimely end is a matter for much regret. So far as can be ascertained at present, Mr. Grayson leaves no relatives.

"Our representative has been assured that the police have the matter well in hand, and have already discovered the murderer to be Mr. Edward Fenton, an architect, of Hampstead, whose arrest is expected hourly.

"It transpires that Fenton travelled with Mr. Grayson from Norwich, but has

since vanished completely, having evidently left the train after committing the murder and abstracting some papers from the luggage of his victim.

"The police are of opinion that Fenton is at present in hiding, but are confident that his whereabouts will speedily be discovered.

"A full report of the case will be printed in a later edition, with a complete history of the late Mr. Horace Grayson's career."

I nodded to myself as I read this report, Lee, and sat thinking deeply, completely forgetting my breakfast. I was beginning to get a little annoyed over the matter, for while the facts clearly pointed to Fenton as the guilty party, something seemed to tell me that he was innocent.

His very manner was that of an innocent man, I reflected. Even when we first discovered him in the old barn, and told him of the murder, his surprise and amazement was genuine enough. And yet he had been the only passenger in the carriage with Grayson when the train left Ipswich.

If Fenton really was innocent, as he solemnly swore, then who could possibly be the murderer? It was certainly a puzzle, and I rose to my feet and paced the room in perplexity.

A crime of this nature is very difficult to reconstruct. Assuming that Fenton had nothing to do with the murder, there remained very little to grasp, for no living man could say with any degree of certainty what had actually happened in that fatal carriage after Fenton had left it.

Restlessly I continued to pace up and down, and then I became aware that somebody was knocking at the door.

"Come in!" I called impatiently.

"Morning, Blake!" said a cheery voice. "How are you this morning? Sorry to disturb you at breakfast, old man. I see you haven't started yet."

"Hallo, Morley!" I said, shaking hands. "Come in, my dear fellow! To tell you the truth, I forgot all about breakfast! You'd better join me in the meal."

"Right; I will!" replied the inspector, throwing his hat upon a chair and sitting down. "Haven't had much to eat this morning yet; too busy over this confounded train murder."

"How is the case progressing?" I asked, dropping into a chair opposite to him.

"Rotten!" grunted Morley. "Fenton still eludes capture. But there is no doubt that he's the man we want, for we've proved conclusively that he travelled with Grayson from Norwich."

"Even so," I remarked, "that does not give you direct confirmation that Fenton is the murderer."

Detective-inspector Morley stared at me in surprise.

"Well, I don't know what further proof you want, Blake!" he ejaculated. "Fenton was with Grayson when the train left Ipswich, but he was missing when the train reached London, and Grayson in the meantime had been murdered. The very fact that Fenton is missing proves that he is the murderer!"

"My dear fellow, I'm not saying that Fenton is not the murderer," I replied. "I only say that so far we have no direct evidence that he is."

"If he is innocent, what in thunder has he disappeared for?" demanded Morley. "He's gone completely—got clear away, confound him!"

"That certainly looks very black," I agreed. "By the way, Morley, how did you get on last night at Brentwood?"

"Drew a complete blank!" grunted Morley disgustedly. "Wasted hours on that embankment, all to no purpose. We



struck a trail of footprints, but they led us nowhere. What happened to you, Blake?"

"Oh, Tinker and I had a good hunt round," I replied evasively, "and when we had finished it was too late to catch the special!"

I managed to preserve a grave outward appearance, although at the moment I was inwardly chuckling to myself. What would Morley say if he had known of our last night's adventure, and that Edward Fenton was even now at the house in Fulham, with Tinker on guard?

But, of course, the worthy inspector did not know this, and he enjoyed his meal heartily, in spite of his disappointment at his inability to get upon the track of the murderer of Mr. Horace Grayson.

Morley chatted with me for some little time after he had finished breakfast, and I told myself that I was probably unwise in hiding young Fenton as I had done. And I realised that I myself was liable to arrest as an accessory after the fact.

But this, of course, did not worry me in the least. Whether I was doing right or wrong, I determined to carry the matter through to the end. For in spite of my better judgment I was becoming more and more convinced that Fenton was innocent. I gave the inspector no hint as to what was in my mind, however, and he shortly rose from his chair.

"Well, Blake," he said, lighting a cigarette, and handing me his case. "I sha'l have to be going. By the look of things, this murder business is going to be a teaser for us.

"Yes, I'm afraid you will find it rather difficult, my dear fellow," I agreed. "But I dare say the solution will present itself sooner or later. Good-bye, Morley—let me know when you discover Fenton's whereabouts."

"All right, Blake; but goodness only knows when that'll be!" growled the inspector, as he left the room.

When I was alone once more, I again fell to pacing the consulting-room restlessly. And from there I wandered into the laboratory and back again. I felt that I must keep on the move while I was thinking, and I soon began to get into an irritable and snappy mood.

The thing was worrying me abominably. I don't remember any case which got on my nerves more than this one, was doing. I felt lost, in a way—groping in the dark for I knew not what.

Although I now believed in Fenton's innocence, somebody was responsible for the death of Mr. Horace Grayson, and, try as I would, no possible explanation of the riddle occurred to me.

I continued my restless pacing, growing more and more irritable meanwhile, and when at last another knock sounded upon the door I glared round almost savagely. Mrs. Bardell, my housekeeper, entered.

"Well, what is it?" I asked crossly.

"Somebody to see you, sir," she began. "A young—"

"I won't see anybody!" I snapped. "Leave me alone—I'm busy! Don't let anybody disturb me at all! Go away!"

Mrs. Bardell looked a little scared, and hurriedly withdrew. I resumed my pacing, and paused at the window. As I gazed down into the street below, I noticed that a taxi was drawn up outside my front door, and a girl was just leaving the approach to the house, crying into a handkerchief.

In a flash I realised that she had probably come to interview me, and I felt rather a brute. Instantly I turned, and made for the door, rushing down the stairs two at a time, hoping that I should

be in time to catch the girl before she drove off.

"My dear young lady," I cried, as I reached the kerb, "I presume you called to see me?"

The girl paused. She was just on the point of stepping into the taxi, and she turned quickly.

"I called to see Mr. Sexton Blake," she said, in a rather musical voice. "Are you Mr. Blake?"

I bowed.

"Yes. And I must apologise for sending you away in this fashion," I said. "If you will do me the honour of stepping into my consulting-room, I will try to make amends."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Blake!" answered the girl, in a grateful tone. "I do so urgently want to speak to you!"

"Then come this way, my dear young lady," I replied.

I escorted her into the consulting-room, and placed a chair for her near the fire, afterwards seating myself opposite her. She appeared to be a trifle nervous, and hesitated a little before speaking. She was a very charming young lady, about five-and-twenty, quietly, but expensively dressed.

"Now, what is the trouble?" I asked gently.

"Well, Mr. Blake, the trouble is not directly connected with myself," she began, "although it concerns me very closely. My name is Mildred Barry, and I have come to ask you to help my fiance, who is in a most dreadful position. He is innocent—I know he is innocent! The police are foolish even to suspect him!"

I smiled.

"May I ask who your fiance is, Miss Barry?" I inquired.

"He is an architect named Edward Fenton," she replied, "and the police want him for—for murder, Mr. Blake! Oh, it is ridiculous! It is preposterous!"

I was surprised. It was most singular that this young lady should come to me to help her lover, considering that I had already done so, and was even now engaged upon the very same matter.

"As it happens, Miss Barry," I said gently, "I have heard all about the murder of Mr. Horace Grayson, and I know that Mr. Fenton is suspected of the crime."

"But—but you don't think he is—guilty?" asked the girl quickly.

I hesitated. I didn't want to raise Miss Barry's hopes too high, in case things did not go quite right, and I answered her question cautiously.

"Well, there is no denying the fact that matters look exceedingly black against Mr. Fenton," I said. "And you cannot in any way blame the police for seeking his arrest. But I am rather inclined to the belief that there is something more in this matter than meets the eye."

"You—you mean that you think he is innocent?" breathed the girl.

I nodded slowly.

"I think, Miss Barry," I said, "that your fiance is mixed up in this matter in some manner, but I can hardly believe that he is a murderer."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Blake—thank you ever so much for those words!" exclaimed Miss Barry gratefully. "Then you will help to find him, and prove his innocence, won't you? Please—please do, Mr. Blake! My father will pay you any sum—no matter how much—to have Mr. Fenton's innocence established."

"We will leave the matter of financial

cost out of the question," I smiled. "But you must not worry yourself, Miss Barry. I can assure you that Mr. Fenton is quite safe and well, and that I will do my utmost to prove that he is innocent of this terrible crime."

"It is very good of you, Mr. Blake, and I thank you from my heart!" exclaimed the girl gratefully. "You have relieved me tremendously. But I am rather puzzled by what you said just now about Mr. Fenton being safe and well. How can you possibly know that?"

"Never mind, my dear young lady," I answered, rising to my feet. "You must leave the affair in my hands. I promise you that I will do my best in the matter, and you must not worry."

I could see that she was still rather mystified, and perhaps I had been a little unwise to say as much as I had. But she made no further remark as I bowed her out of the consulting-room.

When she had gone, and I was once more alone, I found that all my impatience and irritation returned to me in full force, and I resumed my pacing again. I don't know whether you have ever been in this peculiar mood, Lee, but I can assure you that it is anything but pleasant.

I felt more irritable and snappy than ever, and for some time I walked to and fro continuously, deep in thought. But, try as I would, I could get no farther ahead with the problem.

At last I was abruptly disturbed by the ringing of the telephone-bell, and I quickly crossed to the instrument, and snatched the receiver from its hook.

"Hallo!" I snapped.

"That you, guv'nor?" came Tinker's voice over the wire.

"Yes; what do you want?" I said.

"Well, don't bite my blessed head off, sir!" protested the lad, in surprise. "What the dickens is the matter with you?"

"Never mind that! What have you rung me up for?" I demanded impatiently.

"I must say you're jolly cheerful, guv'nor!" complained Tinker. "Here am I, stuck here on my own, and when I ring you up for a few cheery words, you nearly jump down my neck! But that's not what I want to tell, sir. Fenton wants to write a couple of letters—one to his girl, and another to a pal."

"Oh, I see!" I replied. "Who is his pal, Tinker?"

"Blowed if I know, sir!" replied Tinker. "He told me to ask you if he can write the letters—that's all. What shall I tell him?"

I considered for a moment. I could see no objection why Fenton should not write, if he wished to do so. He would certainly not give himself away, for that would mean arrest—immediate arrest.

"Are you there, Tinker?" I called. "You can tell Fenton that he is at liberty to write if he wants to. Anything else you want to say?"

"No, sir!" said Tinker. "I'll wait until you're in a more cheerful temper! At present you're best left on your own! Good-bye!"

I hung up the receiver mechanically, for I had suddenly thought of something, and a gleam of excitement crept into my eyes. All my ill-humour left me, and I prepared to go out.

And that is about all I can tell you for the present, my dear Lee. But I will certainly send you further details later—when I am quite certain of my facts.

