COMPLETE Book-length SEXTON BLAKE story inside.

UNION JACK 2P

The FROZEN MAN MYSTERY

By E. S. Brooks.

Mystery, Thrills, and Detective Work in this sterling story by the author of the Waldo series. Introducing SEXTON BLAKE (the World's Most Popular Detective) and EUSTACE CAVENDISH.

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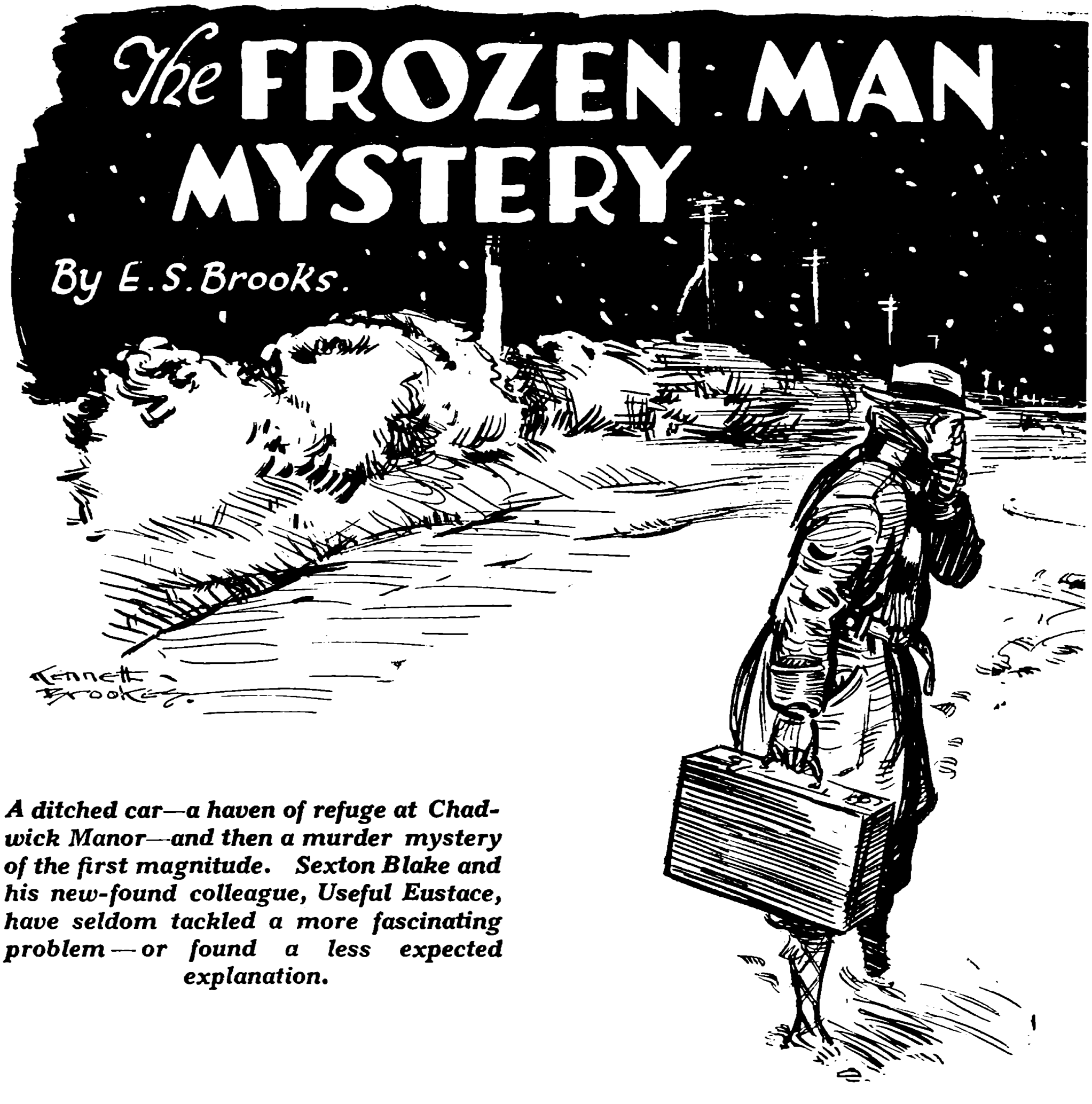

A ditched car—a haven of refuge at Chadwick Manor—and then a murder mystery of the first magnitude. Sexton Blake and his new-found colleague, Useful Eustace, have seldom tackled a more fascinating problem—or found a less expected explanation.

Chapter 1.
An Orphan of the Storm.

THE twin headlamps of the powerful two-seater sliced through the darkness, but it was difficult for the solitary occupant of the car to detect where the road ended and where the grass border began; for there was a thick, ever-increasing carpet of snow on the highway.

The storm had sprung up suddenly, and the flakes, thick and large, were whirling into the wind-screen with bewildering profusion. The automatic wiper was becoming clogged every moment.

"Whoa!" ejaculated the driver, wrenching violently at the wheel.

A sudden turn in the road had presented itself, and with any real luck the two-seater would have got round. But the driver was a shade too late in noticing the bend, and the car, slithering helplessly, went broadside into a heavy snowdrift. There was a hidden ditch beneath that white carpet, and the car, after one or two violent jolts, settled down with an acute list to starboard, and with the radiator three-parts buried in the snow.

"And that, I think," said the driver, "has definitely done it!"

"Oh, well, we'd better be moving, I suppose," murmured Eustace. "Looking at the bally car won't get it out of the ditch."

He sat for a moment behind the driving-wheel, and then he climbed out of his seat, ploughed round through the snow, and inspected the derelict. No damage had been done; but the driver, being an experienced motorist, could see at a glance that any attempt to back out of this ditch would be futile. He stood there, in the full glare of the headlamps, with the snowflakes whirling round him. The inspection, even when assisted by a monocle, did not cheer him.

The Hon. Eustace Cavendish sighed.

"Spilt milk, and all that sort of thing!" he observed ruefully. "I mean, no good crying. The thing's done, and there it is. This is an occasion when a few round, old-fashioned curses would come in handy; but I'm hanged if I can think of any!"

Eustace was an elegant young man, and he hated the idea of trudging through the snow for assistance. He even doubted if he could obtain any. True, it was only early in the evening, but where was he? Somewhere between Sudbury, in Suffolk, and Bury St. Edmunds. A very lonely, isolated stretch of road.

Eustace knew it well, but for the life of him he couldn't remember any likely village. He had recently passed through the long, wide main thoroughfare of Little Melbury, but that was some miles back.

Previous stories by E. S. Brooks include:—

The Death Snare
Terror by Night
The Three Black Cats
Captive of the Crag
The Shrivelled Man

It was really a frightful nuisance, this mishap. Such an absurd, trifling thing to upset all his plans. He had intended getting home in time for dinner—his home being near Bury St. Edmunds. Eustace's father was Lord Halstead, and he owned considerable estates in this part of Suffolk.

"Oh, well, we'd better be moving, I suppose!" murmured Eustace, buttoning his collar. "Looking at the bally car won't get it out of the ditch. There's nothing for it but to take a stroll—— Good gad!"

As he stepped round towards the driving-seat in order to switch off the headlights, he was aware of an acute pain in his left ankle. He had felt it earlier, but had taken little or no notice; but now the pain was positively agonising. He had a vague memory of twisting his foot against the clutch-pedal as the car had lurched into the ditch.

"Oh, well, they say that troubles never come singly!" he remarked, as he waggled his foot about. "This is decidedly on the poisonous side. Bus capsized, and ankle more or less wonky. Looks like being a cheery evening, Eustace, old boy."

This young man, however, was not so helpless as he looked.

There were many sterling qualities about Eustace Cavendish—as Mr. Sexton Blake, the famous criminologist, had discovered. The genial Eustace had accompanied Blake on more than one case, and he had proved himself to be a shrewd, keen, dependable companion. In truth, Eustace was very much of a surprise packet. He looked so useless, and yet he was so useful.

Having fished a suitcase out of the dicky, he switched off the headlamps, and then proceeded to hobble up the road. His ankle gave him quite a lot of trouble. Every time he set his left foot to the ground an acute pain shot up his leg. But it was not a bit of good grumbling. Eustace believed in taking his misfortunes philosophically.

He had an impression that there was a village not far ahead. Even if he couldn't get any garage assistance, it was possible that he could find somebody to take him on to Halstead Towers.

It was intensely dark, for the sky was heavily overcast, and the snow was whirling down thicker than ever, driven by a high wind which caught Eustace fairly in the teeth. He was compelled to bend forward as he forced his way onwards against the storm.

The snow was lying five or six inches deep already. Yet, when he had started from London, there had been no snow at all. The first flakes had blown into his windscreen as he had been passing through Chelmsford, and after that the storm had rapidly developed, until now it was at its height.

"A little light on the subject wouldn't be a bad wheeze," he told himself, as he pulled a powerful electric torch from his pocket.

The going was better with that torch flashed on. He could at least keep to the centre of the road. In spite of his cheery determination, he was finding this walk intolerably painful. He had hoped that his ankle would become eased after a while, but the opposite was the case. Every step he took added to the pain, and he was forced to call a halt every now and again, in order to get a little relief. He must have wrenched his ankle quite severely.

He glanced about him at times, hoping to see a friendly light gleaming from some cottage window. It occurred to him that it might be a good idea to seek shelter, where, possibly, he could borrow a strong walking-stick to help him on his way. But there was nothing. Not a light in any direction. Nothing but the enveloping smother of rapidly falling snowflakes.

A white, ghostly shape loomed out of the darkness ahead, and Eustace's torch revealed it as a snow-laden signpost. It was only a small one, with a single arm pointing down a narrow lane.

"Oh, well, you never know!" he murmured.

He hobbled towards the signpost and examined the inscription upon it. It might only lead to a neighbouring farm, or to some hamlet. If the distance was not too great, he would take this lane, rather than walk blindly on along the main road.

"Well, I'm dashed!" ejaculated Eustace, staring at the signpost.

It bore the legend: "To Chadwick Manor."

Not very startling, but Eustace Cavendish found it exceedingly interesting. He proceeded to commune with himself. This matter needed a little thought.

Chadwick Manor brought memories back to him. It was only about a quarter of a mile off the main road, and he remembered it as a stately old pile, set in its own grounds, isolated from all other dwellings, and three or four miles from any village or hamlet. Until he had seen this signpost, he had completely forgotten the existence of Chadwick Manor; but now he was reminded that he would have a long walk before him if he wanted to get to an inn or a garage.

He had been to Chadwick Manor once in his lifetime, and then only for a brief tea-time visit. It was the home of Sir Henry Chadwick, Bart., a very wealthy country gentleman.

But Eustace was not thinking of Sir Henry. His thoughts dwelt upon Roderick Chadwick, Sir Henry's nephew. Roddy had been at Oxford with Eustace, and a more complete specimen of the human toad Eustace had never met. He was a rake, a sponger, a cad. He had frequently traded upon the fact that his father and Eustace's father were more or less neighbours to come to Eustace's rooms for the thinly disguised purpose of borrowing money.

Eustace could remember one occasion when he had been prevailed upon to go home with Roddy, and he remembered Sir Henry as quite a decent old boy—although it was more than probable that Sir Henry would remember nothing of Eustace. His visit had been a very brief one.

Roddy Chadwick was the last person in the world whom Eustace would acknowledge as a friend, although at Oxford he had been compelled, to a certain degree, to suffer his company.

Afterwards, when Eustace had his own chambers in Half Moon Street, Roddy had occasionally looked in—generally when he was broke. More than once Eustace had lent him money, just to get rid of him. He was a peaceful fellow, was Eustace, and he hated having any sort of unpleasantness.

"Of course, the fellow is a perfect specimen of the genus Blighter," murmured Eustace musingly. "I mean, a skunk of the very first degree. But, after all, we are acquainted, and the manor's only about half a mile away. Any port in a storm sort of thing."

He still hesitated. He hadn't seen Roddy for about a year, and he easily recalled the last occasion when Roddy had dropped in at Half Moon Street. He had brought the news that his uncle had invited him to go down to the manor to take charge of the estate. Since then Eustace had heard nothing.

"The chances are that Roddy has been hoofed off to Canada, or Australia, by this time," Eustace told himself. "Frightfully unlucky for Canada or Australia, but that's generally the way of things. Anyhow, it's worth chancing. Even if Roddy isn't there the old boy will give shelter to the orphan of the storm."

IT was quite an excusable decision of Eustace. His ankle was paining him so badly that walking was extremely difficult. And the storm was growing worse, the wind howling, and the snowflakes whirling down in blinding, bewildering flurries. It was doubtful if Eustace could have struggled on to the nearest village, two or three miles away.

When he arrived at Chadwick Manor he had a feeling that he had been walking for miles, and that the hour was close upon midnight. As a matter of fact, the distance from the main road to the manor gates was not much more than four hundred yards, and the hour was still comparatively early in the evening.

The welcome glow of lighted windows showed vaguely through the storm, and Eustace heaved a sigh of relief when he found himself outside the great front door on the wide stone steps. He pulled at the bell, and he heard the wire rattling in its slot. Presently the door was opened by a stoutish, elderly butler.

"Safe harbour!" said Eustace gratefully. "Kindly make way for the crippled ship."

He walked into the stately lounge hall, and the butler closed the door, shutting out the gale and the driving snow. It was warm in here—warm and bright. Electric lights were glowing from various brackets round the panelled walls, and a big fire was burning in the old-fashioned grate.

"Your name, sir?" asked the butler deferentially.

"Oh, rather!" nodded Eustace, as he peeled off his overcoat. "It doesn't really matter, but my name happens to be Cavendish. I'm not really officially here. Quite a chance call. Had a sort of skid with the little bus, and I happened to spot your cheery signpost."

"I understand, sir," said the butler. "You came here to seek shelter from the storm?"

"Not," said Eustace, "that I'm an absolute stranger. I'm well acquainted with that blighter Roddy—— That is to say, jolly old Roddy and I were at Oxford together, and I once had the pleasure of being introduced to Sir Henry. I hope everybody's well, and that my intrusion won't cause too much of an upset."

"Mr. Roderick is in the library, sir," said the butler.

"Splendid, brother. Lead me to him."

"My name is Jevons, sir."

"And a good name, too!" said Eustace enthusiastically. "A sound, old-fashioned, ripe English name. You've got 'Jevons' written all over you, Jevons. By the way, is it necessary to lead me to the library? If it's all the same to you, I'd much prefer to spill my tale of woe into the ear of Sir Henry."

"Sir Henry is in bed, sir," said Jevons gravely.

"In that case, I can't very well give him an earful," said Eustace. "I'm awfully sorry to hear this, Jevons. What's the matter with the old boy? Nothing serious, I trust?"

"Sir Henry has been ailing for nearly a year, sir," said the butler. "He never leaves his room nowadays. Will you please follow me, sir?"

He had taken Eustace's hat and coat and scarf, and had hung them on a vast hallstand near by. Now he led the way down a wide carpeted corridor and softly opened a big door.

"Mr. Cavendish, sir!" he announced.

Eustace strode in, and a young man in evening dress, who was standing with his back to the fire, reading a newspaper, looked up with startled surprise. A light of recognition leapt into his eyes, and he flung the newspaper down, and hurried forward.

"Good glory!" he ejaculated. "Cavendish! Come in, Cavendish, old fellow! Gad! You don't know how pleased I am to see you!"

He wrung Eustace's hand violently, and his pleasure was so apparent, and his greeting so boisterous that Eustace felt positively embarrassed. For it was impossible for him to reciprocate the warmth of his host's greeting. One glance at Roddy Chadwick told him that Roddy was the same drink-sodden good-for-nothing.

He was a weedy young man, with drooping shoulders. His face was unhealthy and unpleasant. There were deep bags under his eyes, and he looked ten years older than he actually was. Country life had done nothing to improve him.

"What a stroke of luck!" ejaculated Roddy, seizing Eustace's arm, and dragging him over to the fireplace. "Gad! You've saved my life! Sit down, old pal! What would you like to drink? Here, take one of these cigars!"

"Well, really, you know, it's awfully good of you, but I'm afraid I'm a bit of an intruder——" began Eustace.

"An intruder, be hanged!" broke in Roddy. "I tell you, I've never been more pleased to see anybody in all my life! Fancy seeing you here—and on such an evening, too!"

"Well, it's really because it is such an evening that I am here," explained Eustace. "You see, my little bus biffed into a ditch down the road, and when I saw your signpost——"

"Thank the stars for this storm, then," said Roddy. "What about dinner?"