In the meantime, I trust that you and Nipper are keeping in the best of health, and with kindest regards to you both,

Yours very sincerely,

SEXTON BLAKE.

U. J.—No. 870.

NEXT WEEK!
**"THE CASE OF THE
FOUR STATUES."**



PEDRO
ARRIVES!

The huge
bloodhound
made a wild
leap towards
Sexton Blake,
and Morley sat
down with
a bump.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Letter from Edward Fenton to Jimmy Tetloe.

78, Benmore Gardens,
Fulham, S.W.,

February 24th

DEAR OLD JIMMY.—I'm in trouble—hugo and terrific trouble. Trouble with a large-sized capital T, in fact.

Of course, you have seen from the papers that I'm wanted for murder. Think of it, Jimmy boy! Wanted for murder! It's ghastly! The very thought of it all makes me shudder.

There's no need for me to tell you that I'm innocent. You must have known that from the beginning. I have absolutely no more idea how Horace Grayson met his death in that beastly railway-carriage than the Man in the Moon has.

But it is my intention to tell you all about my part in the affair, and I'd better begin at the beginning. You'll understand why I'm writing from the above address later on.

I first met that awful rotter Grayson several months ago. I can't help calling him a rotter, although he is dead. I was introduced to him by a business friend, and he at once offered to lend me some money for a scheme I had on hand at that time.

He was very affable, and apparently friendly, but somehow I didn't seem to take to the fellow, and I refused his offer of a loan. He merely smiled and shrugged his shoulders, and replied that perhaps some time in the future he would have the pleasure of doing business with me.

I forgot all about Grayson and his money for a time, and I entered a competition for the plans of a new Government building. Things were rather "tight" with me, then, too, and I had put all my energies into this competition in the hope of winning the prize—which was quite a large sum of money.

Well, I won it—as you already know. But I couldn't obtain the money for at least a week, and I very urgently required some cash for my business. This was imperative, unless I was to go under. There's no need to go into details of all this at the moment. I'm just giving you an outline of how I was situated.

U. J.—No. 870.

I didn't know which way to turn, and I was at my wits' end. And then I suddenly remembered Horace Grayson and his offer of a loan.

I went to his office, and told him how I was placed, and that I had won the prize for the Government building plans, and asked him for three thousand pounds. He let me have it quite readily, and I signed a promissory note for the amount.

This money placed me upon my feet again, and everything was going beautifully. My business was gradually extending, and I was looking forward to becoming a prosperous and flourishing firm.

A week later Grayson came to see me in my office, saying that he wanted the money repaid. I was quite willing, for during the interval I had received the prize money.

"All right, Mr. Grayson!" I exclaimed, shaking hands with him. "You can have your money back, and welcome. If you hadn't called, I should have posted you a cheque this evening. Take a seat for a few moments, and I will write you out a cheque at once. Have you brought the promissory-note?"

"Yes, of course, Mr. Fenton," he replied, producing a large pocket-wallet, and taking a document from it. "Here it is!"

He laid it on the desk in front of him, and I glanced at it casually, as I felt in a drawer for my cheque-book. Something caught my eye which made me examine the paper more closely, and I looked at Grayson curiously.

"I think you've made a mistake, Mr. Grayson," I said quietly. "This note is for ten thousand pounds!"

"Quite right, my dear sir," answered Grayson calmly.

"But I don't understand!" I exclaimed, in a puzzled tone. "The amount I borrowed from you was three thousand pounds—not ten thousand pounds!"

Grayson looked surprised.

"I think it is I who does not understand, Mr. Fenton," he said steadily. "Surely your memory must be at fault?"

"At fault!" I repeated. "What on earth do you mean, Mr. Grayson? You know as well as I do that the amount was three thousand pounds!"

"I know nothing of the sort, my dear

sir!" declared Grayson. "The sum you borrowed was ten thousand pounds, and that is the amount I now require—plus the usual interest!"

"What?" I shouted warmly. "Ten thousand pounds! Why, you must be mad! You know perfectly well that I only obtained three thousand pounds from you, Mr. Grayson, and I signed a promissory-note for that figure!"

Mr. Horace Grayson smiled grimly, and pointed to the document on the table. It was now beginning to dawn upon me that I had been tricked—that this moneylender was a swindling scoundrel.

"You won't repudiate your own signature, I suppose?" said Grayson, picking up the paper, and holding it out for me to see. "Here is the document you signed in my office—all in perfect order."

I took the note rather dazedly, and looked at it. It was for ten thousand pounds, as he had said, and my signature was undoubtedly affixed to it.

"This is not the paper I signed, Mr. Grayson!" I declared, keeping my temper with difficulty.

"My dear sir, please be reasonable," replied Grayson smoothly. "You came to my office and obtained ten thousand pounds—"

"Three thousand pounds, Mr. Grayson—you know that!" I interrupted.

"You came to my office and obtained ten thousand pounds," repeated Grayson, disregarding my interruption entirely, "and you signed this note for it. And now, when I ask you to return the cash, you deny having had the money. But that won't do, Mr. Fenton—it won't really. I have your signature to prove what I say!"

As you can guess, Jimmy, I was boiling over with wrath at this attempt at barefaced robbery. The note had been faked somehow, but I realised that I should have a difficult task to bring the swindle home to Grayson.

"What you say is entirely untrue!" I exclaimed. "I won't deny that this is my signature, but I do most certainly deny that I obtained ten thousand pounds from you, Mr. Grayson, and I absolutely refuse to pay it!"

"You refuse to pay!" cried Grayson heatedly. "But you can't refuse! You



have admitted that this is your own signature!"

"I will repay you the three thousand pounds with the usual interest!" I said. "That is the sum I borrowed, and that is the sum I will repay—not a farthing more!"

"Then I will take proceedings to recover my money!" shouted Grayson, losing his temper. "I am not going to be swindled by you, Mr. Fenton!"

This was the limit!

Grayson was actually accusing me of being the swindler!

"You can do what you like!" I retorted, keeping calm with the utmost difficulty. "You're a swindling blackguard, Mr. Grayson, and you know it! You can take this cheque for the amount I borrowed, plus the agreed interest, or you can leave it—whichever you like. But, in any case, you'll get out of my office as quickly as possible. I've had quite enough of your society for one day!"

Grayson grabbed the cheque and the promissory-note, and waved them in the air excitedly as he made for the door.

"All right, Mr. Fenton!" he snarled. "You mark my words. I'll have the remaining seven thousand pounds from you! I'll have the law on you for it!"

"You can do what you like!" I answered. "Only get out!"

The scoundrel left the office, and I sat down with my brain in a whirl. Of all the confounded, barefaced swindles, this was surely the most outrageous!

It was some little time before I calmed down sufficiently to continue my usual work; but after a time I became absorbed, and the incident passed from my mind—at any rate for the time being.

Three days later I had occasion to travel to Norwich on some rather important matter, which I concluded satisfactorily during the early afternoon, and while I had some lunch I looked up the trains to London. I soon found that I could easily catch the express, which reached Liverpool Street at 9.12.

I finished my meal leisurely, and then

sauntered to the station. A little later I took my seat in a first-class compartment, and settled myself comfortably in a corner, preparatory to enjoying a smoke and a novel.

You can imagine my chagrin, Jimmy boy, when I suddenly caught sight of Horaco Grayson hurrying along the platform, evidently looking for a vacant seat in the train. The sight of him brought back all my rage and resentment at his blackguardly conduct three days earlier, and I fervently hoped that he had not seen me.

But this hope was vain, as I soon discovered. Grayson paused, and then came straight over to my compartment, and calmly took a seat, nodding to me quite in a friendly fashion.

I returned his greeting somewhat frigidly, but did not speak. There were several other passengers in the carriage, for which I was heartily glad. I had no desire to have another argument with Grayson, and I prayed that the other occupants of the compartment would travel to London with us.

But again I was disappointed.

All went well until the train reached Stowmarket. And there, unfortunately, Grayson and myself were left alone in the carriage. I knew that it was hopeless to continue my reading, for I could see that Grayson intended to engage me in conversation.

"Now that we have an opportunity for a little private talk, Mr. Fenton," he said, "I intend to ask what you propose to do about that little matter of the seven thousand pounds you still owe me?"

"Now, look here, Grayson," I answered warmly. "The matter you refer to was finally settled in my office three days ago. If you're wise you'll let the matter drop."

"But, my dear sir, I can't afford to let the matter drop," he declared, still keeping up the farce that it was I who was in the wrong. "Seven thousand pounds is a large sum, and I must have it back."

"I must say that you are a pretty good actor, Mr. Grayson," I remarked, lighting a cigarette. "But I can assure you

that it's not quite good enough to convince me that I owe you the sum you mention!"

With some difficulty I was keeping my temper, and I determined that I would not quarrel with the scoundrel if I could possibly help it. He also appeared to have come to a similar decision, for after a few more remarks he changed the subject and began telling me a humorous incident which he had experienced in Norwich.

I was glad of the change—anything to pass the time until the train reached London, when I could easily escape from his hateful presence.

A little later we stopped at Ipswich, and again I hoped that some other passenger would enter our compartment. But my luck was out that day, Jimmy—dead out.

We restarted, and then a change came over Grayson. He began to show his true colours once more, and I realised that he had only been waiting until Ipswich was left behind. He confirmed this a moment later.

"This train is a non-stop from Ipswich to London, Fenton," he said, leaning over towards me. "And before Liverpool Street is reached you and I have got to settle our business."

I laughed.

"So far as I am concerned, the matter is already settled," I remarked easily. "I wish you'd let the matter drop, Grayson, you get on a fellow's nerves!"

"That's all very well," he replied, beginning to get angry. "But if you think you're going to get out of paying, my dear sir, you're entirely mistaken. You have got me to pay the balance of the money you borrowed, and the sooner you realise it the better."

"I absolutely refuse to pay you another farthing, you swindling rotter!" I cried warmly. "I didn't mean to lose my temper with you, but, hang it all, this is more than flesh and blood can stand!"

"Swindler, am I?" roared Grayson, now thoroughly roused. "We shall see, Fenton—we shall see! I'll have you in

THE THREAT!
 "All right, Mr. Fenton," snarled the money-lender, "I'll have the law on you for this!"





court over this matter, and I'll ruin you—I'll sell you up, and turn you into the street, you—you young puppy!"

"You'd better control your tongue, Grayson!" I said, between my teeth. "Don't go too far!"

The scoundrel was boiling with wrath at his failure to scare me with his threats, and he had all his work cut out to keep his hands off me.

"Are you going to pay me?" roared Grayson.

"No, you blackmailing thief, I'm not!" I shouted. "You're a money-lending shark, and your proper place is in prison! You'll never get another penny from me, I can assure you. And it is I who will go to the police, not you. The police are your deadliest enemies, and you know it—you crook!"

Grayson jumped to his feet, almost choking with anger. And then he hurled himself at me like a roaring tiger.

The attack was a little unexpected. I knew that Grayson was enraged, but I didn't think he had the pluck to go for me. He is a flabby sort of man, and not at all the kind of chap you'd expect to fight.