"Thanks, Roddy, but you needn't trouble——"

"Trouble be hanged!" said Roddy. "Unfortunately, I've just dined, or you could have joined me. But we'll soon put that right."

He rang the bell, and when Jevons came, he ordered dinner for Eustace—to be brought into the library on a tray. Eustace was rather puzzled. In the old days, Roddy had never displayed such overwhelming and embarrassing delight in his company.

"You'll have to stay, Cavendish," declared the host. "You can, can't you?" he went on anxiously. "You needn't go away to-night?"

"Well, I was hoping to get to Halstead Towers," said Eustace. "If there's any way of getting there——"

"There isn't," said Roddy. "No way at all. The roads are impassable by now. You'll have to stay here, Cavendish—and I want you to stay."

"I'd hate to cause any upset," said Eustace. "It's hardly the thing to crash in like this, old boy."

"I wish somebody would crash in every evening!" said Roddy fervently. "Gad, Cavendish, do you realise that I haven't seen any of my old pals for

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nearly a year? Do you realise that I'm a prisoner in this infernal place?"

"Really?" murmured Eustace.

"Absolutely a prisoner!" declared the other, his tone fierce and desperate. "You can't realise what a kick it gives me to talk with one of my old Oxford pals. I'm leading a dog's life in this hole. It's driving me mad, Cavendish!"

"As bad as all that?" said Eustace, feeling that it was up to him to make some comment.

"Can't you stay a week?" asked Roddy eagerly. "Be a sport, Cavendish, and stay! You're the first one of the old gang I've seen for nearly a year! How's everything in London? Piccadilly? Leicester Square? Ye gods! What wouldn't I give for just one night amongst the bright lights!"

He stood there, on the hearthrug, his face flushed, his eyes aglow. Then he reached forward for the whisky decanter, and poured himself out a stiff glass. He poured one out for Eustace, too.

"I take it," said Eustace, "that you don't care much for the good old countryside, what?"

Roddy Chadwick set his glass down with such a crash that it smashed.

"I hate the country!" he said fiercely. "I loathe it, Cavendish! Don't you understand that I'm a prisoner here? My uncle won't let me move out—I can't even go to Bury St. Edmunds! I'm kept in this place, morning, noon, and night—week in, week out. I'm getting to the point where flesh and blood won't stand it any longer!"

"But you're not chained up, are you?"

"Yes, I am!" declared Roddy. "You've used the right term. I'm chained up! After I left Oxford, my uncle wouldn't have anything to do with me; he even stopped my allowance."

"I fancy he was rather cut-up about you being sent down, wasn't he?" murmured Eustace.

The other frowned.

"Don't rake up that old affair!" he growled. "I wasn't the only one sent down, anyhow. I can't understand my uncle," he went on, eager to change the subject. "He'd have nothing to do with me until about a year ago. Cut me off—stopped my allowance—refused to recognise me!"

Eustace knew why, but he made no comment. In his opinion, Sir Henry Chadwick had been wise in disowning his worthless nephew.

"Then, all of a sudden, my uncle sent for me," continued Roddy. "It was because he had a breakdown, and he took to his bed. The old fool! There's nothing much wrong with him—it's mostly imaginary! But he sticks to his room, upstairs, and there he remains, leaving me to live alone in this great old house."

"You might be worse off," said Eustace, glancing round the stately old library.

"I'd rather he gave me an allowance, and let me live in London," said Roddy, breathing hard. "But he won't! He keeps me here. My job is to look after the estate. He must have a Chadwick on the spot. That's his infernal cry. He's bed-ridden himself, and I'm the only other Chadwick—so I've got to be here."

He flung his cigarette into the fire, and bent nearer to Eustace.

"I know what his game is," he went on thickly. "As long as I'm at the manor, I can't get up to any mischief! That's the long and the short of it, Cavendish. I'm not blind—I'm not a fool! I can see through his game! Do you know that he's left me everything in his will?"

"Really?" said Eustace mildly. "You surprise me!"

"Everything!" insisted the other. "And why?"

"I assume," said Eustace gently, "that he must be going cracked."

"He's made me his heir on conditions," said Roddy, breathing hard. "If I leave the manor without his permission—even for one night—he'll cut me out of his will! That's what he told me when I first arrived here, last winter. As long as I do as he tells me, I'll have my allowance, and I can live here, and look after these estates—and I shall be his heir. But if ever I go against his wishes—if ever I kick over the traces—he'll send for his lawyer, and cut me out."

EUSTACE made no comment. Privately he held the view that Sir Henry Chadwick was a very brainy old boy. He knew his nephew, and he was drastic with him.

"But I can't stand it!" continued Roddy desperately. "You know as well as I do, Cavendish, that this sort of life doesn't suit me. I like the bright lights. Night-clubs, theatres, cabarets, cards——"

"Particularly cards!" murmured Eustace, under his breath.

"And here I've got nothing!" shouted Roddy, working himself up to a fine pitch of excitement. "Absolutely nothing, Cavendish! This place is a dead hole! I'm not allowed any visitors, and I'm not allowed to spend a single, solitary night away from the manor. Not even an hour!"

Eustace frowned.

"You're not allowed visitors, what?" he said. "That means that I'm butting in!"

"You're different," said Roddy quickly. "My uncle means that I

mustn't have any of my other friends—my old set. You're different, Cavendish. You're not one of them."

"You've certainly tapped the nail's head there, old bean!" said Eustace promptly.

He regarded Roddy with disfavour, for it seemed to him that this detestable fellow was far more detestable than ever. His uncle's experiment was evidently failing. Sir Henry had been trying for a year to wean Roddy away from his old life—to let the clean country air and rural life cleanse this scamp. But what good had it done? Roddy was nearly drunk now, and it was evident, from his very appearance, that he had been drinking heavily for months. What chance had the country air against such dissipation?

Only the fear of being cut out of Sir Henry's will had kept Roddy here. He evidently knew that his uncle would prove to be a man of his word if he ever rebelled.

There came a tap at the door, and Roddy nodded.

"Your dinner," he said briskly. "You'd better have a cocktail—— Hallo! Where's the tray, Jevons?"

The butler had arrived empty-handed.

"Sir Henry has heard voices, Mr. Roderick," he explained diffidently. "He has instructed me to inquire the name and business of your visitor, sir."

Roddy compressed his lips, and his eyes flashed malevolently.

"You can tell my uncle that I'm entertaining a friend!" he snapped. "That's all, Jevons!"

"I rather think," said Eustace, "that I'd like to go. Really, Roddy, I'd loathe to be the cause of any trouble——"

"Sit where you are, Cavendish," interrupted Roddy. "Go on, Jevons—take that message to my uncle!"

"Very good, sir," said the butler.

He went out and closed the door. Roddy poured himself out another whisky, swore ferociously, and looked at Eustace with feverish eyes.

"There you are!" he panted. "You see? The old fool's heard voices, has he? I've got to make a stand about this."

"I don't like it," said Eustace, who was thoroughly uncomfortable. "After all, this is your uncle's house. I didn't come here to make a row."

"You are my guest—and you're different from my other friends," said Roddy quickly. "Hang it, you're practically a neighbour, aren't you?"

"Well, yes, but——"

Eustace broke off as he heard a loud commotion from somewhere within the house. A voice was roaring and shouting, and at the same moment Jevons opened the library door.

"Pitch him out!" came the roaring voice. "Do you hear, Jevons? If he won't go of his own accord, take him by the scruff of the neck, and kick him out!"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Eustace, pained.

He strode out into the hall, with Roddy close at his heels. And there, at the top of the great staircase, was a grim figure in a dressing-gown and slippers.

Chapter 2.
Fired. Wired.

SIR HENRY CHADWICK, BART., was a big, heavily-built man. His hair was grizzled, and he was clean-shaven except for a bristling, close-clipped moustache. In Eustace's opinion he did not look particularly ill at the present moment.

He was standing at the head of the stairs, shaking his fist violently. His face was suffused with fury.

"Get out of this house!" he thundered, glaring at Eustace. "If you're one of Roderick's friends, you're no good! Jevons, kick that fellow out!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Jevons, giving Eustace an appealing look.

"This isn't fair, uncle!" shouted Roddy hotly. "Mr. Cavendish is the son of Lord Halstead, and he's practically a neighbour——"

"I don't care who he is!" thundered Sir Henry. "He's a friend of yours, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is. But I don't see——"

"Enough!" bellowed Sir Henry. "If he's a friend of yours, he's no good! Get out, you young cur, or I'll come down there and throw you out with my own hands!"

Eustace gripped himself. He wasn't used to being spoken to in that fashion—and yet, in his heart, he felt no grudge against Sir Henry. The old man wasn't to know that Eustace was not really one of Roddy's friends. In London, Eustace wouldn't have been seen dead in Roddy's company. Roddy's friends were wasters and blackguards and unmentionable creatures of the vilest type. No doubt Sir Henry knew this, and it was only natural that he should place Eustace in the same category.

"You're making a mistake, Sir Henry, but I'll go," said Eustace steadily. "For my own satisfaction, I'd just like to tell you that I'm not one of your nephew's friends. Never have been. But this is your house, sir, and I apologise for having intruded. My only excuse is that I didn't know the circumstances."

"Well, you know them now!" grated the old man. "I don't care who you are, or what you are! Get out of this house!"

"You can't do this, uncle!" shouted Roddy, beside himself. "Cavendish came here to shelter from the storm, and——"

"Another word from you, boy, and I'll kick you out with him!" fumed Sir Henry ferociously. "And you know what it means if I kick you out! I am the master of this house, and——"

"Sir Henry!" came an alarmed voice.

The big front door had opened—evidently it was not latched—and a stranger stood within the lounge hall. The man who had spoken was a tall, elderly, kindly-looking man, wrapped in a great fur coat. He was carrying a small bag, and he flung this and his hat aside, and hurried forward.

"You'd better not interfere, Dr. Smallwood," said Roddy furiously.

"But I shall interfere," declared the other, his eyes smouldering with heat. "What do you mean, you young hound, by upsetting Sir Henry in this way?"

"He's upset himself!" snapped Roddy. "I didn't ask him to kick up this shindy. This friend of mine came here to shelter from the storm——"

"I won't have the young blackguard in my house!" thundered Sir Henry, from the top of the stairs. "Smallwood, take that young man out, and——"

"Wait until I come down," muttered the doctor to Eustace. "I shan't be long."

He hurried upstairs, seized Sir Henry by the arm, and led him firmly but gently out of sight. Sir Henry raved, but Dr. Smallwood's voice sounded soothing and gentle. Sir Henry's tones grew quieter, and they finally ceased altogether as a door was heard to close softly.

Eustace glanced at Roddy.

"An upsetting sort of business," he said. "I'm sorry about this, but I didn't know. I rather think I'd better grease off."

"You shan't!" growled Roddy hotly. "Look here, Cavendish, you've got to stay! Don't take any notice of my uncle—he was raving like a madman. Smallwood will smooth him over."

They went into the library, Eustace feeling very decidedly upset. But for that murmured word from the doctor he would have gone on the spot. He declined the drink that Roddy had poured out for him. Roddy himself consumed nearly half a glass of neat spirit.

"The first time one of my old pals comes into the house, and this is what happens," he muttered thickly. "Gad! I can't stand it, Cavendish. I'm not going to be kept here, like a prisoner in a dungeon. Curse the old fool!"

He relapsed into silence, and Eustace, testing his ankle, found that it was less painful than before.

He looked at Roddy and wondered what he could say. There seemed very little that he could say. The sooner he got out of this house the better.

Fortunately, Dr. Smallwood came in just then, and there was a hard, set expression on his naturally kindly face. He did not even glance at Roddy. He confined his attentions to Eustace.

"Just a minute, young man," he said, beckoning.

"Look here, Dr. Smallwood, I'm not going to have——" began Roddy.

The doctor turned his back and walked out of the library, and Eustace, as he followed, heard a string of violent curses from Roddy. He breathed more freely as he closed the library door.

"Before you say anything, doctor, there's just one little point I'd like to make clear," he said, grasping the doctor's coat lapel. "I am not one of Roddy's friends. Between you and me, and strictly between ourselves,

I wouldn't touch Roddy with a barge-pole!"

"I'm glad to hear it," grunted the doctor, eyeing him closely.

"You don't happen to have any disinfectant or antiseptic?" went on Eustace, in an anxious voice.

"Why do you need it?"

"I've shaken hands with that blister, and I need a spiritual shampoo, as it were," explained Eustace.

The old doctor's eyes kindled with a twinkle of amusement.

"If you're quite ready, Mr. Cavendish, we'll be going," he said. "Jevons, Mr. Cavendish's coat and hat. Mine, too."

"Yes, sir," said the butler, with obvious relief.

"I don't like turning you out in this fashion, but you appear to be a sensible young man, and you will probably realise that it is better that you should go," went on the doctor. "I have calmed Sir Henry down, but only after promising him that I would take you away without the loss of a minute."

"I wouldn't have come if I had known how things stood," said Eustace, shaking his head. "The fact is, my car skidded——"

"I noticed it on the road as I came along," interrupted the doctor. "My own car is outside, and it is entirely at your service, Mr. Cavendish. It will be a pleasure for me to give you a lift to Little Melbury, where, I have no doubt, you will be able to get all the assistance you require."

RODDY came charging out of the library just as Eustace and the doctor went out into the snow-swept night. Roddy even came to the door, nearly knocking the stately Jevons over in his excitement and fury. Dr. Smallwood ignored him, and Eustace merely waved a hand.

"Well, cheerio!" he called. "Sorry I couldn't stay, Roddy, but I think it's better, on the whole. Must be polite," he added to the doctor in an undertone.

"One is not polite to pigs!" said the doctor caustically.

Roddy was shouting something, but Dr. Smallwood slammed the door of the smart coupe and immediately engaged his gears. The car glided off amidst a smother of snow.

"A pretty scaly sort of affair," commented Eustace regretfully. "The first time I've ever been hoofed out of anybody's house!"

"You mustn't look at it in that way, Mr. Cavendish," said the doctor. "Sir Henry is a cantankerous old man, and the mere fact that you are acquainted with Roddy stamps you, in Sir Henry's eyes, as a worthless scamp."

"I knew the blighter at Oxford—to my cost," said Eustace. "I'd no idea how things stood now, or I wouldn't have come."

"Quite so—quite so," said the doctor, as he bent over the steering-wheel. "I understand exactly, young man. I only hope that your visit may precipitate something. If that young hound would only make a lightning trip to London, he would never be readmitted into the house. But he's too cunning; he's too infernally clever. He knows what would happen if he disregarded his uncle's orders."

"So he told me," nodded Eustace. "A sort of experiment on Sir Henry's part, what?"

"A mad experiment—a hopeless experiment," said the doctor impatiently. "What's the good of it? Roddy is worthless through and through. You can't expect to change the spots of a leopard."

"Why doesn't Sir Henry kick him out?"

"Because the young waster is too clever," grunted the doctor. "He knows on which side his bread is buttered, and he stays here. And he'll continue to stay, no doubt, knowing that he is his uncle's sole heir. The only gleam of hope is that one day he will kick over the traces. Sir Henry is a man with rigid, cast-iron ideas. He promised Roddy that his allowance would be secure so long as he remained at the manor. And Roddy remains. But his heart is in London, with his accursed night clubs and his evil companions. I tell you, Mr. Cavendish, that that fellow is unfit to live outside an institution."

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Eustace. "I found that out years ago. And you ought to know, I suppose, being the family physician."

"I knew Roddy when he was quite a little boy," said the doctor thoughtfully. "He was an incorrigible young rascal even then. Ever since I can remember him he has been a responsibility to his uncle. Scrape after scrape, and so on. I don't wonder that Sir Henry loses his patience occasionally."

"The old boy is an invalid, I understand?" asked Eustace. "Not that he appeared to be particularly decrepit when I saw him at the top of the stairs."

Dr. Smallwood compressed his lips.

"I don't mind telling you, young man, that I have a good deal of trouble with Sir Henry, too," he said feelingly. "There's nothing much wrong with him. Imagination, mostly. He's a hypochondriac."

"Oh, rather!" nodded Eustace. "One of those melancholy blighters who think they've got every sort of illness under the sun, whilst actually they're pretty healthy. That's the idea, what?"

"Exactly," said the doctor. "I have a vague idea, too, that he keeps to his room so that Roddy shall have a fair chance. Roddy is virtually in charge of the estate. And a fine mess he has made of things, too! Heaven only knows how it will all end! My only hope is that he will play truant, and then perhaps Sir Henry will lose some of these fanciful ideas of his. Perhaps he will take command of the reins again."

"I dare say if Roddy has enough rope he'll hang himself," remarked Eustace.

The doctor gave him a swift glance.

"That's just the trouble," he said. "Roddy is allowed no rope at all. I only wish that Sir Henry would allow him some. As matters stand, there's a deadlock. You see, Sir Henry promised that he would look after his nephew, and he is proud of his good name, too. While Roddy is here he can't get up to much mischief. He can't besmirch the family honour. You understand?"

"I'm really frightfully sorry for Sir Henry," said Eustace, with feeling.

"Roddy is a wastrel—an orphan, and Sir Henry feels a certain amount of responsibility regarding him," continued the doctor impatiently. "I have told him a hundred times that he is very foolish, but he won't listen to me. My only fear is that something drastic might happen."

"Fear?" said Eustace. "I rather thought you wanted it to happen."

"I should like this scamp to be removed from the manor, but I didn't mean that," replied Dr. Smallwood. "Sometimes he gets into drunken frenzies, and I am always on edge. I feel vaguely that Roddy might do something terrible."

"Don't you believe it," said Eustace, with conviction. "Roddy is too much of a cur, too much of a coward. I know him. The most frightful chunk of fungus that ever grew."

COURTEOUSLY Dr. Smallwood offered Eustace the hospitality of his own home in Little Melbury; but as it happened they came in contact with a big car, in the main road, which was going to Bury St. Edmunds, and as the owner of this car offered Eustace a lift, Eustace very gladly accepted it. The doctor promised to see that Eustace's own car should be rescued and taken to a local garage.

So, in spite of the heavy snowstorm, Eustace did finally arrive at Halstead Towers that night; and, incidentally, he spent a very enjoyable week-end.

He didn't return to London until Tuesday. By then practically all the snow had gone. There had been a rapid thaw on Monday, and Eustace drove back to town over wet, slushy, muddy roads, and he found London murky and unfriendly. But it was good to be back, nevertheless.

He found his chambers in Half Moon Street overrun with brisk-looking men in overalls, carrying bags of tools. Eustace was dismayed.

"What's all this?" he demanded, when Pagett, his valet, relieved him of his motoring coat. "Why didn't you send me a wire, or something, Pagett? I mean, I can't live in this frightful mess."

"They're telephone men, sir," explained the valet. "I understand that they'll be finished by this afternoon."

"Well, that's a little ray of sunshine, anyhow," said Eustace. "You'd

better pop down, Pagett, and run the old bus round to the garage."

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, and by the way, what's wrong with the telephone?" asked Eustace.

"These men are not interfering with the ordinary instrument, sir," explained Pagett. "They are fitting up a special telephone—one that connects your rooms with those of Mr. Sexton Blake, in Baker Street."

Eustace's eyes opened wide.

"Great pip! Not really, Pagett?" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir."

"Take this, Pagett," said Eustace, slapping a pound-note into his valet's hands. "You don't deserve it, but I'm feeling so frightfully pleased that I've got to give money away. Well, I'm dashed! I mean, really, I am dashed!"

He was overjoyed. Only the previous week he and Sexton Blake had talked over the possibility of having a private wire fixed up between Baker Street and Half Moon Street. At the time, Eustace had mentally decided that it was only one of Blake's little jokes.

But Blake, obviously, had been in earnest. And Eustace was tremendously bucked at this expression of the famous criminologist's confidence.

This phone was being expressly fixed so that Blake could get into touch with Eustace at any hour of the day or night—with the certainty, too, of absolute privacy.

Eustace was in a fever until four o'clock in the afternoon—when the telephone men finally took their departure. Then Eustace sat down in his most comfortable chair, reached for the phone, and unhooked the receiver.

"Hallo, Eustace!" came a cheery voice over the wire, almost immediately.

"Good gad! Is that you, Blake, old boy?" gasped Eustace. "I was expecting some chirpy feminine voice to cry 'Number, please!' I say, isn't this frightfully ripping?"

"Well, it may come in useful," admitted Blake.

"What about the expense, old boy?" asked Eustace anxiously. "I mean, it must have cost——"

"Never mind about that," put in Sexton Blake, with a laugh. "It was my idea, Eustace, and I'm footing the bill. Salary, we'll say, for your past services."

"You should let me pay half," said Eustace. "In fact, I'd rather pay the whole lot. And what about a spot of work? Anything that I can do, old boy?"

"Not at present," replied Sexton Blake. "However, it is comforting to know that you are within call. If I need you, Eustace, I will ring you."

"Need me quickly, old boy," said Eustace earnestly. "I've just had a week-end in the country, and I'm bubbling with vitality."

Much to Eustace's disappointment, the private telephone was silent during the remainder of the day—although Eustace made a point of remaining in. And the next morning he was the bane of Pagett's existence. He wandered about his chambers restlessly, and more than once he moved towards the private phone. At the last moment, however, he held his hand. He had a horror of forcing himself upon Blake.

At about noon the midday paper was delivered, and Pagett brought it to Eustace as usual. Eustace sometimes had a fancy to study the form of racehorses; but just now his interest in that sort of thing had dwindled to vanishing point.

He unfolded the paper, and casually read the headline across the front page—"Shocking Crime in Suffolk Mansion." Then he uttered an ejaculation, and sat forward in his chair, his eyes wide open.

Chapter 3.
Eustace Finds Work.

IT took a good deal to startle the Hon. Eustace Cavendish, but he was startled now.

Ordinarily, he would have been interested in such a murder case, for it had always been his hobby to keep track of major crimes. But he felt that he was somehow connected with this particular affair, for he had been at Chadwick Manor so recently.

"The murdered baronet, who was a bachelor, was evidently killed in cold blood," ran the report. "The discovery was made by Dr. Smallwood, the family physician, who has been in the habit of making an early-morning call for some months past. The body of Sir Henry was found lying on the bed, and he had been stabbed to the heart. No weapon, however, was discovered. Inspector Rankin, of the Suffolk Constabulary——"

Before Eustace could read any further, the door opened, and Pagett appeared. For once the imperturbable valet was looking flustered.

"There's a young gentleman here, sir," he announced. "He appears to be very agitated——"

"Out of my way, fool!" panted a hoarse voice.

Pagett was elbowed aside, and Eustace found himself gazing at the dishevelled figure of Roddy Chadwick. Eustace did not turn a hair. He regarded Roddy with a thoughtful eye, and then used his monocle to assist the inspection.

"All right, Pagett," he said, nodding. "You'd better leave us."

Roddy threw a frightened glance at the door as the valet closed it, and then he staggered forward, half-sinking into a chair. His collar was crumpled, his necktie unfastened, his hair unbrushed. He was even unshaven, and, altogether, he looked very much of a wreck. His weak face was unhealthily flushed, and the bags under his eyes were more pronounced than ever.

"They're after me, Cavendish!" he croaked. "I believe I was spotted at Liverpool Street Station. For Heaven's sake, hide me! You can do it here. Nobody will suspect——"

"Steady, Roddy," interrupted Eustace. "I've seen the news, although I haven't had a chance to read the details. What do you know about Sir Henry's death?"

"Nothing!" screamed Roddy, leaping to his feet, and rushing across to Eustace, and clasping him in panic-stricken terror. "Nothing, I tell you! They think I did it, Cavendish, but I didn't! I tell you, I didn't!"

"If you didn't, why do you want to hide?" asked Eustace evenly.

He took Roddy's wrists, forced them down, and deliberately pushed the young man into a chair. There was something cool and collected

about Eustace now. His monocle was still in his eye, but in spite of this all trace of the dandy had gone.

"Take it easy, Roddy," he advised. "No; I shan't give you a drink. You've had plenty of drink already, by the look of you. Give me some details of this tragedy."

"Details?" babbled Roddy. "I—I don't know any! When I got up this morning, I heard that my uncle had been murdered—stabbed to death! Jevons told me, and Jevons thinks that I did it! The police think so, too!"

"Why did you leave the manor?"

"I bolted—I knew they'd arrest me, so I bolted!" panted Roddy wildly. "What else could I do? I thought of you, Cavendish—and I thought perhaps that you would hide me here."

"If you killed your uncle, you're for the long jump—I'll personally see to it," said Eustace. "If you didn't kill your uncle, there's no need for you to hide anywhere."

"There is—there is!" shouted Roddy. "I had an unholy row with my uncle last night. Everybody heard—the servants — everybody! My uncle threatened to cut me out of his will—and this morning he was found dead! I tell you, they think I did it! You've got to help me, Cavendish!"

"Well, we'll see," said Eustace soothingly. "The thing is for you to cool down."

"You've got to help me!" insisted Roddy, in a feverish tone. "That quarrel last night was your doing!"

"Good gad! My doing?"

"Yes, it was!" shouted Roddy. "After seeing you the other night, I couldn't stick that rotten country life any longer, and I told my uncle that he would have to let me go to town now and again. That was the cause of the row. He finished with me! He threatened to stop my allowance, and cut me out of his will. And this morning——"

Thud, thud, thud!

A thunderous banging sounded from somewhere within the building. Roddy leapt to his feet with a scream, and stared at the door with fear-stricken eyes.

"The police!" he gabbled. "They're here! You've got to hide me, Cavendish! I didn't do it, I tell you! I knew nothing about the murder until I got up this morning. Don't let them get me! Don't let them——"

His words faded away in his throat, for at that moment the door opened, and two men in uniform stood there—an inspector and a constable.

"Get out of this house!" he thundered at Eustace from the head of the stairs. "If you're one of Roderick's friends, you're no good!"

"I am sorry to intrude, sir," said the inspector, looking at Eustace. "But it's a matter of duty. This young man, I believe, is Roderick Chadwick."

Roderick fairly shrieked a denial, and he made a wild, insane attempt to run through into Eustace's bedroom. He was quickly seized and held. Eustace had never before seen such a pitiful exhibition of rank cowardice. If Roddy was guiltless of the crime, then he was a fool as well as a coward. For no man ever looked more guilty than he did.

He was formally cautioned in connection with the death of his uncle, Sir Henry Chadwick, and the police took him away. His description had been circulated after he had bolted from the manor, and a railway policeman at Liverpool Street had recognised him. It had been an easy matter to trail the taxicab which Roddy had hired to Half Moon Street.

EUSTACE unhooked the receiver of the private phone, and within twenty seconds he was in touch with Sexton Blake.

"A case, old boy!" he announced briskly.

"I'm afraid there would be no justification for us going down to Chadwick Manor, Eustace!" came Blake's voice. "Scotland Yard has not been called in, and the local police might resent——"

"Whoa! Hold on!" ejaculated Eustace. "How did you know I meant this Chadwick affair?"

"Isn't that what you were ringing up about?"

"Absolutely, old boy!"

"It's perfectly simple, Eustace!" came Blake's voice. "I knew that you went down to Suffolk for the week-end, and I have an idea that Sir Henry Chadwick was a neighbour of yours. The news of his murder is contained in the early evening papers. It is natural that you should be interested. But I am afraid that any investigation on our part would be regarded as an interference!"

"You don't understand, dear brother," said Eustace. "Roddy Chadwick, the blighter who is suspected of the deed, has been arrested!"

"Less reason than ever, then, for us to——"

"He was arrested in my chambers," said Eustace.

"Oh, was he?"

"Not five minutes ago," continued Eustace. "And there are certain facts about this case which make it frightfully imperative that we should get a move on. I practically promised Roddy that I would rally round. I simply must go down to Suffolk. And if you came with me, it would be joy undefiled!"

"I think you'd better give me a few details, Eustace," said Blake. "You seem to know more about this affair than I first thought!"

Eustace gave the details. He described what had happened on his recent visit to Chadwick Manor, and he gave an account of Roddy's panic-stricken flight to London, and his entry into Eustace's chambers.

"It's practically a commission, old boy," concluded Eustace. "If this foul blighter is really innocent—and, personally, I don't think he'd

have the pluck to jab a knife into a rabbit—it's rather up to us to fish him out of the mire!"

"It is honestly your opinion, Eustace, that young Chadwick could not have murdered his uncle?"

"Absolutely!" said Eustace. "The fellow is a cur and everything unmentionable. Hasn't got the pluck of a house-fly! The fact that he bolted means nothing, because he's just the kind who would bolt!"

"I'll be round within ten minutes," replied Blake. "Be ready to leave at once, Eustace!"

SEXTON BLAKE gave instructions to Tinker to look after things at Baker Street, and then he drove to Eustace's chambers in the Grey Panther.

Eustace was on the edge of the pavement when Blake arrived, and he leapt nimbly into the powerful Rolls-Royce roadster.

"This is really frightfully decent of you, Blake, old lightning flash!" he said happily. "I mean, I hope I'm not interfering with any of your other odds and ends of toil. I should be awfully upset if you left something of national moment to come down with me on this Suffolk stunt!"

"I don't mind telling you, Eustace, that I shouldn't have come down if you had not given it as your opinion that young Chadwick is innocent," replied Blake. "There are some points of interest in the case which attract me. As soon as we get out of London, you can give me a few more details."

"As many as you like, old boy," promised Eustace. "Not, of course, that I know many. Still, I'll tell you all I know!"

And long before the Grey Panther had passed through Chelmsford, Sexton Blake was in full possession of the facts as Eustace knew them.

"Well, on the face of it, the thing looks pretty black!" said the detective. "Young Chadwick told you that his uncle intended cutting him out of his will this morning. And during the night Sir Henry was murdered!"

"A pretty good motive—what?"

"So it would seem," said Blake. "However, we cannot say anything definite until we have made some inquiries actually on the spot."

When they arrived, they were faced by a somewhat portly police-inspector, who regarded them with distinct disfavour. He was Inspector Rankin, of the Suffolk Constabulary. He was in charge of the case.

"Did you receive any instructions to come here, Mr. Blake?" he asked, after Blake and Eustace had introduced themselves. "Personally, I can't see any reason why you should bother yourself over such a straightforward affair as this!"

"I am here on behalf of Mr. Roderick Chadwick," replied Blake promptly.

"Young Chadwick!" echoed the inspector. "But he's under arrest! He's the murderer!"

"Not absolutely, is he?" put in Eustace. "I thought he was merely arrested on suspicion?"

"By this time he has been charged with the wilful murder of his uncle!" said the inspector grimly. "We've got enough evidence to hang him a dozen times, if necessary!"

"Are there any Scotland Yard men here?" inquired Blake.

The inspector laughed.

"There's no need to call in the Yard over an affair of this sort!" he replied pompously. "There are plenty of capable men on the spot!"

They were standing in the big lounge hall, and there was an air of tragedy in that big, lonely old house. All the blinds were down, and the interior of the building was gloomy. Now and again a servant would glide past, almost walking on tiptoe.

Dr. Smallwood came out of the library whilst Blake and Eustace were talking with the inspector in the hall. There was a great change in the old doctor. He was haggard and bowed down with grief.

"You here again, young man?" he said, as he recognised Eustace. "Was it necessary, do you think, to visit this house of death?"

"I'm really frightfully sorry, doctor, but I rather fancied that we might be able to do something," replied Eustace. "This is Mr. Sexton Blake, whom you may have heard of."

Dr. Smallwood bowed to Blake, his eyes full of inquiry.

"I am here in the interests of young Chadwick," said Blake. "There seems to be some doubt——"

"In the interests of young Chadwick!" broke in the doctor angrily. "What nonsense is this? Are you mad, Mr. Blake? Young Chadwick is guilty! Without question, he is guilty! The infernal young hound won't get half he deserves if he goes to the scaffold! Hanging is too good for him! Do you hear me? And you say that you have come down here in his interests! I have never heard of anything more preposterous!"

His bitterness against Roddy was intense. His eyes blazed, and his whole face became flushed. The glare that he bestowed upon Blake was positively threatening.

Not that Blake resented the old doctor's manner. Eustace, too, could understand his attitude. Sir Henry Chadwick had been one of Dr. Smallwood's oldest friends; for many years Sir Henry had been the doctor's patient. And it was only natural that the old practitioner should be bitter and harsh in his attitude towards Roddy. He had loathed Roddy even before the murder, and now that this tragedy had befallen the house, the doctor no longer found it possible to hide his inner feelings.

"Didn't I tell you that I was afraid, Cavendish?" he said, looking at Eustace in a reproachful way. "Don't you remember? I told you that young Chadwick might do something terrible one day. Heaven forgive me for failing to warn Sir Henry in time! But never for a moment did I believe that the young hound would commit such a vile deed."

"Were you present during the quarrel last night?" asked Blake.

"I was."

"Can you tell me what led up to that quarrel?"