But he was so enraged that he threw discretion to the winds and charged at me like a bull. His fist caught me fairly over the eye, and I was sent flying on to one of the seats. But I was up in a second, now as angry as my opponent, and ready for anything.

"Why, you rotter!" I shouted. "If you want a fight you can have one with pleasure. Nothing will please me better than to give you a thundering good hiding, you—you reptile!"

Well, Jimmy boy, Grayson had asked for it, and I went for him baldheaded. As I had expected, there was not very much fight in the fellow, but I must say that he defended himself pretty well, considering.

But he couldn't last long. I knew. And I meant to teach him a good lesson while I was about it, and I hammered away at him until he was gasping for breath.

"Have you had enough, you rotter?" I panted at last.

"You—you hooligan!" he gasped faintly. "I'll—I'll kill you for this!"

I smiled grimly, and gave him a left-hander which sent him spinning. He grabbed wildly at the luggage-rack, missed it, and then went crashing to the floor of the carriage, and lay still.

"I think that'll do for the present, old chap!" I muttered breathlessly. By George it was warm while it lasted, but I'll bet Grayson has learnt his lesson!

I sank to the cushions, panting from my exertions. The train was rushing towards London at a good rate, and I began to realise that I was in a somewhat awkward position.

And then I thought of the promissory note which Grayson had retained. Was it in his pocket? Or one of his bags? The note was rightfully mine, since I had repaid the sum I borrowed, and I determined to search for it now, while I had the opportunity.

Hurriedly I hunted through Grayson's pockets, but drew blank. He had plenty of money in his pocket-book, but the promissory note was not there. I carefully replaced everything, and then turned my attention to his bags.

Ruthlessly I turned the contents out upon the seat and looked through the various papers they contained. The Gladstone-bag had scarcely any papers in it, and I impatiently thrust it aside and turned my attention to the attache case—the only two articles of luggage Grayson had with him.

C. J.—No. 870.

This was stuffed full of documents, books, and printed matter, and I searched them hastily. And in a few moments I uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Ah, here it is!" I muttered, grasping the promissory note quickly and putting it in my pocket. "I think that will upset your swindling games, Mr. Horace Grayson! You can't claim money from me without evidence, you rotter!"

I felt very pleased at the success of my search, and I had no qualms whatever about taking the paper, for it was mine by right. But my pleasure was short-lived.

At that moment I noticed that the train was beginning to slow down, and I looked round quickly. A kind of panic seemed to seize me, and the awkwardness of my position dawned upon me very forcibly.

If the train pulled up at a station, and I was found there, I should certainly be arrested for assault and robbery. And I told myself that I must get away—leave the train at once.

I glanced at Grayson. He was still lying upon the floor, but he was distinctly showing signs of recovery. And I determined to jump from the train at once, before Grayson fully regained consciousness.

It was dark now, and I had no idea whereabouts we were. But my one thought at that moment was to leave the train. I freely admit that I was wrong—it was the most foolish thing that I could possibly do. But this thought didn't strike me then. My one desire in life was to escape.

I opened the door of the carriage and stopped upon the footboard. We were still slowing down, and every second I expected the train to run into a station. But it didn't.

Closing the door with some difficulty—for it's no joke to hang on to a moving train in this fashion—I took a last look at Grayson. He was beginning to move, and on the spur of the moment I wrenched my bunch of keys from my pocket and locked the carriage door.

I don't know why I did it, Jimmy. Perhaps it was the thought that Grayson would follow me—I don't know. But I always carry a railway key about with me, and it might have been the mere fact of having the key on me which impelled me to lock the door. Anyhow, I did lock it.

The guard had locked the other door at Stowmarket—probably on Grayson's previous instructions.

I looked down at the embankment, and wondered whether it was safe to make the jump. The train was now running through a cutting, and was not travelling at a very great rate. And, fortunately for me, it seemed to be still slowing down.

Still hanging on firmly, I waited until the express slowed down a little more. I could easily tell when the speed increased, and I determined to wait my opportunity to jump when we were going at the slowest rate.

I glanced ahead, but could see nothing in the darkness. No station was in sight, and I was very thankful for this. We were still in the cutting, and suddenly I heard the engine give a few energetic puffs, and at the same moment I felt the train jerk forward.

"Now is the time!" I muttered, clenching my teeth firmly.

I looked downwards, and saw that long grass bordered the railway track. Then I took a sudden spring sideways, and let go my hold.

Luckily, I landed on my feet, in the long, tangled grass, and then sprawled

headlong. But I wasn't hurt in the least, and I scrambled to my feet thankfully, and watched the rear lights of the train disappearing in the distance.

I hardly knew what to do. I had no idea where I was, or how far the nearest town might be. So I set off up the embankment, and walked straight ahead, trusting to luck to lead me back to civilisation.

But I seemed to get further and further away from any sign of human habitation. For miles I walked over fields and meadows, and at last I came in sight of an old barn. By this time I was thoroughly tired out, and I determined to go inside the building and have a sleep.

I opened the door, and entered. The place was empty, and seemed to be quite bare of even a little straw. I struck a match, and saw a ladder leading up to a loft. Mounting this, I was relieved to discover a pile of hay at the end of the large loft, and I walked over to it, and sank down wearily.

I remember no more until I was rudely awakened by Mr. Sexton Blake, the famous detective, and Tinker, his assistant. They told me that I was wanted for murder, Jimmy boy—the murder of Mr. Horace Grayson!

But I swear before Heaven that I did not kill Grayson; I didn't even harm him. When I left the train he was showing every sign of recovery, and I know no more than the dead who killed the scoundrel.

I was flabbergasted when Mr. Blake told me that a murder had occurred, and the only suggestion I can offer is that somebody was hiding under the seat. It would be easy for a tramp to rob Grayson after I had left, and kill him afterwards—probably by accident.

I explained all this to Mr. Blake, but I couldn't hope that he'd believe my unsupported story. I realised that the case looked exceedingly black against me, and I at last prevailed upon Mr. Blake to take my word of honour that I was innocent of the crime, and to place me in a place of safety for one week while he made further investigations.

After a while he agreed to do this, and I suggested that he should have me guarded night and day. On my part, I agreed that I would make no attempt to escape.

So that's the position, Jimmy boy. I'm a prisoner in this house at Fulham, and Tinker is continually on guard. But even if he were not here I should not leave the house, for I have given Mr. Blake my word of honour.

It is exceedingly kind and generous of Sexton Blake to make even this concession, for I suppose that he is really placing himself in some danger by so doing. I really think that the famous detective believes in my innocence, otherwise he surely wouldn't have agreed to my suggestion. And this gives me hope, for if any man in London can prove who killed Mr. Grayson, Mr. Blake is that man.

But everything looks so hopeless and black against me. In spite of my hopes, I am beginning to fear that Mr. Blake must fail in his efforts. If he does, I shall, of course, be handed over to the police at the end of a week—handed over as a cold-blooded and brutal murderer!

Oh, Jimmy, it's awful! It's simply appalling!

But I have given my word, and I must remain here a passive prisoner.

And now, as a concluding word, I want you to do me a favour, old man. Will you go and see Miss Barry, tell her that I'm safe and well, and do all you possibly can to comfort her?

I know you won't mind doing this for



me; and a visit from you will put the dear girl at her ease a little. For she has, of course, seen the papers, and will naturally be anxious. But she believes in my innocence, I feel certain.

Needless to say, I am hoping against hope that Mr. Blake will succeed in finding out the truth before the end of the week. If he does, everything will be all right, and my name will be cleared.

In the meantime, a letter from you, Jimmy boy, will greatly cheer me up, and I am confidently expecting a reply by return of post.

With kindest regards and best of wishes.

Your unfortunate chum,

TED.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Letter from Tinker to Nelson Lee.

78, Benmore Gardens,
Fulham, S.W.,
February 25th.

DEAR MR. LEE,—Of course, you know that I'm at present acting as a temporary warder in this house—that is, if you have read my letter to Nipper. And I don't mind admitting to you that I'm fed up with the job.

Not that it's hard or tedious; it isn't that at all. Rather the opposite, in fact; there isn't enough action about it for my liking. Edward Fenton, the prisoner, is in the next room, and he's absolutely a model of good behaviour.

I don't know what to make of the business at all. Fenton strikes me as being a jolly decent sort of chap, and not a bit like a murderer. But if he didn't kill Grayson, I'm blessed if I can see who did.

So far, my prisoner has shown no sign that he wants to escape, and I don't believe he would if he got the chance. He told the gov'nor that he wouldn't try it on, and he's keeping his word.

At present he's comfortably seated before the fire, having a read. The windows of the room are not barred, but they've got closed shutters on the outside, and these are securely locked. The door of the room is also locked, so it wouldn't be very easy for Fenton to get away, even if he did decide to make the attempt.

I'm simply stuck here doing nothing, and, as I said before, I'm fed up. I feel as if I want to be doing something to help the gov'nor with the case. As it is, I'm completely in the dark about it all, and I haven't the least idea what Sexton Blake is doing, or how he's getting on.

I'm writing you this letter chiefly to tell you that an adventure has occurred, and I'm jolly pleased, for it has relieved the monotony of my position, and given me a little companionship.

I was reading by the fire in the room next to Fenton's, when I suddenly heard somebody approaching the front door. This struck me as funny, for I expected nobody, and I knew the gov'nor would ring me up if he had sent anyone to me, or even if he was coming himself.

A moment later several knocks sounded upon the door, and I thought I heard voices. So there was more than one visitor! I thought for a second, and then decided to go and see who it was. I had to be careful, you know, because in hiding Fenton in the house Sexton Blake was really breaking the law.

I opened the door curiously, and then I nearly fell over with surprise, for Nipper and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were standing on the doorstep, smiling cheerfully.

"Hallo, old son!" exclaimed Nipper heartily. "How goes it?"

"Dear fellow, I am delighted to see

you again—I am, really!" said Sir Montie.

"Well, I'm blowed!" I ejaculated. "If this doesn't take the biscuit! But, by gosh, I'm absolutely overjoyed to see you both! Come in, you bounders! How on earth did you know where I was? And what the dickens are you doing up in London?"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Go easy, old boy! You're askin' too many questions at once."

"We came up this morning over some blessed legal rot of Montie's," said Nipper, as they followed me into the sitting-room.

"Pardon me, old boy, we did nothin' of the kind!" exclaimed Montie. "We came up to London to transact some important legal business, Tinker, an' after we had concluded the matter Nipper suggested that we should look you up, you know."

"Jolly good idea!" I said. "But I hope you aren't in a hurry to leave now that you have come. I'm fed up with being here alone."

per—I do, really!" he murmured. "I shall be most pleased to stay here for the night."

"Good!" I exclaimed heartily. "That's settled, then. Buck up and get your overcoats off, and we'll have some grub."


We soon prepared a hearty meal, and sat down to enjoy it. I had already seen to Fenton's needs, and had taken him his supper on a tray. The poor chap was too worried to eat very heartily, but, of course, he had to have something.

I told Nipper and Montie everything I knew about the strange case while we consumed our meal, and we discussed every solution to the mystery.

"It's no good," I said at last. "We're simply wasting time in jawing here. The gov'nor will get to the bottom of the matter before long. Let us go to bed."

"Right-ho!" said Nipper, with a yawn. "It's getting a bit late, and I'm feeling tired after messing about over Montie's legal business all the afternoon."

"Begad! It's not often I have occasion to come to London, payin'



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1 1/2

THE CASE OF THE FOUR STATUES

A Remarkable Tale of Mystery & Adventure, Advancing Sexton Blake, Tinker, and Zenith the Albino.

"Well, I don't know," replied Nipper. "There's no particular hurry, at any rate. Montie's legal business took much longer than we thought, otherwise we should have been here before. But it's all settled now, and we're free to do as we like for a bit. We knew you were here from your letter, so we thought we'd come and cheer you up in your loneliness."

Of course, Mr. Lee, Nipper will tell you all about what happened himself when he returns to St. Frank's, and I'm only writing you this letter to keep up the sequence of events, and also to preserve a record of them.

"Well, I'll tell you what, my sons," I exclaimed, "there's tons of room here, and you've jolly well got to stay the night. You've admitted that you're free to do as you like, and I'll take no refusal."

"Personally, I shall be delighted to stop," Nipper said, turning to his pal. "How about you, Montie?"

"Dear fellow, I say the same as Nip-

per—I do, really," protested Montie. "As usual, you're exaggeratin'—you are, really."

"Well, are you two going to sleep together, or would you prefer separate rooms?" I asked. "You can take your choice."

"Dear old boy, Nipper an' I will share the same room," murmured Montie.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Nipper. "Lead the way, Tinker old man!"

We all mounted to the upper floor, and I showed my two visitors to their room. The house was a large one, and had several well-furnished bed-rooms in it, so there was plenty of room for us all.

Fenton, of course, being a prisoner for the time being, had a bed in the back room downstairs, and he was securely locked in for the night.

I led the way into a large bed-room in the front of the house and switched on the electric light.

"How's this, my sons?" I exclaimed.

"Great—simply terrific!" said Nipper,



looking round at the comfortable bed and solid furniture.

"Dear fellow, this is really toppin'!" declared Sir Montie. "Mr. Blake believes in bein' comfortable, at any rate—he does, really!"

"This isn't the gov'nor's house, you fathead!" I said. "He's hired this place especially for Fenton's benefit."

"Oh, I see!" said Nipper. "I wondered why the house was so beautifully furnished. But that explains it."

"Sexton Blake has known the owner of this house for years, and he's rented it on several occasions," I explained. "He often has occasion to require a private retreat, and it's jolly handy to be able to get it."

"Begad! Rather!" agreed Montie. "Where are you sleepin', dear old boy?"

"In the next room to this," I said. "Good-night, my sons—pleasant dreams!"

I retired to my own room, and was soon in bed and asleep. Somehow, I felt more contented after the pleasant supper with Nipper and Montie, and I dropped off at once.

I must have been asleep for about a couple of hours, when I suddenly woke up with a start, having been disturbed by a slight sound. I'm a light sleeper, as a rule—the gov'nor's training has taught me to be—and the least unusual noise arouses me.

Wide awake in a moment, I listened intently, and again I heard something moving outside in the passage.

"Queer!" I thought, jumping out of bed hastily. "Who on earth is that, I wonder?"

I crossed to the door and opened it noiselessly. And then I saw the dim outline of a pyjama-clad figure in the corridor, standing quite still. As I emerged from my room the figure moved.

"Hist!" it breathed, silently edging towards me. "That you, Tinker?"

"Yes," I whispered, recognising Nipper's voice. "What on earth are you doing out here, you blithering—"

"I thought I heard somebody moving about down below," he explained, in a low tone. "Somebody bashed up against something just now, I'm certain, and I woke up instantly. Listen!"

We stood quite still.

"Begad!" said a voice behind us. "Is anythin' the matter, dear fellows?"

"Shurrup!" hissed Nipper. "Listen!"

"Pray don't be so frightfully theatrical, Nipper!" protested Sir Montie mildly. "You gave me quite a start—you did, really!"

"Will you be quiet, you fathead!" whispered Nipper. "There's someone down below!"

"Oh, begad!" murmured Montie.

He remained silent, and we all gazed down the stairs into the darkness below. But we could hear nothing. Everything was quiet and still.

"You must have been mistaken, old man," I whispered.

"No fear!" exclaimed Nipper decidedly. "I'll swear I heard something! We'd better go down and make investigations. Come on!"

We all crept silently down the stairs, shivering a little. For we were all merely wearing our pyjamas, and the weather is anything but warm just at present. Nipper led the way, and Montie and I followed.

At the foot of the stairs we paused. And then I heard a scuffling sound and a thud.

"Ooooch!" gasped Nipper. "What—who the dickens punched me in the chest? Great Scott! Come on, you chaps! There's some rotter here, and he's going for me baldheaded!"

J.—No. 870.

"Begad! Where is the frightful beast?" said Montie. "I'll—Ow!"

"You sound as if you've found him, Montie—or he's found you!" I grinned.

In two seconds a terrific struggle was going on in the hall, and in the darkness it was very difficult to hit out with any degree of certainty. Every now and again the chap we were fighting gave a grunt, but he said nothing. And all the time we were grappling with one another.

I grabbed hold of an arm, which was obviously that of the intruder, for I felt the sleeve of his coat. And I hung on, and did my best to pinion the fellow's other arm as well.

"I've got him!" I gasped. "Give a hand here, Nipper!"

"Where are you, Tinker?" panted Nipper. "Blessed if I can see a thing here! Montie, go and switch on the lights, for goodness' sake!"

"Dear fellow, I don't know where I am any more than you do!" exclaimed Montie. "Hold on to the frightful rotter while I find the switch!"

"Buck up, then!" I shouted.

"Begad! I'll be as quick as I can, dear old boy—I will, really!" murmured Sir Montie.

Nipper managed to grasp the legs of the man, and we all went over with a fearful crash. And at that moment Montie found the switch, and the hall was flooded with light.

"Thank goodness!" I panted. "Who the blazes have we got here, Nipper?"

"It's—it's a burglar!" gasped Nipper breathlessly. "A masked burglar!"

"Well, he doesn't look like a burglar, at any rate," I said, as I noticed that the stranger was wearing an expensive suit and a good overcoat. "He's more like a Piccadilly knut than anything else."

"You're quite right, old boy," said Tregellis-West, coming over and looking down at the captured man. "This chap has certainly the outward appearance of a gentleman—he has, really."

Nipper and I were still holding the intruder tightly, and he was unable to move. He was pretty nearly winded by the struggle, and his breath was coming in gasps.

"Who the dickens are you—and what do you mean by breaking in here?" I demanded.

"By Jove! Give a fellow a chance, you know!" panted the man. "I was under the impression that only Tinker was on guard over Teddy—not a blessed troupe!"

"What? Who are you?" I asked curiously, pulling off his mask. "I've never seen you before that I know of."

The face of a smart young man was revealed, now very hot and red. His hair was dishevelled, and his collar and tie were badly crumpled. His clothes, too, were somewhat dusty. He appeared to be quite a harmless sort of fellow, and Nipper and I both released him at the same moment.

"That's better!" he said, in rather a drawling voice, as he struggled to his feet. "I don't know who you boys are, but you must allow me to compliment you on your fightin' powers! I never had such a rousin' reception!"

We grinned, and glanced at one another.

"Dear fellow, you must allow me to inform you that you are intrudin'," said Montie, adjusting his pince-nez, and looking the stranger up and down with interest. "An' let me remind you that you haven't answered Tinker's question yet—you haven't, really! Who are you?"

"Well," answered the man languidly, "my name happens to be Tetloe—Jimmy Tetloe—an' I came here with the inten-

tion of rescuin' my pal Teddy—Edward Fenton, you know."

"The dickens you did!" I ejaculated warmly.

"You see," explained Tetloe. "Teddy has given his word to Mr. Blake that he won't make any attempt to escape. But that wouldn't prevent me from kidnappin' him—carryin' him off to a place of real safety, by Jove!"

I stared.

"But what on earth for?" I demanded. "Fenton's safe enough here, isn't he?"

"Yes. But supposin' Mr. Blake fails to find the real murderer?" said Tetloe. "Poor old Teddy won't be safe then, will he? He'll be handed over to the police, an' then goodness knows what'll happen to him!"

"Begad! You are goin' on the assumption that Mr. Blake will fail, old boy," remarked Tregellis-West. "And that's absurd, you know—it is, really!"

"I don't know so much about that," declared Tetloe. "Poor old Jimmity explained all about the beastly affair in his letter, an' it strikes me that Mr. Blake will have all his work cut out to find the real murderer of Mr. Grayson within the week. An' if he doesn't, it'll be rotten for Jimmy, you know—simply rotten!"

"That's right enough," said Nipper.

"But how the dickens could you hope to 'carry off' a man like Fenton?—Why, according to Tinker, he's a bigger chap than you are!"

Jimmy Tetloe grinned rather sheepishly.

"I don't know exactly how I should have managed the job," he confessed. "But I wanted to make sure of Teddy's safety. There's only three days of that blessed week left, an' I was gettin' anxious."

"Don't you worry, Mr. Tetloe," I said confidently. "You leave it all to the gov'nor, he won't fail. And he'll do the trick easily before the week has elapsed."

"Well, I hope you're right, Tinker," said Tetloe. "I seem to have butted into this house just at the wrong moment. I had no idea that Teddy had such a strong bodyguard—by Jove, I hadn't!"

I grinned.

"This is Nipper," I said, introducing him, "the assistant of Mr. Nelson Lee. And this is his chum, Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's College!"

"Charmed to make your acquaintance, dear boys," drawled Tetloe. "But I can't help wishin' that our first meetin' had been a little more conventional—I'm sore all over!"

"Dear fellow, that is entirely your own fault—it is, really," smiled Sir Montie. "But what are you goin' to do? I don't suppose that Tinker will hand you over to the police as a burglar, begad! Will you, old boy?"

He turned to me and winked.

"Well, we'll let you off this time, Mr. Tetloe," I said. "But I suppose you want to see Fenton, don't you?"

"I should rather say so!" declared Tetloe. "That's what I came for, you know. But the kidnappin' stunt is off now!"

"Absolutely off!" I added, as I made towards Fenton's room.

"Begad! If you an' Mr. Tetloe are goin' to have a jaw with the prisoner, Tinker, I think Nipper an' I had better get back to bed—I do, really," said Montie. "It is frightfully cold in this hall when one is wearin' nothin' but pyjamas."

"Good idea," agreed Nipper. "Come on, Montie!"

They went off upstairs once more, and Tetloe followed me into Fenton's room. Of course, he was asleep, but he soon woke up. He was delighted to see his



pal, and very amused when he heard the events of the last ten minutes.

The two friends talked together for a while, and Fenton seemed to be tremendously bucked up by Tetloe's visit, for the latter assured the unfortunate Fenton that everything would be all right, and that he was not to worry in the least.