"The usual thing," replied the doctor curtly. "Young Chadwick grumbled about being kept a prisoner—as he called it—in this house. He demanded permission from his uncle to take a trip to London. Sir Henry refused, and it was I who ordered Roderick out of the room. I told him bluntly that if he didn't go, I would kick him out. He was worrying his uncle unduly."

"And then?"

"The young fool flared up, and said that I was to blame for his uncle's attitude," replied Dr. Smallwood sombrely. "Indeed, he used such vile language that it was as much as I could do to keep my hands off him. It was at that point that Sir Henry came to his decision."

"His decision to leave Roderick out of his will?"

"Exactly," nodded the doctor. "He told Roderick quite plainly that he had finished with him. His experiment had failed, and the whole thing was over. Roderick could go to London as soon as he liked—and stay there. Not one penny of allowance would he receive—and Sir Henry also swore that he would fetch Williamson from Bury—Williamson is the lawyer. He's handled Sir Henry's affairs for over thirty-five years.

"When Roddy heard that, he seemed to go absolutely mad, and he shouted threats against his uncle, and finally flung himself out of the room and went down to the library; I believe, to drink himself into a state of semi-stupor."

Inspector Rankin grunted.

"For the life of me, Mr. Blake, I can't understand why you're here," he said. "The case is straightforward—and the murderer has already been arrested. Young Chadwick, when he knew that he was going to be cut out of the will to-day, murdered his uncle during the night. I think it quite possible that he was half-drunk at the time, and scarcely knew what he was about. At all events, his counsel will do well to put forward that plea at the trial. As Sir Henry is dead, and as the old will was not annulled, it means that young Chadwick is the heir. Then, again, his flight this morning. Why did he run off as soon as he was awakened?"

"That's quite a point," nodded Blake. "If young Chadwick really committed this murder, why did he go to bed at all? If he meant to run, why didn't he run at some hour

during the night, when he might possibly have gained a good start?"

"Why?" repeated the inspector, staring. "Because he intended inheriting his uncle's property."

"In that case, it was madness on his part to bolt this morning."

"He evidently lost his head," said the inspector. "That's the way I look at it, anyhow. He probably drank himself into a frenzy, went to his uncle's room in the middle of the night, and stabbed him. Perhaps there was some drunken reaction afterwards—a stupor, say—and he was powerless to start."

"I knew Roddy was a poisonous sort of blighter," said Eustace, "but I never set him down as an absolute fool. No man would drink himself to——"

"Mr. Cavendish is right, inspector," said Blake. "Young Chadwick is so obviously guilty of this crime that it could not have been premeditated. If he really intended murdering his uncle so that he could inherit the estates, he would have adopted some ruse to divert suspicion from himself. But he did nothing of the kind. It would seem that he deliberately put the noose round his own neck."

"And the sooner that noose is tightened, the better!" said Dr. Smallwood heatedly. "Man alive, how can you assume, even for a single second, that Chadwick is not guilty? Why, the very knife with which the murder was committed was found in his bed-room."

"Indeed?" said Blake, glancing at the inspector.

"I found it myself," said that officer with some pride. "Under a floorboard, near the window. I naturally searched young Chadwick's bedroom, and it wasn't long before I spotted that loose board. Not only was there a big carving-knife in the cavity, but a pyjama-jacket, too, with one sleeve soaked in blood. You'll waste your time here, Mr. Blake, if you think that you can save young Chadwick from the scaffold."

"He will not be saved," said Dr. Smallwood tensely. "The world will be cleaner after Roderick has been hanged. He's a noxious parasite—a thing of no use to man or beast."

Chapter 4.
The Missing Toe.

EUSTACE began to feel that he had made rather a mess of things. It had been a pity to drag Sexton Blake down there for nothing. Yet there was something about Blake which reassured Eustace. Blake was not looking quite so disappointed as Eustace had expected.

"Have you any objection if I have a look at the body?" asked the detective, glancing from Dr. Smallwood to Inspector Rankin.

"No objection at all, Mr. Blake," grunted the inspector impatiently. "Go ahead, if you want to. But I tell you frankly that there's nothing whatever to see."

Before Blake could go upstairs, however, Mr. Frederick Williamson arrived from Bury St. Edmunds. Mr. Williamson was a small, dapper little man, and he now had a grave, troubled expression on his face. He was busy with Dr. Smallwood for a time, and with the police, too. But presently Blake had a chance of chatting with him.

"An appalling tragedy, Mr. Blake," said the lawyer. "So totally unexpected, too. Sir Henry was ailing, perhaps, but as Smallwood tells me, it was more imaginary than real. No reason why he shouldn't have lived for another twenty years."

"And Roderick is the sole legatee?"

"Yes, the worthless young puppy!" retorted Mr. Williamson hotly. "It always passed my comprehension why Sir Henry allowed that scamp to live in this house—and virtually to take command of the estate. A mad thing, Mr. Blake—and now it has led to this."

"There is nobody else, I suppose, who benefits to any considerable extent by Sir Henry's death?" asked Blake.

"Nobody at all," replied the lawyer. "This nephew is the only close relative, as far as I know. Of course, there are some bequests to servants. Jevons, for example, will get ten thousand pounds."

"As much as that?" commented Blake.

"He has been a very faithful servant," replied the solicitor. "Been in Sir Henry's service for most of his life. Then there are some bequests to the head gardener, the cook, and so forth. But they are all trifles, comparatively."

Blake shook his head when he had a word with Eustace, some minutes later.

"Pretty mouldy, looking at it by and large," said Eustace. "The case seems to be as plain as a currant bun at a school treat."

"I'm afraid it's a waste of time, Eustace," said Blake. "Not that Roderick murdered his uncle with any idea of obtaining the fortune. There was nothing premeditated about the crime, as far as I can see at present. It is far more likely that Roderick drank himself into a condition of maddened rage, and that he took his uncle's life in a moment of sheer insanity. As the inspector says, the case is perfectly simple."

"What a frightful bore, old boy!"

"But you never know," continued Blake, with a sidelong smile. "We haven't finished yet, Eustace."

Dr. Smallwood offered to accompany Blake and Eustace upstairs, to view the body. Before doing so, however, Blake carefully examined the fatal carving-knife. It was not an interesting exhibit. Quite an ordinary carving-knife, bloodstained, but with no finger-prints on the handle.

"No finger-prints?" said Blake, glancing at the inspector. "Very strange, don't you think?"

"Young Chadwick must have worn gloves."

"And he was in a drunken frenzy when he committed the murder?" mused Blake. "Rather peculiar that he should take the precaution to wear gloves."

"Decidedly on the rummy side, too, that he should conceal the old rib-tickler under the floor of his bed-room," commented Eustace. "I mean, rather asking for trouble, what? As he took the care to hide the dread weapon, one would have supposed that he would have shoved it in the farthermost attic, or the deepest cellar. But hardly in his own bally bed-room."

"There is no accounting for what a desperate man, having just committed a murder, might do," said the inspector. "I confess that I cannot see the object of these—er—quibbles, Mr. Blake. The evidence is conclusive. Chadwick's flight, in itself, condemned him."

"But he hasn't confessed, has he?" murmured Eustace.

"How many murderers confess?" retorted the inspector.

It was apparent that he greatly resented Sexton Blake's investigations, and judging by the glances he bestowed upon Eustace every now and again, he looked upon that elegant young gentleman as a brainless noodle. Not that Eustace minded.

The doctor intervened at an awkward pause.

"Drink!" he said bitterly. "Drink is the cause of this tragedy, Mr. Blake. It was the curse of Roderick's life. His rotten example had begun to affect other members of the household, too."

They were walking upstairs, towards the death chamber, and Blake pricked up his ears.

"How do you mean, Dr. Smallwood?" he asked.

"Well, there's Jevons," said the doctor gruffly. "As worthy a man as ever lived—a man who has grown old in Sir Henry's service. I won't say that he didn't like his glass of port, now and again. But of late he has been drinking more heavily—and there isn't the slightest doubt in my mind that Roderick egged him on. Only about a month ago Jevons was positively drunk."

"Did Sir Henry know?"

"He knew, and he gave Jevons notice on the spot," replied the doctor. "It was only the old man's pitiful entreaties that made Sir Henry relent. But right to the last he was cold towards Jevons, and I don't think he really forgave him."

Blake glanced at Eustace, and Eustace winked.

"I wonder," said Eustace, "if Mr. Blake and I could wash our hands? Long motor ride, you know, and all that."

"Certainly," said the doctor. "Here's the bath-room. I'll wait for you."

They went in, and Eustace grinned.

"I rather thought, old boy, that you required a word in private with me on the subject of the Jevons bird,' he remarked. "Dashed significant what?"

"I only regard it as significant, Eustace, because of your strong conviction that Roderick Chadwick could not have committed this murder," said Blake. "The evidence is overwhelmingly against him. Yet we must examine these facts concerning Jevons."

"I've got nothing against the old blighter; but we can't ignore the fact that he heard the quarrel," said Eustace. "So he must have known that a new will was in the offing."

"There isn't much you miss, Eustace," said Blake approvingly. "That is precisely the point. Jevons had been dismissed—and had been reinstated. But he knew Sir Henry was still angry with him; and when he heard that a new will was to be made, it is quite likely that he feared that he would be cut out of it."

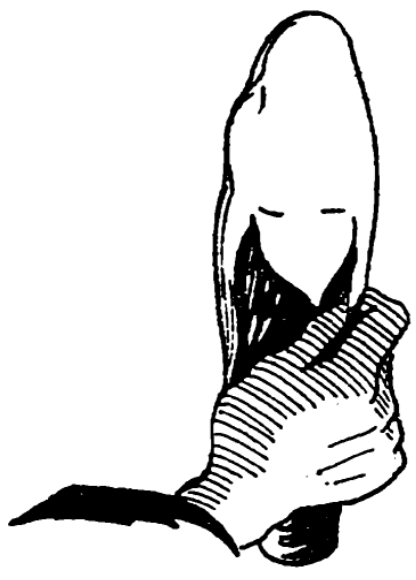
"So he knifed Sir Henry in order to make sure of his merry ten thousand," nodded Eustace. "A foul thing to do, and I really can't believe that Jevons did it. But it's a point."

"The carving-knife is suggestive," mused Blake. "It is the very weapon that a butler would select. And he could easily have got hold of one of Roderick's pyjama coats—and he could just as easily have planted this coat and the knife under the floor of the young man's bed-room. In proportion to Sir Henry's fortune, ten thousand pounds is a small sum; but, to a man like Jevons, ten thousand pounds is a very large amount indeed."

They emerged from the bath-room and found Dr. Smallwood at the top of the stairs bidding good-bye to Mr. Williamson, who had come up.

"Make no mistake, Mr. Blake—that wretched boy is guilty," said the lawyer. "A thoroughpaced young scoundrel—capable of any villainy. I really do think that you are wasting your time here."

"We shall see," replied Blake briefly.



EVERYBODY was convinced that Roddy was guilty — the police, the doctor, the lawyer—everybody. Blake could understand that these good people wanted to believe Roddy guilty. They harped on it so much.

"I hope you won't be too long, Mr. Blake," said Dr. Smallwood, as he opened a door. "I can assure you that there is nothing to be discovered in this room."

They were followed in by Inspector Rankin, who had an impatient expression on his face. He was as resentful as ever.

"A little more light, please," said Blake briefly.

"I drew the curtains out of respect for the dead," said the doctor. "Perhaps we had better leave them drawn. There is a lamp here——"

"I would prefer the daylight," interrupted Blake.

Eustace crossed the room and drew the curtains well back, so that the wintry daylight flooded into the death chamber. Blake went to the silent figure on the bed, and gently drew down the sheet.

At first his examination was merely cursory; but suddenly he became more tense, more alert. Eustace, at least, noticed the change, and he wondered.

"You think that this wound was instantaneously fatal, doctor?" asked Blake, turning.

"Without a doubt," replied Dr. Smallwood. "Sir Henry probably knew nothing of it. The knife pierced the heart."

Blake nodded, and continued his examination. He even took out a powerful magnifying lens, and with this he inspected the wound on the dead man's body. Inspector Rankin grunted with impatience. He had no sympathy with that sort of thing.

"Upon my word, Mr. Blake, this is too bad!" he said half angrily. "What is your reason for this—this fooling? Are you trying to impress us? The case is cut and dried. Sir Henry was stabbed to death, and the evidence——"

"I am sorry, inspector, but I am conducting this inquiry in the interests of my client, Mr. Roderick Chadwick," interrupted Blake. "Whatever Mr. Chadwick's character—and I cannot doubt that he is a worthless scamp—I must nevertheless do my utmost in the interests of justice. Do you mind bringing the carving-knife?"

"I object very strongly!" replied the inspector curtly.

"But you will bring it, nevertheless."

"I don't see why——"

"You will see why after you have brought it," interrupted Blake, with a steely glitter in his eyes.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders, snorted, and departed. Dr. Smallwood, with inquiry in his eyes, moved nearer to the bed.

"Have you made some discovery, Mr. Blake?" he asked curiously.

"I think so, but I am not quite sure yet," replied Blake. "Did you examine this wound very carefully, doctor?"

"I will confess that I did not give it the close attention which you are now giving it," replied Dr. Smallwood. "I did not see the necessity. When the cause of death is so obvious——"

"It is not always safe to accept the obvious," put in Blake. "Sir Henry was found murdered—stabbed to the heart. A knife is discovered in his nephew's bed-room. It seems to be a case where two and two make four. But when the inspector brings that knife I want you to help me."

The inspector came in, carrying the fatal knife gingerly. Blake took it, gazed at is closely, and then compared it with the wound.

"Come and have a look at this, inspector. You, too, Dr. Smallwood," he said. "Do you notice anything significant?"

"What do you mean—significant?" asked the inspector impatiently.

"This carving-knife has a very wide blade—particularly towards the hilt," replied Blake. "You, Dr. Smallwood, declare that the heart was pierced?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then this blade must necessarily have been thrust in completely to the hilt?"

"Yes, unquestionably."

"Look at the wound," said Blake. "If you like, measure it. The blade of this knife is considerably bigger than the wound. I am suggesting that a totally different knife was used for the murder."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the doctor, startled. "You amaze me, Mr. Blake! I must confess I never dreamed that there could be any such possibility."

"But you agree?"

"Certainly I agree," said the old doctor earnestly. "Look, inspector. What do you make of it?"

Rankin was an obstinate man.

"I make nothing of it," he replied curtly. "You're a doctor, Smallwood, and you surely know that nothing can be judged from this comparison. Isn't it more than likely that the wound has closed since death?"

Blake looked at the doctor inquiringly.

"H'm! It is possible, of course, though not likely," said Dr. Smallwood slowly.

He adjusted his pince-nez and gazed more closely at the dead man's chest. He even took Sexton Blake's magnifying-glass, and gazed through this, too.

"Curious—very curious," he said at length. "If another knife was employed, Inspector Rankin, then the whole structure of the evidence is shattered. It indicates that the carving-knife was deliberately planted in Roderick's bed-room—and I should hate to believe that. For who could have done it, and for what reason? Again, where is the actual knife which dealt the fatal blow?"

"This is the actual knife," said the inspector gruffly. "I absolutely refuse to believe this story of yours, Mr. Blake."

"As a medical man, I can say definitely that the wound might have contracted," said the doctor thoughtfully. "It is not very likely, but possible."

"That is sufficient for me," said Rankin, with a triumphant glance at Blake. "I shall require you to give that evidence at the inquest, doctor. Why on earth should we fool about like this?"

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"I am very much afraid, Rankin, that this will be a matter for expert advice," he said. "Without wishing to cast any doubt on Dr. Smallwood's statement, the opinion of a specialist is essential. You, Dr. Smallwood, will no doubt agree with me. I doubt if you would care to accept the responsibility of——"

"Certainly not," interrupted the doctor, who was looking thoroughly startled. "The point is an important one. The corroboration of a second medical man is imperative. Mr. Blake is right, inspector. If you will

Our Christmas Programme

Christmas-story-specialist GWYN EVANS gives us another seasonable treat!

NO doubt about it, our Christmas Number is going to be something really special!

Strictly speaking, there will be two Christmas numbers. Next week's issue, out next Thursday, will be the first, and the second will appear on the following Thursday, December 19th.

If you remember our last year's Christmas issue, you will remember the Robin Hood Club—that quixotic body, headed by the Earl of Huntingley, whose mission is to act as a band of modern Robin Hoods.

Here they are again, and in finer form than ever! Gwyn Evans, author of such memorable yarns as "Mrs. Bardell's Christmas Pudding," and "The Affair of the Black Carol," eclipses his previous best in this double-length yarn.

Next Thursday will see the publication of the first part of it—the following issue, the sequel. In short, this year's Christmas programme is a double serving of Yuletide fare.

Next week's Special Christmas Number will be enlarged to 32 pages in order to contain this full-length story, plus extra features.

Tinker's Notebook will be bright with topical and seasonable items, and—make a note of this—the long-anonymous authors of our Sexton Blake stories will now make their appearance in a page of portraits and Yuletide greetings.

In all respects these two forthcoming issues are not to be missed. Book now:

The Mistletoe-Milk Mystery and The Masque of Time.

The Characters You Will Meet . . . . .

Sexton Blake
Tinker
Splash Page
Det.-Inspector Cout's
Mrs. Bardell
Robin, Earl of Huntingley
The Hon. Toby Cripps
Pongo Paget
Lady Marion Huntingley
Padre John Browne
Bently the Valet
Julius Jones
Ruff Hanson

—and sundry others no less delightful with whom to spend a Happy Christmas

---

permit me, I will arrange with a colleague to examine the body—and the knife."

BLAKE pulled the sheet back into place, and Dr. Smallwood went to the window and prepared to draw the curtains again.

"Just a moment, old boy," said Eustace gently.

"Mr. Blake has finished in here," said the doctor.

"Not yet, I fancy," said Eustace. "Blake, dear old ferret, what do you make of these?"

Eustace nodded towards a corner of the room which had apparently escaped attention. There was a big easy-chair in the way, and beyond this the carpet did not extend. The floorboards were highly polished, and there had been really no reason why anybody should go behind that armchair. But Eustace, with his accustomed keenness, had not allowed his eyes to remain idle.

"Footprints, you know," he said casually.

Blake moved the chair, and went down on his knees at the edge of the carpet. Mentally he registered a good mark against Eustace's name. At close quarters he could see that the footprints were fairly well defined. They could only be seen directly at an angle, and they were the footprints of a man with bare feet.

"Another discovery, Mr. Blake?" asked the inspector sarcastically.

"Very clever! Allow me to congratulate your astute companion!"

"Not at all," murmured Eustace modestly. "It comes quite natural, I can assure you. I won a prize at school——"

"Good heavens! What do you expect to find in the bed-room?" demanded the inspector. "Footprints? The footprints of a man with bare feet? Isn't it as clear as daylight that Sir Henry made those footprints?"

"Let us see," said Blake evenly.

He went over to the bed, uncovered the feet of the dead man, and pursed his lips.

"They are not Sir Henry's footprints, inspector," he replied. "Look here. The little toe of Sir Henry's left foot is completely missing, and those footprints on the floor were made by a man with perfectly sound feet."

"Oh!" said the inspector blankly.

"Did you know about this, doctor?" asked Blake, indicating the missing toe.

"Why, of course," said Dr. Smallwood. "Sir Henry had an accident as a boy, and his toe was amputated."

Blake took a closer look at the dead foot.

"As a boy?" he repeated curiously.

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"I am only sure because of what Sir Henry himself told me," replied the doctor, with a show of heat. "I see no reason to doubt Sir Henry's word on the matter. Why should he tell me a lie regarding such a triviality?"

"If those footprints weren't made by Sir Henry, then they must have been made by Roderick Chadwick," said the inspector. "We know that he came into this room in his pyjamas to commit the murder. Obviously he was in his bare feet. Good heavens! Why all this mystery over nothing?"

The inspector was annoyed because he hadn't seen those footprints for himself. Blake was beginning to see more clearly than ever that Inspector Rankin was an inefficient officer. Sound, no doubt, for the ordinary routine work of the district, but quite useless in an investigation of this type. If the Scotland Yard experts had been called in, they would very soon have robbed this room of its secrets.

"They're not Roddy's footprints, old boy," whispered Eustace, as he went on his knees beside Blake. "Quite impossible."

"How do you know?"

"Roddy often borrowed my shoes at Oxford—he generally borrowed everything he could lay his hands on," replied Eustace. "Size seven. These feet are about size nine."

Blake nodded.

The footprints had not been made by Sir Henry—since the mark of the

(*Continued on page* 16.)

To Start With.

A BOY in Chicago has been awarded £20 for an act of bravery.

Lacking full details, we can only suppose he went out to play without his bullet-proof vest on.

* * *

Wisdom of the Week.

"THE best people do not do their washing in the parlour," said a woman witness at the Marylebone Police Court.

* * *

Drama of the Week.

PROUD of his son, a Parisian father sent him to an expensive school in the South of France. The father made enough money at his profession to give him a good education, but he never confided what the profession was.

ENLIGHTENED

Later the boy was enlightened.

Home from school for the holidays, he was short of money, went into a pawnshop with his watch.

Behind the counter stood his father.

* * *

Comedy of the Week.

BANG!

The discharge of a shotgun in a wooded swamp in New Jersey, U.S.A. Behind the gun, young Johnny di Rocco, a thirteen-year-old, with whom were several companions; in line with the sights of the gun, a low-flying hawk.

But the hawk flew on. Instead, Johnny and his fellow-hunters saw a man on the skyline fall and lie still.

Scared stiff at what he had done, the hunter dropped his gun, dived into the woods. The others, white-faced, crept back to their homes, and not for some hours did they muster the courage to tell of the man killed by that random shot.

Through the night hours a squad of policemen, and Johnny's mother, combed the woods. Meantime, he, paralysed with panic, clung to the branches of a tree, wherein he had hidden himself.

In the morning he ventured forth. He met the search-party apprehensively.

They had found the body. It was a scarecrow, with Johnny's shot in its dummy head.

* * *

Flats for Flatties.

THE policemen's lot is now a not unhappy one.

From providing sentry-boxes where he can consume in peace and privacy his between-duty snack, to supplying him with commodious and well-appointed flats (house-agents' jargon) to live in, the Powers who look after the interests of Robert are doing their stuff.

Recently has been completed the building of a fine block of flats solely for the occupation of policemen of the Metropolitan Force and their families, at Kennington, London.

Apart from the wonderful bowling green on the huge central lawn, they have all modern conveniences (bed., recep., kit.-scull., bth-rm.).

The very idea of it makes me go h. and c. all over.

Thriller.

WHAT is the mystery of the dilapidated house at Montreuil?

Frederic Rigaudin was an accountant, living in Paris, and employed by a Polish woman in a house in this suburb of the city.

A few weeks ago a wicker trunk in the left-luggage office at Lille Station was opened. Inside was the body of Rigaudin.

Police investigations began.

The woman was Polish by nationality, uneducated, but rich from her dealings in rabbit-pelts. There came a time when she wanted to move from the house at Montreuil. She was surprised when Rigaudin, who kept her accounts at a salary of about four pounds a week, offered to buy it.

Sixty-four pounds was the first payment, but he could not raise it. Anxious to get the property, he persuaded her to accept his promissory note.

THE house accordingly became his. But it remained closed and shuttered, while the new owner continued to live at his own flat in another part of the city.

Witnesses have testified to seeing him drive up in a car, meet various people outside who spoke to him in some foreign language, believed be Polish, and then accompany them into the shuttered house. They never remained for long, but emerged and went their various ways.

And now the accountant, owner of a decrepit house he could not pay for and never lived in, has been found in a trunk, murdered.

A real-life thrill-story, if ever there was one!

* * *

Dark Days.

YOU and I know the despair of debt (alas, alas!).

Our sympathy, then, is demanded for

Tinker's N

Sexton Blake's assistant cheerily —but mainly from that famous "Index." If you'd like to write to "Union Jack," Fleetway House,

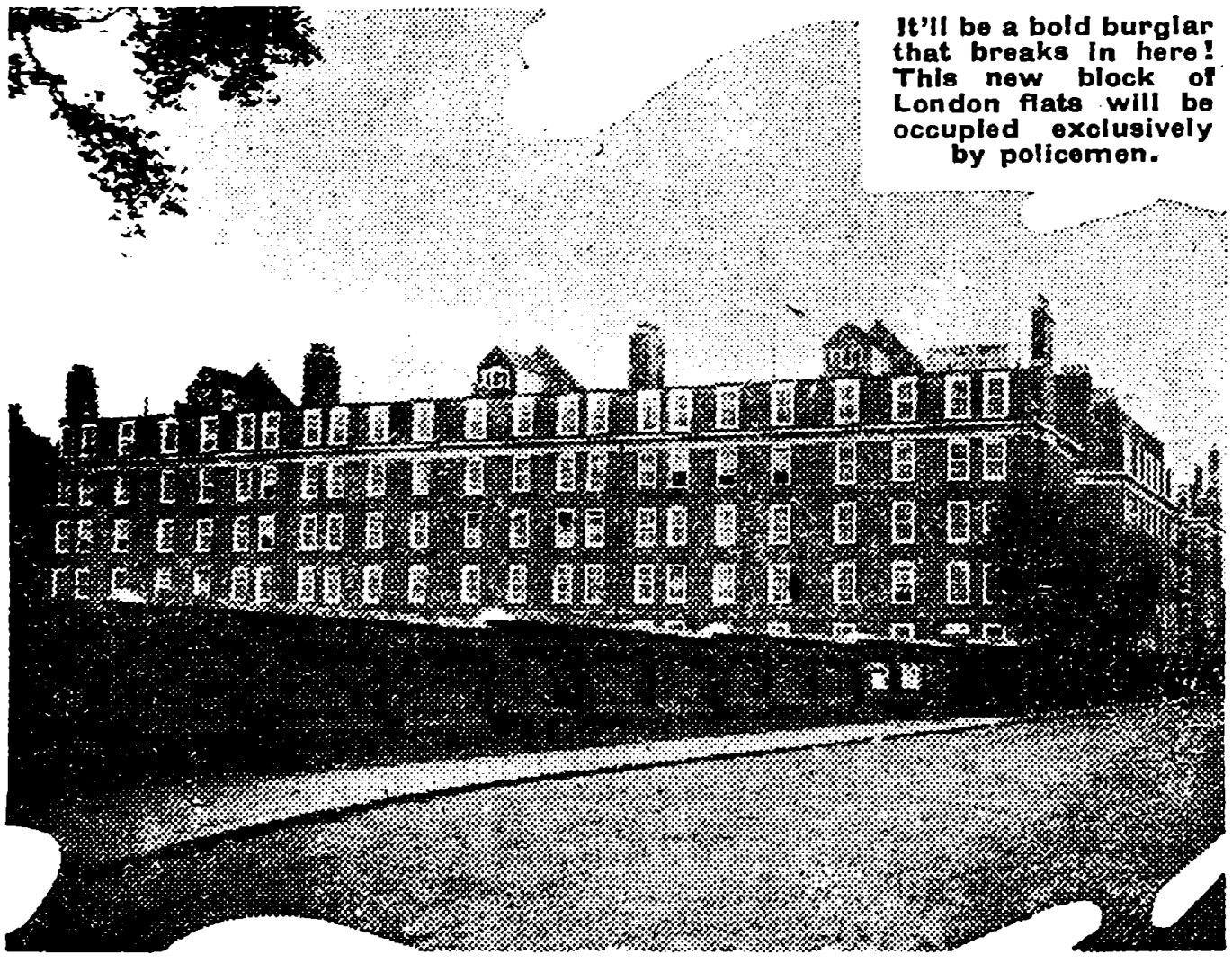
the villagers of Porlock, Somerset, whose local council haven't got the money to pay the electric light bill for last winter.


MADE UP

It seems that Porlock finances are in charge of the Williton Rural District Council, and they won't yield any more cash to Porlock till some aggravating date in the next financial year, or something like that.

Special journeys to the hard-hearted Williton purse-holders have been without avail. On the plea that the rate was already made up, they simply turned the prayers of Porlock down.

Commercial travellers for candle firms



It'll be a bold burglar that breaks in here! This new block of London flats will be occupied exclusively by policemen.

ote-book

cusses items from all sources tion known as the Baker Street ker, his address is: c/o Editor, ringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

ght to be able to book big orders in rlock just now.

* * *

k, and——

AID a policeman witness in a begging case in a West London court: "This an came up to me when I was in plain othes and asked for a copper." Judging from the sequel of the man's urt appearance, he got the wrong sort copper.

* * *

ay Complaints.

MOSCOW is well in the running for the Prize Par. this week.

It seems that the director of a theatre ere which had not been doing very od business got the "House Full" ards out by a very cute stunt.

He announced that the orchestra and chorus would, at the end of the performance, give a special item. Should anyone of the audience not like the extra number, they had only to mention the fact and they would receive their admission money back ten times over.

Packed, the house waited expectantly for the surprise item. It duly came. The programme ended, and the band and chorus struck up the Communist "Internationale," with the audience duly standing at respectful attention.

Then appeared the manager before the curtain. They had just heard the special item, he said. Did anyone wish to show their displeasure at it?

Nobody did. To criticise the national Soviet hymn would be distinctly unhealthy. The audience dispersed, ticket-money unclaimed.

* * *

Bigamystery.

THERE are (as the chess-board designer remarked to the corkscrew bender) all sorts of queer ways of making a living.

The latest is by getting married.

A man—a naturalised American—has just been arrested in Warsaw on the eve of his sixty-second wedding. He had previously married sixty-one wives in less than two years.

No, he was not a wholesale bigamist—merely a business man. He had discovered that the American immigration laws forbade aliens entering the country except under stringent regulations, but that wives of naturalised Americans already in the States could do so at any time.

THERE were dozens of local girls with lovers in America whom they wished to join; also there was such a thing as legal marriage by proxy. Result, he got busy, and hence the spate of matrimony and the steady exodus across the sea of wives from those parts.

All they had to do was to get married, quite legally, obtain the necessary papers and photograph of the wedding group, and say good-bye.

But the game was too good to last. The police heard of it, arrested him on a charge of bigamy, and, when they found his artful proxy-weddings did not make him guilty of this, held him for wholesale evasion of the emigration laws.

* * *

Oh, Horrors!

OFT in the stilly night a policeman's lot is not a happy one.

"Let me go! *Let me GO!*" screamed an agonised voice from a house in Gledhow Gardens, Kensington, in the dark hours recently.

Suspecting the worst, terrified residents rang up the police with news of a new murder.

From the station sallied forth a sergeant, an acting-sergeant, a constable. The house was in sinister darkness and empty. A stealthy prowl round the premises with flashing torches for signs of the criminal—but darkness and ominous silence.

Then bangings at the door and pulling at the bell.

A portentous pause, and then——

HEAVY steps clumping down the stairs, and the door opening slowly.

It was the caretaker.

He denied knowledge of a murder. There was nobody there but himself, he said. The policemen entered, poked about.

They found a three-valve wireless set; learned that the loud speaker had just been shrieking forth the last screams and shouts of a wireless thriller play, "The Monkey's Paw."

* * *

Overdone.

THERE are burglar alarms, too, to disturb the calm meditations of the night watch.

I happened to be walking along Cheapside late one night when an ear-shattering din broke out overhead. It was the big gong of a burglar alarm on the wall of a jeweller's shop.

I thought I saw a policeman some way along the street. I hurried up to him.

He looked up casually as I approached, and went on with his job of testing the locks of shop doors. The bell still continued with its clamour.

"Can't you hear it?" I demanded urgently.

"'Course I can hear it," he said, "not being deaf."

"But what about the burglars? It's a jeweller's shop."

"There aren't no burglars," he said easily. "I should get palpitations of the heart if I worried about those alarms going off. They're doing it all night long. They go off for the fun of the thing, seemingly. Last night four of 'em on my beat, and three on the next man's."

I gathered that it was the habit of these delicately adjusted alarms to err on the safe side and ring entirely without provocation. Probably one of these times one may ring in real earnest as a gentleman of the jemmy uproots the safe when the burgling community get to know of this information.

A game of bowls in the new police quarters—a pleasant off-duty antidote to strenuous traffic-controlling or tramping a beat.

(*Continued from page* 13.)

left little toe was quite clearly indicated—and they had not been made by Roddy. Then by whom?

"Jevons?" breathed Eustace, apparently reading Blake's thoughts.

"No," replied Blake, without hesitation.

He had already noticed that Jevons had bad feet—like so many men of his age and calling. He walked with a hobble, clearly indicating that his feet were troublesome. Besides, his very age was against any such possibility. These footprints had been made by a man with perfectly healthy feet—a man in the prime of life.

Sexton Blake's investigations were progressing.

He was satisfied, in his own mind—notwithstanding the doctor's opinion—that the carving-knife was not the weapon with which the murder had been committed. This was decidedly a point in Roddy's favour. Again, somebody had been in this room overnight—somebody with bare feet. Not Sir Henry—not Roddy. Who else was there? The only other people who had been in the room were Dr. Smallwood and Inspector Rankin—and perhaps one or two other police officials. And none of them could conceivably have removed their shoes and socks. These footprints had been made by somebody else—somebody who had not yet appeared in the case.