Then Tetloe took his departure, and I got back to bed, and finished my night's rest.

The next morning, while we were having breakfast, the gov'nor arrived. He was pleased to see Nipper and Montie, and very amused at the adventure of last night. But he was in a hurry, and could not stop to hear all the details.

"I want you, Tinker," he said.

"Want me, sir?" I repeated. "Good! But what about the prisoner?"

"Probably Nipper and Montie will oblige us by remaining on guard for a while," suggested Sexton Blake, looking at them.

"Certainly, sir!" said Nipper readily.

"I shall be delighted to do so."

"Bogad! So shall I, Mr. Blake—I shall, really!" murmured Montie languidly.

"Thank you, boys," said the gov'nor.

"You will be helping me greatly by remaining here for a while, and I am sure that Mr. Lee won't mind."

"And I've got to come with you at once, gov'nor?" I asked.

"Yes, Tinker, immediately," said Sexton Blake.

And that is about all I've got to say in this letter, Mr. Lee. I hope you won't mind about Nipper and Montie stopping here for a bit; it won't be for long, anyway.

"I'll write you all the details of future developments as soon as I get a chance, old man," I said to Nipper, as I was leaving the house with the gov'nor.

"But I shall see you again before I go back," said Nipper in surprise.

"Never mind," I answered, "I'll write you in any event; it'll be a record of the case. You'll want it to show to Mr. Lee, too."

"Oh, yes," said Nipper. "Well, good-bye, Tinker, and good luck!"

I said good-bye to Montie, and then left with Sexton Blake.

With regard to the rest of this strange puzzle, Mr. Lee, you'll be able to learn all details from my next letter, which will be addressed to Nipper.

Kindest regards from the gov'nor and myself—he told me to send you his.

Yours very faithfully,

TINKER.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Letter from Tinker to Nipper.

Baker Street, London, W.,

February 27th.

MY DEAR OLD NIPPER,—As you know, at the time the gov'nor called for me at Fulham I was completely in the dark as to what he'd been doing to establish Edward Fenton's innocence, and it was not until after we'd run down to Brentwood that I discovered what Sexton Blake was up to.

When the gov'nor and I left you and Montie in charge of the prisoner, we boarded our large touring-car, which Sexton Blake had used to bring him to Fulham, and started off for Brentwood, although I didn't know it at the time.

"Now, then, gov'nor, how's the case progressing?" I asked, when we were fairly under way. "Have you made any discoveries?"

"None to speak of," answered Sexton Blake shortly.

"Well, that's pretty rotten," I

observed. "This affair is proving a puzzler, and no mistake. Even now you don't know whether Fenton is innocent or guilty, do you, sir?"

"No!"

"You're jolly snappy this morning, gov'nor!" I complained. "You almost jumped down my throat over the 'phone when I rang you up last time, too. Where are we off to now?"

"Brentwood!"

"What for?" I demanded.

"To test a theory of mine, if you particularly wish to know," said Sexton Blake. "And now don't worry me, my lad!"

"Oh, all right, sir," I replied grumpily. "By the look of things, this trip is going to be jolly cheerful—I don't think!"

After that I relapsed into silence. Sexton Blake seemed to be in a black mood, and I thought it best to leave him alone for a spell. We bowled along in the car through the City and the East End, and the gov'nor let her rip as soon as we got through Stratford.

After that it didn't take long to get to Brentwood, and Sexton Blake turned off sharp to the right at the top of the hill as we entered the town, and pulled the car up at the station.

"You wait here in the car, Tinker," he said, as he jumped down. "I sha'n't be long!"

"Right-ho, sir!" I replied.

I wondered how long he'd be, and what he'd gone into the station for, and I determined to ask him when he reappeared.

After ten minutes' wait Sexton Blake emerged from the station, and climbed into the car again.

"Drawn blank, Tinker," he grunted.

"Look here, gov'nor," I began warmly. "You're not playing the game at all. Here have I been stuck over at Fulham, guarding Fenton, and now you've brought me down to Brentwood without a word of explanation. What's the game, sir? What are you looking for? What have you come down to this place for, anyhow? How the dickens can you hope to find the murderer here? You might let me into the know, and tell me what's happening."

Sexton Blake chuckled.

"Anything else you'd like to know, Tinker?" he asked.

"I don't know anything yet, gov'nor, not a blessed thing!" I replied.

"Well, perhaps I have been treating you rather unfairly, my lad," admitted Sexton Blake. "But I've been worried—deucedly worried. However, I will make amends by taking you into my confidence at once."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "That's the most sensible remark you've made this morning, gov'nor!"

"In the first place, Tinker," began Sexton Blake, "the inquest upon the body of Horace Grayson will take place this afternoon at Liverpool Street Station, or some place near by, and the coroner's jury is bound to bring in a verdict of wilful murder against Edward Fenton."

"That's about the only verdict they could bring in, sir!" I agreed.

"If possible, I want to avert that!" declared Sexton Blake.

"How could you do that, gov'nor?" I asked curiously.

"By bringing forward evidence to show that Grayson's death was caused by an accident!" said Sexton Blake impressively.

I stared at him in amazement.

"An accident, gov'nor!" I gasped.

"Precisely, Tinker!" agreed Sexton Blake calmly.

"But—but that's impossible, sir—it must be!" I answered helplessly. "You know that Grayson was beaten to death

in a fearfully brutal manner. And he was locked in the compartment—absolutely alone!"

"Certainly!" said the gov'nor. "But in spite of that I think it is quite possible to prove that the affair was a pure accident."

"Well, sir, it beats me!" I declared. "I'm blessed if I can see how a thing like that can be proved. It seems so—so— Well, so fantastic."

"I will admit that on the face of it the thing appears to be impossible, as you remark," went on Sexton Blake. "Perhaps I had better explain my theory to you, Tinker."

"I wish you would, sir!" I replied. "I'm in a bit of a maze now, I can tell you!"

"Let me reconstruct, as far as possible, what actually happened in that fatal compartment," continued Sexton Blake, as we drove along in the direction of Romford. "We know that Fenton and Grayson fought, and that, according to Fenton's story, Grayson was knocked out, but not in any way injured by the encounter."

"Yes, gov'nor; everything is clear up to that point," I remarked.

"So far, so good," said Sexton Blake.

"Fenton left the carriage, locking the door before he jumped from the train. Shortly afterwards Grayson recovered from the effects of the knock-out blow, and struggled to his feet. Now, Tinker, what would a man in Grayson's predicament, finding himself alone in the compartment, dazed and bewildered, naturally do first?"

"Shove his head out of the window, gov'nor, for fresh air!" I replied.

"Precisely, Tinker—precisely!" exclaimed Sexton Blake. "And it is my firm belief that this is exactly what Grayson did do, and lost his life by so doing into the bargain!"

I looked at the gov'nor in surprise.

"Lost his life by putting his head out of the window, sir?" I repeated. "How the dickens do you make that out?"

"Well, my lad, taking Fenton's story at its face-value, as it were, there only remains one possible explanation of Grayson's death," declared Sexton Blake firmly. "We have already agreed that Grayson's first action after recovering was to put his head out of the window, have we not?"

"Yes, gov'nor," I said.

"If my theory is not all at fault," continued the gov'nor, "his death came almost immediately afterwards—brought about, I should say, by his head being forcibly struck by a projection from a passing train."

"Great Scott!" I ejaculated.

"Such a projection," continued Sexton Blake, "would have the effect of killing Grayson on the spot, and pitching his body back into the carriage. Either this happened, or Fenton is guilty—one or the other, Tinker. There is no other possible explanation of the mystery."

"Well, I'm blowed!" I exclaimed. "It all seems so simple now you explain it like that, gov'nor. That ass of a porter must have been wrong when he said that both windows of the compartment were closed. And I believe you're right, sir—Fenton, after all, is an innocent man. I'm jolly glad, for he's a decent sort of chap."

"Yes," agreed Sexton Blake, "Fenton certainly did not strike me as being the sort of man to murder a fellow-creature in cold blood. And his story, improbable as it sounded, had a ring of truth about it."

"That's what I thought, sir, really," I replied. "But I couldn't see any possible explanation of the crime, apart from Fenton's being the culprit. But U. J.—No. 870.



what are you doing down here now, sir—looking for the projection which caused Grayson's death?"

"Yes, my lad," said Sexton Blake. "I drew a complete blank at Brentwood. So we will see what the station at Romford can teach us."

By this time the car had nearly landed us in Romford, and we made all haste to the station. Arriving there, we went straight to the goods department, and interviewed the clerk in charge.

After a lot of questioning, looking up papers, ringing up other departments, and goodness knows what else, the gov'nor discovered that a goods-train passed the Norwich express that night between Shenfield and Romford.

"But that goods-train is broken up now, sir, of course!" said the clerk. "The trucks are now in sidings at several stations."

"Can you let me have a complete list of them?" asked Sexton Blake, slipping a ten-shilling note into the man's palm.

"Yes, sir; I think so," answered the clerk readily. "If you wait here a few minutes I'll get one for you."

We waited.

In about ten minutes the man returned, and handed Sexton Blake the required list. The gov'nor thanked him, and we went out to the car.

"Now, Tinker," murmured Sexton Blake thoughtfully, "let us see. This list gives an outline of the contents of the various trucks. Ah, this looks a likely starting-point! I observe that two trucks, loaded with heavy agricultural implements, are in a siding at Harold Wood Station. Suppose we run over there at once?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" I answered. "Harold Wood is only just up the road. We can get there in ten minutes easily."

"You take the wheel, my lad, while I examine this list further," said the gov'nor, taking his seat.

"Right-ho, sir!" I replied, starting the engine. "Do you think we shall find what we want at Harold Wood—or are there any more trucks containing heavy farming machinery?"

He looked down the various entries, and then shook his head.

"There does not appear to be anything else which would in any way fit in with my theory," he said. "I am confident that we shall discover the fatal projection which caused Grayson's death in the siding at Harold Wood."

Well, Nipper, old chap, the gov'nor and I were pretty confident that the end of this strange case was practically in sight, and we made all haste to the small station, which, as you know, is situated between Romford and Brentwood. I let the car go for all she was worth along the lovely stretch of tarred road, and we reached our destination in a very few minutes.

Sexton Blake went straight to the stationmaster's office, and briefly explained his business. The official was impressed, and conducted us himself to the siding where the trucks were now lying.

"These are the two trucks, Mr. Blake," said the stationmaster, pointing.

"Thank you!" replied the gov'nor. "One of them, I perceive, contains a mowing-machine of the self-binder pattern. An examination of that will most probably prove to be enlightening."

It was!

Sexton Blake at once made his way to the side of the truck which had passed close to the Norwich express, and he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as he saw that a portion of the ironwork of the self-binder was loose.

He turned to the stationmaster.

U. J.—No. 870.

"Can I have a few words with the porters who shunted these trucks into the siding?" he asked.

"Yes, certainly!" answered the official. "I'll call them at once."

He turned round, and yelled out two names in stentorian tones, and a minute or two later the two porters came running up, wondering what on earth was the matter, to judge by the expressions upon their faces.

"This gentleman wants to ask you two men a few questions," explained the stationmaster, indicating Sexton Blake.

"Are you the man who uncoupled these trucks from the goods-train, and shunted them along here?" asked the gov'nor.

"Yes, sir," said one of the men.

"Well, I want you to think carefully," went on Sexton Blake impressively. "Do you remember if this piece of ironwork was projecting over the side of the truck at the time of arrival?"

He indicated the loose member as he spoke, and looked at the man.

The one who had spoken before answered at once.

"Yes, sir," he said quickly. "I remember quite distinctly. That piece of iron was stickin' out a good bit over the side of the truck, an' I thought at the time that it was dangerous. That must have worked loose somehow, an' I pushed it back myself while we were shuntin' the trucks in."

"Thank you!" said Sexton Blake in satisfied tones. "That is all I wish to know."

He now turned his attention upon the loose piece of ironwork, and carefully examined the end of it through his powerful lens. Then he turned to me.

"Come here, Tinker!" he called.

"What do you make of that?"

I took the lens, and squinted through it at the projecting piece of iron.

"Great Scott, gov'nor!" I ejaculated excitedly. "I can see some—some dried hair, and—and pieces of skin! Oh, it's horrible, sir!"

"I agree with you, my lad," agreed Sexton Blake. "It is horrible. But it is positive proof that Mr. Horace Grayson's death was accidentally caused by this piece of iron!"

"Of course it is, sir!" I exclaimed. "Absolute proof! It's simply marvellous how you worked all this out in your mind, and then came down here and proved it like this."

Sexton Blake smiled.

"I'm glad, Tinker—very glad," he said simply. "For I now have my case complete, and Mr. Edward Fenton is cleared of all suspicion."

"By George, won't he be delighted!" I said. "But this case is one of the queerest cases you've ever handled, gov'nor, in my opinion. I know jolly well that if the police had had the matter in hand Fenton would certainly have been hanged for a crime he never committed!"

"Probably he would," agreed the gov'nor. "There was every indication of his guilt, and the fact that he left the train was very much against him. However, we have now plenty of evidence that the whole affair was a most unfortunate accident, and we must hasten to inform Morley of our discoveries."

"The inspector will have a fit when you tell him that Fenton's innocent!" I grinned.

Sexton Blake turned to the stationmaster, and made arrangements for the truck containing the mowing-machine to be covered up at once and left untouched until the police had made their examination.

After that, we left the station, and strolled into the village, leaving the car

where it was. But I think the gov'nor himself has explained the concluding events of this peculiar case in a letter to Mr. Lee.

So there's no need for me to say any more, Nipper, old top.

Kindest regards to Mottie and yourself—not forgetting poor old Tommy Watson, whom I haven't seen for ages.

Your affectionate chum,

TINKER.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Letter from Sexton Blake to Nelson Lee.

Baker Street, London, W.

February 27th.

MY DEAR LEE,—I believe that Tinker, in his letter to your assistant, has recorded the events of this amazing affair up to the point when we left Harold Wood Station, leaving our car behind. Therefore, if you have read that letter, you are now fully cognisant of all the facts to date.

Taking it for granted that you are interested in the matter, it is natural that you would like a brief history of the concluding incidents, and I am therefore taking up the thread where Tinker left off.

"What's the next move, gov'nor?" asked Tinker, as we walked towards the main street of the village.

"The next move, my lad, is to get through to Morley immediately," I replied. "After that, I think we may as well obtain something to eat while we await the worthy inspector's arrival."

"Jolly fine idea, sir!" declared Tinker heartily. "I'm simply starving!"

We soon found a telephone call-office, and I at once got through to Scotland Yard. Of course, Morley might possibly be out, but I thought this unlikely. The inquest was not due to take place for several hours yet.

As luck would have it, the inspector was in.

"Hallo—hallo! Who is that?" called a voice over the wire.

"Blake speaking," I answered. "That you, Morley?"

"Yes. Where on earth are you, Blake? Your voice sounds a good way off, somehow."

"I'm at Harold Wood," I answered.

"What the thunder are you doing down there?" demanded Morley. "And what have you rung me up for? Anything the matter?"

"No. But I want you to come down here immediately, Morley," I said. "You'll find it to your advantage, I can assure you. If you hurry, you can just catch a train which leaves Liverpool Street in fourteen minutes from now."

"Great Scott! That'll be a rush!" exclaimed Morley. "But what's it all about, Blake—that Grayson affair?"

"Yes!"

"All right—I'll come!" said the inspector at once. "Expect me by that train. Good-bye!"

He rang off, and I left the telephone-box and rejoined Tinker.

"Did you get him, sir?" asked the lad.

"Yes, and he is coming immediately," I answered. "His train cannot arrive for three-quarters of an hour, however, so we have ample time to obtain a good meal."

"There's an hotel over the road, sir. What about that?" asked Tinker.

"I dare say that will suit us as well as any other place," I answered, as we crossed over.

We entered, and were soon enjoying our food. There was no hurry, and we took things comfortably, chatting over the case meanwhile. When we had



finished we strolled back to the station, and then sauntered up and down the platform, awaiting the arrival of the train.

In a few minutes the signal went down, the train steamed in, and pulled up with a jerk.

"The inspector's come all right, guv'nor!" exclaimed Tinker. "I saw his chivvy, as the train whizzed in! He's in the front!"

"So I observed, my lad," I replied, walking towards the official, who had now alighted. "Apparently, he has brought two companions with him."

A moment later I was shaking hands cordially with Detective-Inspector Morley, who introduced his two colleagues, and then walked ahead with me.

"Now, then, Blake," he said eagerly, "what's all the excitement about? Have you found out the real murderer is Fenton, as I said?"

I smiled.

"Well, I haven't asked you to come down here especially to obtain proof of Fenton's guilt, my dear fellow," I answered. "On the contrary, I strongly advise you to abandon your search for Fenton. You are on an entirely wrong trail!"

The inspector glared at me.

"What the thunder do you mean, Blake?" he demanded. "There's no doubt whatever that Fenton is the murderer, and I mean to get him! I don't understand you at all. You know perfectly well that what I say is right!"

"I don't agree with you, Morley," I replied calmly.

"But, hang it all, Blake, Fenton must be the culprit!" declared the inspector warmly. "We have tried and tested every other possible channel, and his guilt is absolutely proved—proved to the hilt!"

"How?" I asked.

"Well, in the first place, Fenton and Grayson travelled from Norwich together, didn't they?" demanded Morley.

"Certainly! We agree on that point, my dear fellow," I said, smiling.

"We have obtained positive proof that the two men greatly disliked one another," continued the inspector, warming to his work. "The guard of the Norwich express has sworn that he saw the two men both at Stowmarket and at Ipswich, talking together on friendly terms."

"Up to that point you are on pretty solid ground, Morley," I answered. "But from there you are merely going upon supposition."

"Naturally!" agreed the inspector. "When the train left Ipswich the two men were alone in the carriage, and we can only suppose that they quarrelled, and afterwards came to blows. It is quite evident that during the fight which ensued Fenton killed Grayson, robbed him, and then left the train in the cutting."

"That is what you are assuming," I remarked. "There is no direct evidence to prove it, however."

"But, dash it all, Blake," exclaimed Morley, with some heat, "no man will ever be able to conclusively prove what happened in the carriage! Fenton, when we get him, will make some sort of statement, but what he says may be totally false. He'll make out a case favourable to himself, naturally. But I don't think it'll help him much. He'll swing for Grayson's death as sure as the sun is shining now!"

I shook my head.

"I don't think so, Morley," I replied.

"Well, I don't know what to make of you to-day, Blake—blowed if I do!" declared the inspector. "I don't see what more you want to convince you. Why,

the very fact of Fenton's disappearance is sufficient to prove his guilt! If he's innocent, as you seem to think, why hasn't he come forward?"

"You can hardly expect him to do so, under the circumstances," I replied. "If he is innocent of this crime, it would be a most unwise action on his part to give himself up at this juncture. For he undoubtedly knows by the papers exactly how the matter stands, and he would be simply running his head into the noose." Morley looked at me with an expression of exasperation in his eyes.

"Look here, Blake, I've had enough of this!" he said firmly. "What in the name of goodness are you driving at? You've got something up your sleeve! I'm not idiot enough to believe that you've brought me down to this beastly hole simply to tell me that I'm on the wrong track! Now, out with it!"

I smiled, and faced the inspector squarely.

"I'm going to ask you a plain, blunt question, Morley," I said, "and I want you to give me a straightforward answer."

"Right!" he said. "That's what I want, Blake. What's the question?"

"Merely this," I replied. "If I can produce positive evidence to show that Grayson was killed by accident, will you undertake to have the search for Edward Fenton abandoned?"

The inspector gasped.

"An accident!" he repeated blankly. "My dear man, you can't do it! The thing is impossible!"

"You have not answered my question, Morley," I reminded him gently.

"But— Well, Blake, if you can bring forward evidence of that sort, of course the police-case will fall to pieces, and Fenton won't be required," he answered, in a sceptical tone. "But you can't do it! It's altogether too absurd!"

I laughed.

"Come with me, my dear fellow," I said, taking him by the arm, and making towards the goods department. "I think I can show you something which will surprise you."

"Oh, all right, Blake!" answered the inspector. "You're mighty mysterious over this business, I must say!"

"Have patience a little longer, Morley," I remarked.

Tinker and Morley's two companions had heard our conversation, and they were just behind us when we reached the two trucks. I could see that the three men were somewhat mystified, and wondering what was in the wind.

"What's the idea of bringing us here?" demanded the inspector impatiently.

"You will understand in a moment, Morley," I replied. "Just listen to me for a few minutes. These two trucks contain heavy agricultural machinery, as you can see, and the trucks recently formed part of a goods-train which left London on the night of the Grayson affair."

"Well?" said Morley, becoming more mystified than ever. "What about 'em?"

"That goods-train passed the Norwich express at some point between Shenfield and Romford," I continued. "That fact has been proved, but you can easily verify it by interviewing the railway people."

"But I don't see the drift of all this, Blake!" protested Morley.

"You will do in a moment," I replied calmly. "As you will observe, a portion of this self-binder is loose, and at the time the goods-train passed the express this piece of ironwork was projecting over the truck's side."

"Go on, Blake!" grunted Morley. "Perhaps I shall grasp your meaning soon!"

"Grayson, as we are fairly certain, fought with Fenton. Grayson got the worst of that fight, Morley, and was knocked out," I continued. "While Grayson was still unconscious, Fenton left the train. Shortly afterwards, Grayson recovered his senses, and staggered to the window for fresh air—quite a natural action on his part."

"How do you know all this?" demanded Morley.

"I am reconstructing for your benefit the events as they must have occurred," I answered. "Grayson's last act was to push his head out of the carriage window, for immediately after he had done so the goods-train came along. Unfortunately for Grayson, this piece of projecting ironwork caught his head and killed him instantly, at the same time sending his dead body reeling back into the compartment, where it was found at Liverpool Street. If you will just examine the end of the loose portion, my dear Morley, I think you will agree that I am right, for you will perceive distinct traces of dried skin and several hairs from Grayson's head."