Who was this mysterious person?

A big man, since he had large feet—a man in the prime of life—a man different from any of these whom Blake had yet seen. And he was a man, apparently, of whom the occupants of Chadwick Manor knew nothing.

Chapter 5.
Left Luggage.

THERE was a conference down in the library shortly afterwards.

Dr. Smallwood was looking grave and troubled; he declared, quite frankly, that he was uneasy concerning that wound. He promised that he would get a colleague to come over and give his opinion.

"I think the matter is more important than that, Dr. Smallwood," said Blake quietly. "When the Director of Public Prosecutions has the facts laid before him, he will doubtless see to it that a specialist is called in. It is more than likely that the Home Office expert himself will come down."

Dr. Smallwood frowned.

"Surely that won't be necessary?" he protested. "If we can get corroborative evidence, by an independent medical man, it will be satisfactory?"

"Quite," put in the inspector, with a cold glance at Blake. "I will see Superintendent Powell as quickly as possible, and he, no doubt, will give all the necessary instructions. I would like to point out, Mr. Blake, that this case is entirely in the hands of the superintendent. I do not mind candidly telling you that he is a man who resents any kind of interference."

Blake smiled.

"I shall have to see the superintendent, then," he replied calmly.

He and Eustace went out—just to have a stroll round the grounds. Eustace suspected that Blake had some ulterior motive, and he was more than ever certain of this when Blake led the way round one of the gravelled terraces towards the window of the death-chamber.

"I have an idea, Eustace, that Inspector Rankin would very much like to use the toe of his boot to me," said Blake dryly. "You heard what he said about interference?"

"The poor old fossil knows that you are capable of twisting him into knots," nodded Eustace. "Naturally, he doesn't think much of it. I'm a bit sorry for the blighter. His complacency has had a number of holes torn in it."

"Unless I am mistaken, his complacency will be shattered altogether before long," said Blake, with a grim note in his voice. "There's something fishy about this affair, Eustace."

"So I gather, dear old sleuth."

"On the surface, everything seemed so plain and straightforward," continued Blake. "Inspector Rankin only looked on the surface—and that was his mistake."

"That's the worst of these bone-headed blokes," said Eustace, nodding. "So frightfully sure that they know best, what? As soon as I went into the chamber of horrors, I knew that we were on the track of something big. It hit me fairly in the gizzard. I was irresistibly reminded of Yarmouth."

"Yarmouth?"

"It smelt so fishy, dear chief," explained Eustace. "Then, again, I couldn't help noticing how your back hair went up into a ridge. I believe you know something that I don't know," he added reproachfully. "Be a sportsman, and spill it into my near-side ear."

"I know nothing more than you do, Eustace," replied Blake slowly. "Those footprints rather worry me—and so do the dead man's feet."

"You mean, they don't tally?"

"Not merely that—but something else," said Blake. "Didn't you notice Sir Henry's feet?"

"I must confess I wasn't fascinated enough to give them more than a mere once-over."

"In the course of that 'once-over,' did you see anything strange?"

"Well, they weren't precisely the kind of feet I expected to see," admitted Eustace cautiously. "To tell you the truth, old boy, they gave me a bit of a shock. I've really been wondering if Sir Henry actually has kept to his bed-room for nearly a year."

Blake nodded.

"Good man, Eustace," he said approvingly. "Sir Henry's feet certainly do not fit in with the facts as we know them. As you say, it is difficult to realise that they are the feet of a man who has been an invalid for so many months."

"That's just the point," said Eustace. "He hasn't been an invalid. Roddy told me so. More imaginary than anything else. I can't help thinking that Sir Henry

has been acting very strangely—pretending to keep to his room, and yet, all the while, dashing hither and thither. I mean, those feet of his are a bit horny, indicating that he has recently done quite a lot of walking. I wonder if the old boy has been playing a double game?"

"Out of my way—fool!" panted a hoarse voice. The valet was elbowed aside, and Eustace found himself gazing at the dishevelled figure of Roddy Chadwick.

Blake thoughtfully lit a cigarette.

"If so, he has done it alone," he said. "And that means that he must have deceived the doctor. It's all very puzzling, Eustace."

"And Jevons?" asked Eustace casually.

"Somehow, I cannot think evil of Jevons," said Blake. "I may have been deceived in him, but I doubt it. He seems to be a fine example of the true, faithful old retainer."

"We seem to be getting into a mess," said Eustace, shaking his head. "I mean, according to the rules, we should first of all suspect the doctor, and then the butler. But, dash it, they're both above suspicion! It makes it so deucedly hard."

He glanced round at the hard ground, and he sighed.

"Nothing here, old boy," he said regretfully. "I mean, what with this frost, and the snow vanishing, there's no chance of finding any footprints out of doors. And speaking of footprints reminds me of those specimens in the bed-room. Whose do you think they are?"

"When we find that out, Eustace, we shall be a fair way towards a solution of this mystery," replied Blake. "They are not the footprints of the dead man, and they are not the footprints of Roderick. They are not Jevons' footprints, and they are certainly not the doctor's."

"We can hardly picture a respectable country practitioner removing his shoes and socks in the presence of a patient," mused Eustace. "Then who else is there? Absolutely nobody. Dash it, don't we meet with snags?"

"Perhaps this snag is not quite so difficult as it looks, Eustace."

"How do you mean?" inquired the young man, adjusting his monocle, and regarding Blake with a straight eye. "If those footprints weren't made by any of the chappies we have mentioned, then who did make them? There isn't anybody else."

Sexton Blake nodded.

"Exactly," he said. "That's just the point."

Eustace stared.

"I confess," he said, "that I don't get you."

"Think it over, old man," smiled Blake. "And you might go indoors and see what arrangements are being made with regard to food. I dare say you're getting hungry."

Eustace went in in a very thoughtful mood, and when he looked for Blake again, Blake had gone. He soon found out that the criminologist had wandered off for a long walk. Eustace felt considerably peeved.

IT wasn't until mid-evening that Blake returned.

He was looking brisk and businesslike, and he expressed approval when he learned that dinner was about to be served.

"I'm hungry!" he said. "I've had a long walk, and this crisp, wintry air has given me a big appetite. Hallo, Eustace! I hope you've been thinking things over?"

Eustace looked at him reproachfully.

"A dirty trick, old war-horse," he complained. "Why didn't you take me with you?"

But Blake only laughed, and it wasn't until dinner was well on its way that he sprang a surprise on Inspector Rankin—who was still there, and who saw no reason why he should not accept the hospitality of the house.

"By the way, inspector," said Blake, "I've seen Superintendent Powell, and I have arranged that we shall meet him at the cross roads at nine o'clock."

The inspector lowered his knife and fork, his eyes filled with fresh resentment.

"I don't understand, Mr. Blake," he said angrily. "Why have you arranged this meeting? What is it for?"

"Well, there is a little job to be undertaken—over at Great Pelton," replied Blake. "The superintendent will have his car ready, and——"

"Great Pelton!" ejaculated the inspector. "That's eight miles away?"

"Roughly, I believe it is!" agreed Blake.

"What on earth are we going over to Great Pelton for?" demanded the amazed inspector.

"I am afraid our task will be an unsavoury one," replied Blake, as he helped himself to some mustard. "To be exact, we are going to exhume a coffin from Great Pelton churchyard."

"Good gad!" murmured Eustace.

"Exhume a coffin?" ejaculated the inspector. "Whose coffin?"

"None will dispute that it belongs to the late Mr. Matthew Knox," replied Blake gravely. "He died, I believe, about a year ago."

"Knox!" said the startled police officer. "Yes, of course! I remember Knox—the blacksmith! But, why in the name of all that's absurd, should we exhume his body? What are you talking about, Mr. Blake?"

"If it's all the same to you, Inspector Rankin, I would rather not say anything else just at present," replied Blake vaguely. "I have formed a theory, and I am naturally desirous of putting it to the test."

The inspector was so upset that he couldn't eat any more dinner.

"But it's so extraordinary!" he protested. "How can the death of Knox, the Great Pelton blacksmith, have any possible bearing upon the murder of Sir Henry Chadwick? I cannot help saying, Mr. Blake, that your methods are—are——"

"Disconcerting, old boy?" suggested Eustace gently.

"I don't approve of them!" said the inspector, compressing his lips. "It will be an absolute outrage to

exhume Knox's body. Have you spoken to the vicar?"

"All the necessary arrangements are made," replied Blake.

Eustace guessed that if Inspector Rankin had been less antagonistic, Blake would have taken him completely into his confidence. But Blake was taking a little impish pleasure in exasperating this pompous police officer.

"You might, at least, have consulted me before you took these steps, Mr. Blake," said Rankin bitterly. "I would remind you that I am in charge of this case."

"Indeed?" murmured Blake. "I thought that Superintendent Powell was."

"Superintendent Powell left me in full and absolute charge," insisted the inspector. "That being the case, I am not altogether sure that I shall sanction this exhumation. It cannot have any bearing upon the murder of Sir Henry. Besides, Dr. Smallwood is coming back later on in the evening. He is bringing Dr. Bradbury, of Prescott's End."

"That needn't interfere with our own arrangements," replied Blake. "Of course, inspector, if you prefer to remain here, all well and good. Don't let me persuade you to come. Our mission, in any case, will not be over pleasant."

BUT Inspector Rankin, when it came to the point, was eager enough to accompany Blake and Eustace to the cross roads. And there, in the cold moonlight of the winter's night, they found not only Superintendent Powell but four constables as well. Sticking out of the waiting motor-car were the handles of picks and shovels and spades.

"What does this mean, sir?" asked Rankin, appealing to the superintendent.

"It means, if Mr. Blake's theory is right, that we shall have escaped making an appalling blunder," replied the superintendent grimly. "The evidence against young Chadwick is so overwhelming that he would certainly have been convicted, no matter how able the defence."

The superintendent was a big, bluff, good-natured-looking man. And, judging by the way he regarded Inspector Rankin, he was not altogether pleased with his subordinate's conduct of the inquiry.

The inspector seemed to feel that he was "on the carpet," and he was so dumbfounded that he had no more to say. He seemed to be fairly bowled over. That complacency of his had received a jolt which shook him to the marrow.

The vicar of Great Pelton—a thin-faced, nervous little man, was awaiting the party when it arrived at the churchyard. He fussed about a good deal, but he put no obstacles in the way of the police.

Eustace watched everything in a fascinated way. He was certain that Sexton Blake had made some big discovery, and, although he was annoyed with Blake for keeping it to himself, he was no less interested on that account.

He was annoyed with himself, too. He had seen everything that Blake had seen, yet he could not follow Blake's line of reasoning. He could not see what had brought Blake to this rural churchyard, eight miles away from the scene of the murder.

Eustace noted that the gravestone gave the information to the world that "Here lies the body of Matthew Knox, aged 57," and so forth. It was an obscure grave, tucked away under the big, high wall of the churchyard, and quite a distance from the road. There were trees and bushes in the vicinity, which made the spot even more private.

No lanterns were used, for the moonlight was sufficient, and neither Blake nor Superintendent Powell had any wish to attract attention. The vicar was the only soul in Great Pelton who knew that this exhumation was taking place, and he, too, desired to keep it private.

Sexton Blake said nothing as the police got to work. He stood there, thoughtful and confident. Eustace attempted to draw him into conversation once or twice, but it was useless.

"Wait," was all that Blake would say. "Until this coffin is brought to the surface and opened I can tell you nothing."

The police worked hard, and it wasn't long before they were rewarded. The ground was soft, and the piles of earth round the grave grew rapidly. Then, at length, the coffin was reached, and when it was freed ropes were passed round it, and it was hoisted gently to the surface.

It proved to be a stout oak coffin, practically as sound as it had been when first interred. It was placed on the ground beside the cavity, and the loose earth was swept from the lid. Then two of the constables busied themselves with big screwdrivers.

It was an eerie kind of business, and Eustace, who was not morbid, felt a desire to walk away. But he couldn't very well do that without being suspected of squeamishness. So he held his ground.

The last screw was taken out, and the constables wrenched at the lid and pulled it away. Inspector Rankin stared eagerly, and Blake, too, was bending over the coffin with an expression of concentrated tension in his eyes.

The lid was moved aside and the contents of the coffin lay revealed—fully in the bright moonlight, which slanted down between two of the neighbouring trees.

"Exactly," muttered Blake, in a satisfied voice.

All his tension had gone, and he looked quietly confident. The others gazed down into the coffin in amazement.

It contained no body, as they had expected, but a number of large, roughly-made parcels!

Chapter 6.
Cold Storage.

THE parcels were wrapped round with coarse canvas, and tied with heavy string. They were jammed into the coffin tightly, and wedged, in places, with crumpled masses of old newspaper.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Inspector Rankin, aghast.

"You were right, Mr. Blake!" said the superintendent grimly.

"So it would appear," nodded Sexton Blake. "I think, at all events, that we were justified in opening this coffin."

"But I don't understand," said the inspector, staring from one to the other, and then looking back into the coffin again. "What does this mean? Was—was the body cut up, and——"

"There's no body at all," said Blake. "These parcels, I have no doubt, will merely contain stones, or bricks—bricks, most likely, judging by the shape of the parcels. But we'll soon see."

He pulled one of the packages out, cut the string, and unfolded the canvas.

Three very ordinary-looking bricks were revealed.

"Not so gruesome, after all," said Eustace. "What I'm wondering, you know, is how Blake knew that this coffin contained nothing but bricks."

"I didn't know—but I suspected," said Blake. "The bricks were evidently wrapped in parcels, and packed with newspaper so that they would not shift."

"That's what I assume," nodded the superintendent. "It would have been awkward if the coffin bearers had heard the bricks shifting about while they were lowering the coffin into the grave. Now, Mr. Blake, it is for you to explain what all this means."

"It is, indeed," said the vicar agitatedly. "I have never been more astounded in my life! Matthew Knox's body not here—not in his own coffin! What can the explanation be?"

"I rather take it," murmured Eustace, "that Mr. Matthew Knox had his left little toe missing—what?"

Sexton Blake nodded.

"Mr. Cavendish is right," he said. "The body of Matthew Knox is now lying in Sir Henry Chadwick's bed-room at Chadwick Manor."

The superintendent looked incredulous, and Inspector Rankin, after a gulp, laughed harshly.

"You may be something of a magician, Mr. Blake, but you're wrong this time," he said. "Man alive! Are you suggesting that Sir Henry's body is not at the manor?"

"The body I examined to-day was the body of Matthew Knox, the blacksmith," said Blake.

"Oh, I say," protested Eustace. "I mean, a year ago—what?"

"Matthew Knox died a year ago," agreed the inspector. "Look at the gravestone! There's the date on it! That body at the manor cannot possibly be the body of Knox!"

"And yet, strange to say, it is," insisted Blake.

"Then Knox did not die a year ago?"

"Yes, he did."

"You'll be a clever man, Mr. Blake, if you can solve this riddle," said Superintendent Powell, scratching his grizzled head.

"There is no riddle at all," replied Blake. "I arrived at my conclusions by a perfectly logical process—and I should have been very astonished indeed if this coffin had contained any human remains."

"But if the body at the manor is not that of Sir Henry, what has happened to Sir Henry?" asked the inspector, bewildered.

"I don't think he is dead," said Blake.

"Not dead—not murdered?"

"If you will come with me, gentlemen, I rather fancy that I can do much to clear up this mystery," said Blake. "I shall be obliged if you will allow me to do things in my own way."

"Go ahead, Mr. Blake," said the superintendent. "You have already exploded one bombshell, so I shall be quite prepared for another."

INSTRUCTIONS were given to the policemen, and a sergeant left in charge. Then Blake and Eustace and Powell and Rankin got back into the car and drove away.

Scarcely anything was said while they bowled along the moonlit country lanes towards Little Melbury.

Eustace had a shrewd idea of the explanation, but Inspector Rankin was

flabbergasted. He made no secret of the fact. And his attitude towards Sexton Blake was now noticeably different. When he looked at the detective he revealed the awe that gripped him.

"The body of Knox!" he muttered again and again. "Impossible! The man died a year ago, and the body at the manor is the body of a man who only died within the last forty-eight hours."

The car came to a halt in a small by-way, at Blake's suggestion. Then Blake led the way across a meadow, and he forced his path through a thick hedge.

Eustace and the police officers followed.