Detective-Inspector Morley looked at me blankly for a moment before replying.

"Well, Blake," he gasped at last, "this is simply astounding! But it all seems to fit in, and you must be right. Let me look at the end of that iron!"

I handed the inspector my lens, and he carefully examined the gruesome "evidence." Then he turned to me.

"You're right, old man," he said—"not a doubt of it. You have scored a distinct triumph, and I must congratulate you. The case appears to be complete, for this evidence is proof positive that the whole affair was an accident. But I am certainly surprised. I would have staked my life that Fenton was the murderer!"

I smiled.

"There's one more incident—a final touch," I remarked. "You, no doubt, remember that there was a chip of green enamel upon Grayson's forehead when we examined his body at Liverpool Street?"

"Yes; I remember that," agreed Morley.

"Well, that chip of enamel obviously came from this self-binder, as you can see," I said, pointing. "The colour is identical!"

"By George, so it is!" exclaimed the inspector. "But how on earth did you find all this out, Blake—that's what I want to know."

"I merely took it for granted that Fenton was innocent, and sought for another explanation of the mystery," I said easily. "And, assuming Fenton to be unconnected with Grayson's death, an accident was the only possible explanation."

"Wonderful—wonderful!" murmured Morley admiringly. "I don't know how you do it, Blake! But we'd better get back to London at once—the inquest will be over if we don't hurry!"

"How are we going, guv'nor?" asked Tinker. "In the car?"

"Well, if there is no train within five minutes or so, I think we'd better go by road," I answered. "What do you say, Morley?"

"Certainly—if there's room in your motor for us all!" agreed the inspector. "But I've got to have a few words with the stationmaster about these trucks, and I'll see about the trains."

He hurried away, and while he was gone, Tinker and I walked back to the car, followed by the two police officials. I took my seat at the driving position, and nodded to Tinker.

"Yes, my lad, start her up!"

(Continued on page 20.)



CURTIS OF THE FIFTH

A Splendid New School and Sporting Serial.

The Chief Characters in this wonderful new school story are:

FRANKFORT K. CURTIS, an American youngster, OSWALD RAYMOND, and "SHERLOCK" HOLMES, who share a study at Wenhaston College.

WALTER HAVILAND, Oswald's cousin, a young scoundrel who means to get Raymond into the bad books of their uncle, SIR GEORGE RAYMOND.

Glanville Day.

CONTRARY to everybody's expectations, Glanville Day broke beautifully fine.

For four consecutive years the elements had seemed to conspire against the race, and every Glanville Day it had poured with rain, and been generally miserable.

This year, however, to everybody's delight, it looked promising for a lovely day. There was to be no school. Directly after breakfast the boys were free to do as they pleased.

Of late years the Glanville had been added to considerably, and made more like a sports day. These were not due to start until half-past one, when there was to be a sculling-race on the river. Dinner, or, rather, luncheon, was at twelve-thirty, and until then the school was free.

Most of the fellows set off for Wylcote Abbey, where the sports were to be held, as soon as prayers were over, for there was plenty of amusement to be had before the race started.

The occupants of Study No. 12 were among the earliest to leave Wenhaston. Raymond and Holmes had bicycles of their own, but Curtis was forced to borrow one.

His new bike had not yet arrived. It was to be a motor—a Triumph. So far, the only person to boast the possession of a motor-bike was Hutchinson, the captain of the school.

It was about ten o'clock when they reached the abbey grounds, and everything was looking gay and lively. Right in the middle of Six-Acre Meadow was a huge tent, from which floated the school colours, and numerous other flags.

At one end of the meadow—it was really a beautiful park, but the name had stuck to it for centuries—was Wycote Abbey itself, and at the other end, directly facing the grand building, ran the river. This formed the boundary to one side of the meadow. On the river-banks a small boat-house stood, and from this, also, the school flag was flying in the breeze.

The course for the big race had been mapped out by stumps, to which lengths of rope were tied. These were placed right round the sports-ground, and the starting-point was to be exactly opposite the boat-house.

In the big tent they came face to face with Oswald Raymond's uncle, Sir George Raymond.

He was a short, stout man, with fierce military moustaches. His head was almost bald.

He was one of the quickest-tempered men alive, and occasionally a little too hasty with his opinion. For all that, however, he was a jolly old fellow, doing good wherever he possibly could. One of his peculiarities was that he always wore extremely baggy trousers—not unlike a sailor's. He wanted comfort, he said—hang the looks! Another was that, if he had an opinion on a certain thing or person, he wasn't afraid of saying his mind, whether he insulted anybody or not.

"Ah, Oswald, my boy," he said, taking Raymond's hand, "you don't know how pleased I am to see you again! But where is Walter? Why hasn't he come with you?"

Raymond turned red.

"Well, uncle," he replied, "you know Walter and I don't get on very well, so I came with my two friends here."

"Fiddlesticks!" snapped Sir George. "Walter's all right! As good as almost any boy in the school! And who are these two, anyway?"

The baronet turned abruptly, and glared at Holmes and Curtis.

"I know you!" he continued, indicting Holmes. "You're the boy Oswald brought home last holidays, aren't you? Nice lad—very nice lad!" he muttered, turning to Curtis. "I haven't seen your face before. Who might you be?"

"My name's Curtis, sir—Frankfort K. Curtis, son of Robert Curtis, of New York." The American fellow bowed.

"So you're a Yankee—eh?" smiled Sir George, taking his hand. "Good—good! I like all Americans!" The baronet had spent a good many years in the States.

"I'm glad to hear it, sir," Curtis said. "You—"

"Who's running in the races?" Sir George interrupted inconsequently—a great habit of his.

"Only Holmes and myself, uncle," Oswald answered. "We're both in the Glanville."

"Excellent!" murmured the old gentleman, his face beaming. "I hope you win, my lads!"

"We can't both win, sir!" smiled Holmes. "Eh? What's that? Both win? Of course not—of course not! How stupid of me!"

Sir George frowned.

Inside the tents the maids were already busy, preparing for the cold luncheon which Sir George was providing. There was one great point about the baronet, the boys were always remarking—he was never stingy. The lunch he placed before them was sumptuous.

It was a huge tent, and yet it only just held all the Form-tables. Every boy's name was stuck on the back of the chair so that no confusion should arise.

At eleven o'clock pretty nearly all the school had arrived, including the headmaster and Mr. Beatson.

It had been arranged that at eleven-fifteen a cricket-match should be played until dinner-time. This also was an annual thing, and, the boys considered, the funniest item on the programme.

It was, in fact, a game in which all the masters played, including Monsieur Luchaire, the little French master, who knew as much about cricket as did the housekeeper's cat.

However, the match went off swimmingly, the headmaster—Canon Lethbridge—coming off the field greatly pleased with himself. He had made a total of six runs before he was finally caught out. That for him was a record.

What with rowing and swimming and running about, the boys were ready for their luncheon; and when the bell clanged they all came trooping towards the big tent as fast as their legs would carry them.

But half an hour before that, when the masters' match was in full swing, and everybody's attention was drawn away, a figure might have been seen creeping out of the tent where the boys washed—the dressing-tent—and cross the intervening space between that and the big dining-tent.

It was Haviland. He was bent on foul work, and as he proceeded he fancied that everybody's eyes were following his movements. As a matter of fact, not a soul saw him enter the luncheon-tent.

Although Mr. Meredith conceived the plots, he took great care not to risk his precious skin by personally carrying any of them out. Even if Haviland "peached," and said he was the originator of the plans, who was to prove it? No; Mr. Meredith was safe enough. No one would believe a word Haviland or Richmond uttered.

The master of the Remove was cunning, and if his "employer" carried off the business with the hoped-for result, he would come in for a nice little sum of money—and practically for doing nothing! Walter Haviland had

done a foolish thing when he had intrusted his secret with Mr. Meredith.

Haviland reached the tent unobserved, and straightway made tracks for Oswald Raymond's place; he had taken good care to casually ask one of the maids to set Oswald next to Holmes, saying that the two were great friends. He had done this so well that the maid never thought another word about it.

Oswald's name was pasted on the back of the chair, and next to his was Holmes'.

Everybody's glasses were filled with wine—red-currant wine—as this saved a good deal of unnecessary bother.

It was to Holmes' glass that Haviland was walking. He quietly drew from his pocket a little phial—green, with a red label.

Darting a swift glance round, he saw that the coast was clear, and popped the contents of the tiny bottle into Holmes' glass.

Having done his work, he gave a great sigh of relief—he was trembling with fear—and, taking out his handkerchief, mopped his forehead.

When he had got a trifle cooler, he carelessly sauntered out of the tent, and laid down in his original position, near a quartet of Sixth Formers.

He had been so quiet, and the Sixth fellows had been so intent on the game that they would have been willing to swear that Haviland had been near them the whole of the time.

When the match was over there was five minutes' interval before the bell would ring, so the three chums—Holmes, Oswald, and Curtis—made their way to the dressing-tent, where they proceeded to wash themselves.

Haviland saw them coming, and took care to be there already when the trio arrived.

"Hallo, Oswald!" was his greeting. "Haven't seen much of you since the beginning of term."

"No," returned his cousin, anxious to be on good terms. "I've been putting in time, trying to get in good form for to-day."

"You'll win," said Haviland diplomatically. "There's no one to beat you!"

Oswald and Curtis had removed their coats, and hung them on a nail in one of the tent-posts. Haviland leaned unconcernedly on to these, talking affably the while.

When the three had their faces wet and soapy his chance came, and he took it. It was fortunate that there was no one else there at the time, and that Oswald's coat was uppermost. Cautiously, talking all the time, Haviland dropped the tiny phial into Oswald's coat pocket.

The next instant he was a couple of yards away, leaning against another post, and when Curtis opened his eyes after rinsing he was looking as unconcerned as ever.

Certainly not a shadow of suspicion rested on Haviland for being in the tent, and Oswald thought for the moment that his cousin was coming round, and trying to be friendly.

A minute later the bell clanged, and everybody was pouring into the tent, the juniors making a truly awful hubbub. Until the meal started they could talk as much as they pleased, and they were not slow in taking advantage of this right.

Unfortunately, Curtis was placed at the other end of the Fifth table, but Oswald noticed with pleasure that Holmes was to sit next to himself on his right, and that trivial miscalculation of Haviland's was destined to mean a lot later on.

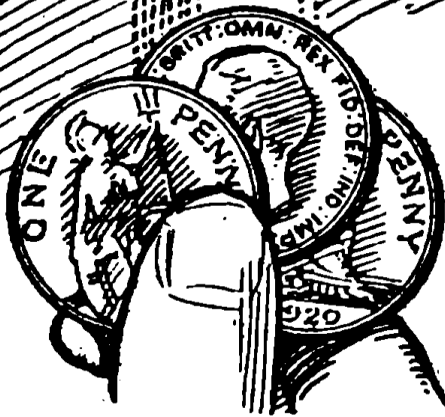
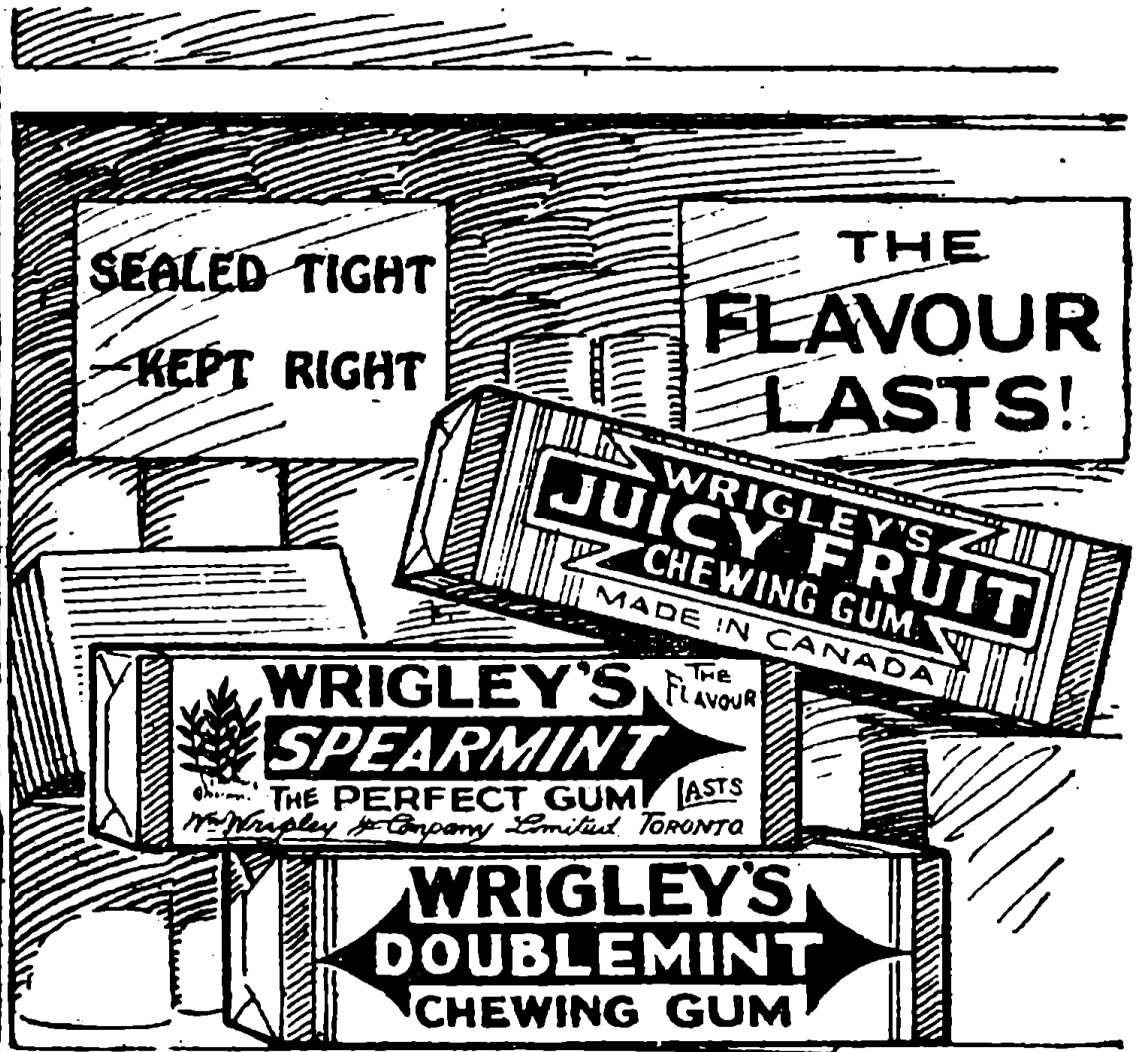
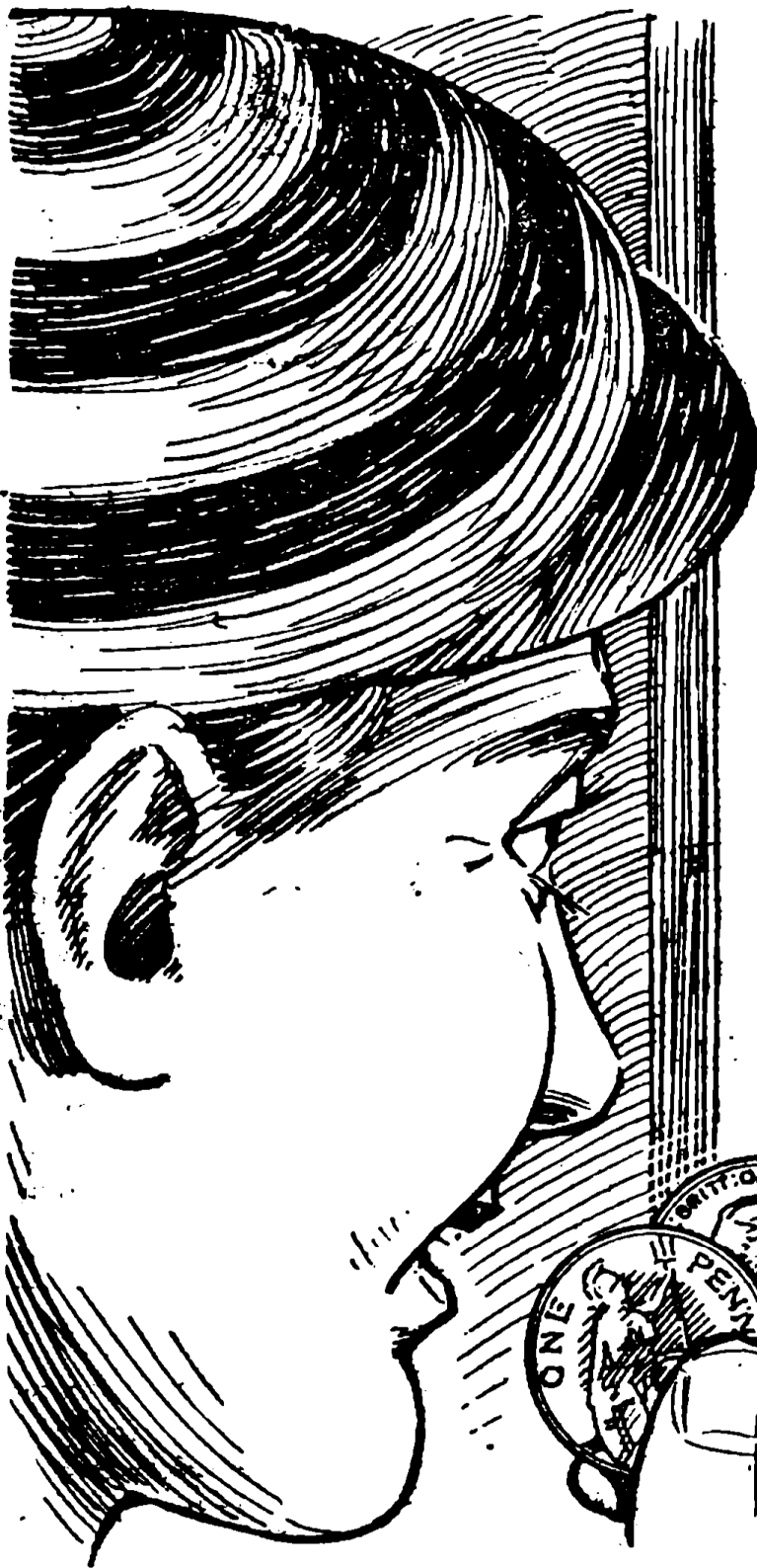
Right opposite Oswald sat Richmond. Haviland was down at the farther end of the table.

The luncheon proceeded merrily, Sir George making everybody feel lively, and at last, and when it was about half over, a sudden crash lower down made all the Fifth Form fellows look down their table.

Haviland had dropped his glass, and smashed it on a plate. The thing was done purposely; it was all part of the plot, and served its purpose well—that of diverting everybody's attention down to his end of the bench.

There was a good deal of chaff and laughter at the clumsy one's expense, but Haviland did not mind in the least—everything was working swimmingly!

(A long instalment will appear on Thursday next. Ask your newspaper to show you this month's numbers of the "Sexton Blake Library." On sale everywhere.)



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Well, to cut a long story short, Lee, the jury eventually brought in a verdict of "accidental death"—a very different conclusion to what had been anticipated at the opening of the proceedings.

The inspector was heartily congratulated on all sides, of course.

"Now then, Morley, that's quite enough!" I said, when he tried to thank me. "Good-bye! Tinker and I are off home!"

We shook hands with the inspector, and jumped into the car again.

"Now where are you off to, sir?" asked Tinker. "Fulham?"

"Yes, my lad," I answered. "And then home, as I told Morley. You take the wheel, and pull up at the first post-office we pass."

"Right-ho, gov'nor!"

We were soon off, and Tinker stopped at the post-office in Bishopsgate Street. I jumped from the car, scribbled a message on a telegraph-form, and despatched it. Then we made all haste to Fulham, where we arrived a little later, and pulled up at the house in Benmore Gardens.

I walked to the door of the back-room, closely followed by the three boys, and unlocked the door. Fenton had evidently heard the commotion in the hall, for he was looking expectantly towards the door as we entered.

"Hallo, Mr. Blake!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "Have you discovered anything?"

"Yes; quite a lot, my dear fellow," I answered. "I will give you an account of the whole matter presently; but I may as well tell you at once that your name is cleared, and that you're a free man once more!"

I related all that had taken place, and Fenton and the boys were amazed. And just as I was concluding the story a knock sounded on the front door.

"Ah, that will be the visitor I was expecting!" I murmured. "Come along, boys! Follow me! The visitor is for Mr. Fenton."

"For me, Mr. Blake?" echoed Fenton. "Who—"

"You wait there a moment," I said. "And you boys make yourself scarce for a while. I will answer the door."

Fenton evidently heard the voice of his fiancee, and he could not remain in the room longer. He came rushing out like a great schoolboy.


"Mildred!" he cried. "I'm free! Free!"

And that is all there is to record, Lee, old man.

With all best wishes and kindest regards.—Yours, as always,

SEXTON BLAKE.

THE END.



Bunter the Farmer

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By **FRANK RICHARDS**

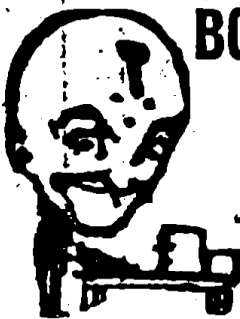
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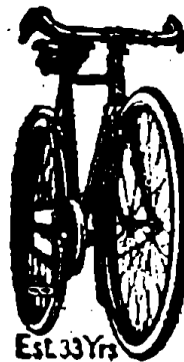
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