They found themselves upon somebody's private property. It was a garden—quite a big, well-kept garden. And here, at the bottom of it, there was a square brick shed. Through the trees could be seen a comfortable, moderately-big house, with one or two lights gleaming from its lower windows.

"We won't tackle the door," murmured Blake. "It is securely locked. But there is a small window at the back which I have tested. This way, gentlemen."

"Oh!" whispered the inspector. "You've been here before this evening, then——"

"Roughly, about three hours ago," nodded Blake.

They squeezed into the shed by means of the window, and Blake now flashed on an electric torch. He cast the beam round the interior of the shed, and the others looked about them interestedly.

"What is it—an electric light plant?" asked the inspector.

"Yes—and something else," said Blake.

A small oil-engine was tucked away in a corner, but at present it was idle. There were great rows of batteries, and a switchboard, and wires running from the leads.

Blake paid no attention to the batteries, nor to the oil-engine.

He went to a great door, which was built into one corner of the shed, and he swung it open. The light from his torch revealed a white-enamelled interior.

"This is a refrigerator," he explained dryly. "No doubt you recognise it as such, Powell?"

"Yes, of course," said the superintendent. "I expect it's run from the electricity supply. But even now I cannot understand—— Gad! You don't mean that Knox's body was kept here, *in cold storage?*"

"There is no other explanation," replied Blake quietly. "Knox's body was never buried. The bricks were substituted before the coffin was interred, and thus the burial itself was a mere farce. Knox's remains were brought here, and they were kept in this refrigerating plant until they were needed."

"Needed!" burst out the inspector. "Needed for what?"

"For the purpose they have now been put to," replied Blake. "I hope you are satisfied, inspector, that the remains at the manor are those of Matthew Knox, and not of Sir Henry Chadwick. Indeed, if you had been a little more diligent, you would have noticed that, although Knox bears a facial resemblance to Sir Henry, it is only a superficial likeness."

"I—I didn't examine the dead man's face very closely," stammered the inspector.

"You should have done!" said the superintendent sharply.

"But why, sir?" protested Rankin. "There was never any question or doubt that Sir Henry had not been murdered. The body was found in Sir Henry's bedroom, and Dr. Smallwood never gave the slightest hint that there had been any substitution. The room, too, was darkened."

"Which only goes to prove, inspector, that one should not be too sure of the obvious," said Blake gently. "Naturally, you had no reason to doubt that the body was that of Sir Henry; and yet, if you had made a close examination, you would have known that there had been a substitution. You knew Sir Henry in real life, and I didn't. Yet I soon came to the conclusion that something was radically wrong. Don't assume that I am attempting to give myself a pat on the back. I merely wish to emphasise that I was justified in making those inquiries and investigations which you considered to be so unnecessary."

The inspector breathed hard.

"I apologise, Mr. Blake," he said huskily. "I can see now that my attitude was uncalled for."

The superintendent was looking uneasy and startled.

"But all this implies, Mr. Blake, that Dr. Smallwood knew of the substitution, and that he was a party to the deception," he said. "That is a point which puzzles me exceedingly. I have always regarded Dr. Smallwood as a man of honour and integrity."

"I take it," put in Eustace, "that this shed is on Dr. Smallwood's property?"

"It is," said Blake grimly. "And now, in order that matters should be quite cleared up, I suggest that we should seek Dr. Smallwood himself."

THEY got out of the shed as they had come in, and then, getting back through the gap in the hedge, they re-entered the car, and drove out of the little back lane, and turned into the road proper.

At Blake's suggestion, the car was driven right to Dr. Smallwood's gate.

They went to the front door, and it was soon opened for them by a smartly-dressed maidservant.

"The doctor is with some patients in the surgery," she explained.

"We will wait," said the superintendent.

They were ushered into a comfortable sitting-room and left there. Apparently the doctor had got rid of his patients quickly, for he arrived within a couple of minutes. When the maid took him the message that four such visitors were waiting for him, he no doubt felt that they were of more importance than his patients.

"Has something happened, superintendent?" he asked, as he came in, and looked from one to another. "I did not expect you here this evening. I have already been to the manor, but——"

"Dr. Smallwood, these police officers are here at my suggestion," said Sexton Blake quietly. "I would like you to know at once that we have discovered that the body at Chadwick Manor is not the body of Sir Henry Chadwick, but that of Matthew Knox."

Dr. Smallwood went as pale as death.

"Steady, doctor!" muttered the inspector, jumping to the doctor's side.

"I'm all right; I need no assistance," said the old man, pulling himself together. "So you have found out—eh? Good heavens! And I had believed that I was clever!" he added bitterly. "I thought that everything had been done so perfectly!"

He glanced at Blake and Eustace.

"I suppose I have to thank these gentlemen for this unfortunate collapse of my plans?" he went on. "I felt, from the first, that you were suspicious, Mr. Blake. The moment you examined the body I had a premonition of disaster."

The doctor went over to a chair and sat down heavily. Some of the pallor had left his cheeks now, but he looked haggard and weary—and yet there was a fierce, defiant light in his eyes.

"Ruined!" he muttered. "Everything ruined! You don't know what this means to me, gentlemen!"

"It means, Dr. Smallwood, that Roderick Chadwick will be freed!" said Blake sternly.

"Freed!" shouted the doctor, springing up. "That's just it! My plan was to get him hanged!"

"But that, in itself, would have been murder!" said the superintendent sharply.

"Murder? No, you are wrong!" retorted the doctor. "It would have been justice!"

Chapter 7.
A Pair of Slippers!

"I AM afraid there will be a great deal for you to explain, doctor," said Superintendent Powell gravely. "As a police-officer, however, it is my duty to warn you——"

The old doctor waved an impatient hand.

"I need no warnings," he interrupted. "I shall tell you precisely why this thing was done, and then perhaps, you will appreciate my own point of view. I am fully prepared to answer for what I have done—which, in the circumstances, amounts to precious little."

"But your intention was grim enough—if, indeed, you schemed to get young Chadwick hanged," said the superintendent. "I must warn you that this will be a very serious charge, and you are under no obligation to speak now."

"Yet speak I shall!" said the doctor fiercely.

Superintendent Powell shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "Do as you like, Dr. Smallwood. I have warned you, and I have done my duty. Before we proceed any further, may I ask what has actually happened to Sir Henry Chadwick?"

The doctor passed a weary hand over his brow.

"Sir Henry is in London, at the Charing Cross Hotel, under an assumed name," he replied. "You will very easily be able to effect his arrest if you so desire. But you must not leave it later than to-morrow, because he will sail for South Africa unless he is prevented."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Inspector Rankin. "This is a mix-up, if you like! Sir Henry not dead! Somebody else's body at the manor! And young Chadwick arrested for a murder that was never committed! Why, what does it mean?"

"Before I tell you," said Dr. Smallwood. "I would like to know exactly

how this gentleman discovered the truth."

He turned to Blake. Eustace was waiting just as impatiently, and so were the police-officers.

"I had several clues to guide me," said Blake slowly. "Singly, they did not amount to much—but collectively they were very significant. I had no real suspicion that anything was wrong until I examined the body."

"Just as I thought," muttered the doctor.

"Even then I did not guess that there had been any substitution," continued Blake. "And I certainly could not suspect that death had come to that body practically a year ago. You must have taken very great care, Dr. Smallwood, to preserve Matthew Knox so perfectly."

"I pride myself that when Knox was placed in Sir Henry's bed, not one man in a thousand would have known that he had been dead for a year," said the doctor. "And all the time the body was in my refrigerator, no soul on earth guessed. Not a single member of my own household—not a living being in the neighbourhood. Who, indeed, would believe that I could have such a secret locked away in my little shed?"

"The wound puzzled me," said Blake. "But the mere fact that the carving-knife did not fit was not startling. But I will confess that I was intrigued when I took a look at the alleged Sir Henry's feet."

"Were they so different from what you might have expected?"

"They were informative in the extreme," said Blake. "They were the feet of a man who had led a hard, toiling life. They were the feet of a manual worker. There were corns on the toes, and callouses on the ball of the foot. Strange things to find on the feet of a man who had been practically an invalid for a year."

"But still there was no definite evidence that the body was not that of Sir Henry," objected the doctor.

"No. The definite evidence came later," replied Blake. "When I discovered that the little toe of the left foot was missing, I knew, for an absolute certainty, that the body was not that of Sir Henry. I had positive proof of the fact."

"In what way?"

"I made it my business to examine two pairs of Sir Henry's slippers," said Blake smoothly. "They were old slippers, and well worn. And slippers, gentlemen, are sometimes instructive. There was ample evidence that Sir Henry not only possessed a little toe on his left foot, but quite a big little toe. The bulge in the shoe left no room for doubt. Those slippers could never have been worn by the man whose body was lying on the bed. Indeed, the slippers were different in size, and different in shape. They did not tally in any respect.

"Then there were the footprints. They were precisely the kind of footprints I should have expected Sir Henry Chadwick to make—size, and so forth—and I could not help but remember that the only person in the house to have bare feet, or not to have slippers handy at a moment's notice because he seldom needed them, was the invalid, Sir Henry. I soon arrived at the conclusion that they were Sir Henry's—and, that being so, it naturally stood to reason that the body was somebody else's body. I deduced from that that there had been a substitution, and it was my next move, therefore, to identify that dead body."

The doctor sighed.

"Once on the track like that, the rest was simple, I imagine?" he commented.

"Astonishingly simple," agreed Blake. "For how many bodies of stabbed men are there to be found?"

"Perhaps you suspected me of murdering the unfortunate Knox?" said the doctor bitterly.

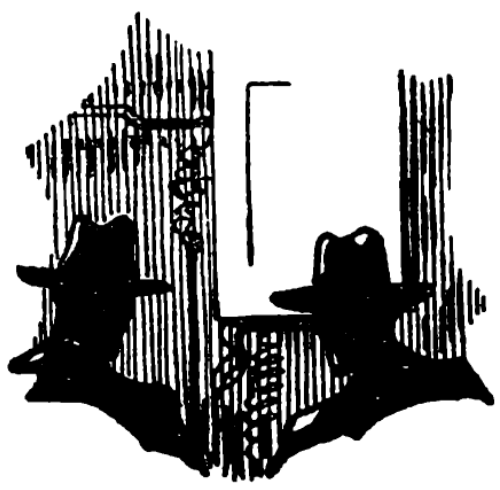
"Oh, no! I judged you better than that," replied Blake. "I knew, however, that there had been no suicide or murder in the neighbourhood of late—or I should certainly have heard about it earlier. I was puzzled. I knew that you were implicated, Dr. Smallwood, because the substitution could not have taken place without your knowledge. As a starting-point, I went to the local inn, and I got very chatty with the landlord.

"To cut a long story short, I managed to lead up one thing to another, and he told me that an old blacksmith of Great Pelton had committed suicide about a year ago. He only recalled the tragedy because, as he told me, Knox had borne some slight resemblance to Sir Henry."

"That must have been a useful earful," murmured Eustace.

"I pretended to be only casually interested," said Blake. "But, as you may imagine, I was hot on that scent. A blacksmith had committed suicide at Great Pelton! He was known to bear a slight resemblance to Sir Henry Chadwick! When I learned that this man, Knox, had stabbed himself I knew that I was on a hot trail.

"I went straight to Great Pelton, and there I discovered that Knox had been something of a drunkard. He had taken to drink, it seemed, after the death of his wife. He had been a lonely man, and one night, in a fit of depression—probably influenced by over-indulgence at the local inn—he took a knife and stabbed himself to the heart."



"There was quite a sensation in Great Pelton when it happened," said the doctor. "I was called in, and I found Knox dead on the floor."

"When I learned that Knox had lost the little toe of his left foot some years ago in an accident in his smith's shop there was no longer any doubt in my mind," said Blake. "Yet, in spite of this definite evidence—definite so far as circumstances were concerned—I needed something of a more concrete nature. I realised that Knox's coffin must be exhumed.

"But before going to Superintendent Powell, doctor, I made a survey of your premises. I was told that you were the doctor who had given the death certificate in Knox's case; and, therefore, you were the man who could have taken charge of his body. I was by no means surprised, therefore, when I found your refrigerating plant. You see, it was simple—once I had a clue."

THE old doctor nodded.

"Alarmingly simple," he agreed. "Indeed, now that you have put it all so plainly I marvel that I succeeded to the point I did. Yet I maintain that this deception would not have been discovered but for your intervention, Mr. Blake. Without any disrespect to you, Superintendent Powell—or to you, Inspector Rankin—I say quite frankly that the police would never have had any suspicion. And once the body had been buried, then everything else would have been plain sailing."

"Everything else?" repeated the superintendent sharply. "What exactly do you mean by that, Dr. Smallwood?"

"I mean the trial of Roderick," answered the old doctor, his eyes burning. "What chance would he have had? In face of the overwhelming evidence, do you suppose for one moment that he would have been acquitted? Oh, no! He would have been sentenced to death; and on the morning of his execution I should have sent up a prayer of thankfulness——"

"You had better say no more, Dr. Smallwood!" interrupted the superintendent. "You are fortunate that this is not an official statement. As a friend, I want to warn you——"

"You are very good, Powell!" broke in the doctor. "As a responsible police-officer, it is your duty, no doubt, to arrest me on a charge of conspiracy. I admit my guilt. But if you expect any expression of regret from me you will be disappointed. My only regret is that Mr. Blake came into this case and ruined the scheme."

"There is one other point that occurred to me," said the superintendent. "Since Sir Henry Chadwick has gone to London, and is staying at an hotel under an assumed name prior to sailing for South Africa, it stands to reason that he knew of this plot, and that he approved of it. Is that a fact?"

The old doctor smiled.

"Oh, yes—Sir Henry knew, and approved!" he said. "If I could shield him, I would do so. If I could keep him entirely out of it and take the full responsibility on my own shoulders, nothing would please me better. But I can see that any such attempt on my part would be futile. Sir Henry's very actions prove that he has been an accessory. Well, we have failed. We are at your mercy, superintendent. It is for you to do your duty."

The superintendent shrugged his shoulders rather helplessly.

"I am trying to help you, and you won't let me," he said, with regret. "Candidly, doctor, I don't quite know what to do. I have never been placed in such a position as this before in all my experience. I hate the idea of arresting you; and I don't suppose I can do even that until I obtain a warrant."

"Get your warrant, by all means," said the old practitioner. "You will find me here, superintendent. I shall not run away. But since this talk of ours is unofficial, perhaps you will listen to me if I tell you the full truth of this unhappy affair?"

The two police-officers exchanged glances, and the superintendent looked at Sexton Blake.

"Personally, I should be very interested," said Blake. "And as this conference is unofficial, it will naturally be confidential. Mr. Cavendish, I am sure, will be the soul of discretion."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Eustace.

Chapter 8.
Retrospect.

DR. SMALLWOOD was looking calm and resigned.

The haggard expression had died out of his face now that the shock of discovery was over. There was not the slightest

"You've been here before this evening, then?" whispered the inspector. "About three hours ago," agreed Blake, as he squeezed in through the window.

indication of regret or remorse. On the contrary, he looked positively dignified in his resignation.

"I can make only one statement—now, or at any other time," he said. "So it is immaterial to me whether you regard this conference as official or unofficial. I am not sorry for what I have done, and Sir Henry himself will support me to his last breath."

"Ahem! I think you had better tell us the whole story," said the superintendent gently.

"Roderick, as you may know, is the son of Sir Henry's younger brother, Walter," said Dr. Smallwood, settling himself back in his chair, and half-closing his eyes. "Walter was a sailor, and a good-for-nothing. At heart, perhaps, he was a sound enough fellow, but he was undoubtedly a wastrel—a reckless, philandering ne'er-do-well. In those days Sir Henry was engaged to one of the sweetest girls in the world. I was a young man myself at the time, and I can well remember the incidents.

"Mary was the daughter of a Norfolk vicar, a quiet, unsophisticated girl, absolutely unversed in the ways of the world.

"About two weeks before the wedding Walter came home from sea. He was a fascinating young rascal, very different from the rather staid and matter-of-fact Sir Henry. From the very first his sailor ways fascinated that unsophisticated young girl. Whether Sir Henry guessed anything or not, he has never told me; but I fancy that he knew absolutely nothing. At all events, within a day or two of the wedding Walter eloped with the girl. In some way or another he used his influence on her, and she ran away with him.

"One morning Sir Henry discovered his bride-to-be had gone. She had eloped with Walter, and it later transpired that they were married by special licence in London, and they went straight on to Walter's ship—a sailing vessel—which set off that very same day for the Indies.

"Can you picture Sir Henry's desolation? What is more, can you imagine his fury? After the first shock had worn off, his hatred against his brother showed itself in a terrible way. Sir Henry had received a blow that stunned him—that embittered him for the remainder of his days. He never recovered from it.

"Well, the boy was born—Roderick. Both parents were drowned in a shipwreck when Roderick was five years old. And that child, motherless and fatherless, was sent home to England. As the boy's uncle Sir Henry was more or less obliged to acknowledge him. He hated the child from the first—not that the child was in any way to blame. Yet, in all the circumstances, who could blame Sir Henry? This boy was the child of the brother who had betrayed him and the girl who had played him false. It was impossible for Sir Henry to have the slightest love for that child, and it was only his sense of duty which caused him to bring Roderick up.

"He gave him the best of educations, and it seemed that time would soften the blow, so he became more resigned.

"But Sir Henry's troubles were not over. As a youth Roderick was wild and wayward, and he showed that he had the blood of his worthless father in his veins. At his Public school Roderick was a constant worry to Sir Henry; at Oxford he was mixed up in a scandal which ended in his being sent down. At the age of twenty he was a vile young rake.

"Now, gentlemen, try to imagine Sir Henry's bitterness, if you can. This boy, upon whom he had lavished such care, had turned out to be an utter scamp. Many men in Sir Henry's position would have refused to have anything to do with the child. But Sir Henry had brought him up, had done everything within his power to give him a fair chance in life.

"Roderick threw all those chances away. And soon after that unhappy affair at Oxford, Sir Henry disowned him. I shall never forget the scene in the library at the manor when Roderick was called to account by his uncle. I was present at Sir Henry's invitation—for I was his oldest friend. Roderick behaved like the filthy young cur he is. And he cursed his uncle, and swore at him. If Sir Henry had killed him then, with his own hands, I could not have blamed him.

"Now, I will tell you something else, gentlemen.

"At that time I was the doting father of a sweet girl of seventeen. She had just come fresh from school, and she was the joy of my life. Her mother had died many years earlier, and this girl was, as you can imagine, the one human being in all the world upon whom I lavished my love. That young scoundrel saw her."

Dr. Smallwood gripped his fists unconsciously. It was the only sign of the passionate rage within him. He took control of himself visibly, and spoke in a tone of calm restraint that must have cost him an enormous effort.

"That young reptile saw my Elsie, and he fascinated her—just as his father had fascinated a girl so many years earlier," he said. "I found them walking together once, and I took Elsie home, and I told Sir Henry what was happening. Without hesitation Sir Henry sent his worthless nephew to London, and told him point-blank that if ever he returned to this district he would choke the life out of him with his own hands.

"I was fool enough to believe that the affair was over. Elsie apparently forgot that trifling flirtation, and before many months had elapsed she was the same happy girl as before. Then, one day, she was missing. She left me without a word—without even a letter. Perhaps I was a fool, but it never occurred to me that Roderick might be responsible. I thought that she had met with an accident; that, perhaps, she had lost her memory. She had gone into Bury St. Edmunds, merely to do a bit of shopping. And she did not come back.

"I did everything within my power. I advertised, I had the police searching the country. There is no need for me to tell you of my months of anguish and anxiety. At last, through a private detective agency, I obtained a clue. A girl had been found in Middlesbrough—starving, dying. It was believed that she was my daughter.

"I went there, and I found her."

The old man paused.

"My poor little girl—my sunny, sweet-natured Elsie," he went on, in a tense voice. "There in Middlesbrough I found her. She was a wife. Oh, yes!

The man who had run off with her had married her—not that a marriage certificate meant anything to him. My little girl was a wreck. She had been brutally ill-treated, she had been starved and beaten. She had been deserted by her husband, and without money and friends; she had starved. She had been too proud to write to me—to confess that she had wrecked her young life. And when I got there I was too late.

"Yes, gentleman, I was too late," he continued hoarsely. "Elsie died in my arms, and if any human being on this earth was murdered, my girl was! She died of no disease, of no fever. She died of starvation, of ill-treatment. In her delirium, towards the end, she told me her husband's name.

"You know the name," he said, with deliberate calm. "Like father, like son. In every respect Roderick had repeated the accursed sin of his father. But he was worse—far, far worse. He took my daughter, and he murdered her. He left her there, starving, and he went to London to live the life of a card-sharper, a thorough-paced, inhuman scoundrel!

"I buried my little girl in the churchyard here—in Little Melbury," continued the doctor. "Sir Henry, as you may guess, was overwhelmed with grief. More than that, he swore to me that he was going to find my nephew and kill him with his own hands. He felt that he was responsible, since he had brought the boy up, and had given him his education, and had been unwittingly instrumental in bringing Roderick and my girl together. He told me that it was his duty to kill that vile creature.

"I disagreed. It was plainly my duty, and not his. For I was the wronged father. In the end we came to a compact. Why should either of us sacrifice ourselves for such a worthless rogue? We decided to wait.

"It was at this period that old Matthew Knox died in Great Pelton. I thought absolutely nothing until I went to Knox's cottage to examine him, after he had stabbed himself. And it was then that an idea came into my head—a startling, staggering idea.

"For many years it had been a standing joke in the district that old Knox resembled Sir Henry. I had never noticed the likeness particularly. In death, however, the hard lines were wiped out of the old blacksmith's countenance, and his resemblance to Sir Henry was quite startling

"It was this which put the idea into my head.

"I REMEMBERED that I had a refrigerating plant in my shed—one that I had used for certain experimental purposes. I knew that I could preserve Knox's body for any period of time—sufficient time, at all events, for me to mature my plans. Once the seed had been sown I soon evolved a scheme of action. I told Sir Henry about it, and he was enthusiastic. He helped me in every possible way. We regarded ourselves as the instruments of justice. The law could not touch Roderick for the crime of murder that he had committed; it was, therefore, up to us to take matters into our own hands.

"On the night before Knox's funeral I went in secret to that little cottage of his. I removed the body from the coffin, and replaced it with bricks. I screwed the coffin down, and the next day the coffin was buried.

"Who was there to suspect? How could anybody believe that the body had been removed, and that only bricks were interred in that churchyard of Great Pelton?

"But the body was in my refrigerating plant—being preserved in readiness for the great day. And Sir Henry co-operated with me all along the line. He pretended to have a minor stroke, and he took to his bed.

"His first move was to send for Roderick, and when Roderick came he was told that he was forgiven—that he was at liberty to live at Chadwick Manor, and to take charge of the estates. But he could only do this on condition that he entirely gave up his former life. Sir Henry made a new will, leaving everything to the boy.

"As you can readily guess, gentlemen, Roderick fell into our trap without the slightest suspicion of what was awaiting him."

"One moment, doctor!" said Blake. "I take it that Roderick knew nothing of the fact that you had learned that he was the man who had run off with your daughter."

"Roderick did not know," replied Dr. Smallwood. "He believed that his secret was intact. Sir Henry, in fact, spoke to him of the tragedy—told him that some scamp had run off with my daughter, and had left her to starve. So Roderick breathed freely, thinking that both his uncle and myself were not aware of the dastardly scoundrel who had killed my girl.

"As for the rest, is it necessary for me to go into any details? Sir Henry and I realised that it would be fatal for us to do anything precipitate. We knew that Roderick would chafe at the quiet country life, and that, sooner or later, he would kick over the traces.

"At the first sign of kicking he was to be trapped. We had actually prepared the coup for the night when this young man arrived at the manor," continued the doctor, indicating Eustace. "But the snow unexpectedly hindered us—and so did this young man. Sir Henry was very excited, and he behaved, perhaps, a little rashly.

"We waited for a further day or two, and it was Sir Henry himself who precipitated the violent quarrel with Roderick.

"That quarrel was so engineered that every one of the servants heard. They heard Sir Henry shouting that Roderick was to be cut out of the will, and so forth. As we had expected, the boy drank himself into a condition of stupor before going to bed. And when the household was asleep, Sir Henry and I carried the body of Knox in, and the stage was set.

"It was I who put bloodstains on that carving-knife, and on the pyjama coat. It was probably while Sir Henry was dressing himself that night in the bedroom that he thoughtlessly trod on the polished boards with his bare feet. I concealed the knife and pyjama coat in Roderick's bed-room—while he slept. He was so drunk that he knew nothing.

"Sir Henry went off to London in secret, his idea being to take a boat for South Africa—until after Roderick's execution.

"As for the rest, we believed that everything would go smoothly. The murder was discovered, and, of course, it was discovered by me. That was an important point. Roderick was suspected from the very first moment. Like a fool he ran away, only adding to the suspicion against him.

"Gentlemen, you have heard my story. I tell you that in the eyes of Heaven Roderick Chadwick murdered my daughter, and hanging was the only fitting punishment for him."

The old man sat down into his chair, and covered his face with his hands.

The superintendent coughed, and his face was pale.

"Dr. Smallwood, as a friend and a man, I cannot blame you for having done this thing," he said quietly. "What I am to do as a police officer, I cannot yet decide. I should like to be clear about Sir Henry's position in the matter. What was his idea in going to South Africa?"

The doctor looked up.

"His plan was to establish a new identity for himself there as William Chadwick, a supposed third brother," he explained. "There were really only two brothers—Henry and Walter. But after the trial—after Roderick's execution—I was to drop a hint or two that there was a brother named William. It would have been easy enough for me to see Williamson the lawyer and to give him these hints. A search, of course, would have resulted in the discovery of this imaginary William. By then, Sir Henry would have grown a beard, and his plan was to return to the manor, and to inherit his own estates. Thus he would have lived here in just the same way, and, although his whole life would have been changed, he considered that it was worth such a drastic step. He is a true friend, is Sir Henry. His one desire was to see justice done—to see me avenged. We felt, too, that we should rid society of a vile and unspeakable pest."

"A FOUL sort of business altogether," was Eustace's remark, as he and Sexton Blake drove back to London.

"I am rather sorry, Eustace, that we came into the case," said Blake, with regret. "I fancy that we have done more harm than good."

"I have been cursing myself for three solid hours!" declared Eustace bitterly. "It was I who dragged you into it, dear sleuth. A poisonous beginning, what? I mean to say. I thought I was frightfully clever introducing you——"

"You have no need to talk like that, Eustace," said Blake. "After all, we have only served the ends of justice, and our consciences are clear. Whatever the police do in this matter it is morally certain that both Sir Henry Chadwick and Dr. Smallwood will get off lightly."

"Do you know, old boy, I have an idea at the back of my head that Superintendent Powell will hush the whole dashed thing up," said Eustace. "Whether he does or not, I gather that we shall regard ourselves as quite out of it, eh?"

"It is for the police to do as they think fit—for the case is obviously out of our hands," replied Sexton Blake. "Yet it is only right that those two men should be punished for their conspiracy—right in the eyes of the law. But, between ourselves, Eustace, I really do hope that Superintendent Powell will think of some way in which to hush the matter up."

There was another little surprise in London.

Blake and Eustace learned that Roddy Chadwick, in Brixton Gaol, was dead. He had died unexpectedly, following a heart attack. He had died from the effects of heavy drinking and evil living. But both Blake and Eustace had a shrewd guess that the worthless Roddy had died of sheer fright.

Whatever the cause, there was not the slightest doubt that justice had been done—and without the law.

THE END.

Continuing **"The Seven Sleepers,"** by Francis Beeding.

The Man with the Mouse-Head Pin

What Has Happened.

THROUGH a remarkable series of events I, Thomas Preston, ex-officer, found myself impersonating Karl von Emmerich, an agent of a German secret society conducting a Nationalist plot, and directed by a rascally professor.

The object of my impersonation, the securing of a cipher document implicating seven of Germany's biggest financiers, had been successful, partly due to the aid given me by two French Secret Service men, De Blanchegarde and Réhmy, who had saved me and Beatrice Harvel, the girl I loved, from the fearful attentions of the professor.

We learned that the document was incomplete without the signature of a mysterious Captain Z, and it was decided that I should continue to impersonate the dead Karl until this had been obtained.

Two of the professor's men had followed me to the hotel where I was reporting to the Frenchmen, and to throw them off the trail my friends bound me and dosed me with chloroform. When the Germans arrived I told them I had been assaulted and robbed of the document. They dashed off in pursuit, leaving me with the document and my mission of getting to Hanover to interview Captain Z.

I Join a Distinguished Regiment.

IT was some time before I recovered from the effects of the chloroform, despite the cold-water treatment applied by Fritz.

Presently I rose and searched the apartment for towels in order to dry my dripping head. This was soon accomplished, but I found my collar and tie thoroughly soaked with water, and the mirror showed me that I presented a very disreputable appearance. As I had my suitcase with me, however, these defects were soon remedied, and I next gathered up the various belongings of my two friends and packed them into their respective suitcases.

I descended, ordered the bill, and asked for a railway time-table, intending to get to Hanover without delay. From the time-table it appeared that the next train did not leave till 11.35 p.m., and it was an express to Frankfurt. Looking at my watch, I discovered that it was twenty-five past nine. I had accordingly some two hours to wait.

My first step was to settle with the proprietor. I explained to him that the two gentlemen whose account I was paying had already left to catch the Paris train and had asked me to settle everything for them. I then found the hotel porter, ordered him to take my bag to the station; to purchase me a first-class ticket to Hanover, with sleeping accommodation if available, and to meet me at the train. I also told him to register the baggage of Réhmy and De Blanchegarde to Hanover to await arrival.

These details settled, I left the hotel on foot, thinking it unwise to remain there any longer than was necessary. I crossed the river and took refuge in a small Bierhalle in the Clara Platz, opposite the Church of St. Clara, and sat where I could command a view of the street without myself being easily visible.

Ordering a glass of brandy, I filled my pipe and started to think things out. I had two things to fear—first, that Gaston and Réhmy had been unable to lose Fritz and Schreckermann in pursuit of them, and that my disgruntled relatives would shortly return, in which case my interview with them would be of a most unpleasant nature; and secondly that the formidable professor had discovered the trick which we had played upon him in the Villa Mortmain and might arrive at any moment.

The Professor.

I had noticed, on consulting the time-table, that there was a train leaving the Swiss railway station on the other side of the town at 9.16 p.m. for Boulogne and Paris, and it struck me that it was just possible that my French friends might have taken that in order to lead Fritz and Schreckermann well away from my vicinity.

As for the professor, I could only await events. I did not see that there were any possible precautions I could take, and I fervently hoped that it would prove impossible for him, even if he discovered his blunder, to reach Basle before the following morning at the earliest, by which time I should be well on my way to Hanover.

Of course, the whole business was desperately risky. If the professor discovered that he had killed Von Emmerich instead of myself, and further, that I had started for Hanover, there was nothing to prevent him warning whatever organisation existed in that city to be ready for me as an impostor. In that case I should be walking straight into a trap.

The sudden decision to go to Hanover had naturally upset our previous plans, and the fact that we had had no time before the unexpected arrival of Fritz to make any fresh arrangements added to my difficulties.

In one sense, however, my task was simple. There could be no going back: the only thing for me to do was to go forward and trust to events. So far, indeed, despite several serious relapses, fortune had favoured me. I could only hope my luck would hold.

Half an hour was consumed in these reflections, at the end of which time I thought I had best be leaving for the station. Before moving I examined the street attentively. For some five minutes I saw nothing to cause me any anxiety. A number of pedestrians passed, of whom I took no particular note. I could see those on the other side of the road more clearly than those nearest me, owing to a lamp-post which stood opposite the window shedding a circle of light on the pavement, into which each passer-by stepped in his passage.

I watched this light for some moments, and presently noticed that a man whom I had just seen go past the lamp from right to left was now going past it from left to right. As I watched him he turned again and once more began to walk down the street. I caught sight of his face as he entered the circle of the lamplight. It was vaguely familiar, but for the moment I could not place it. Then I remembered. I had seen him earlier in the evening. He was the man who had handed me my suitcase when I had left No. 33, Martinsgasse.

I watched him for some moments, and saw that he was indeed, as I had thought, patrolling the opposite side of the pavement, keeping an eye on the Bierhalle. He had presumably kept me under observation the whole time and had followed me thither from the hotel.

Satisfied with my observations, I left the window and debated what I should do.

Finally I summoned a waiter

and asked for a map of Basle. When this was brought to me I studied it closely. I then requested the same waiter to order me a cab, after which I walked to the door of the Bierhalle and stood a while on the threshold in full view of anyone watching from the street, while I waited for the cab to arrive.

When it drove up I told the man to drive me to the Matthaus Kirche, which I had seen on the plan to be not far from the Badischer Bahnhof, the station for Hanover. The cab was a ramshackle affair with a great hood covering the passengers' seats, and shaped somewhat like the hood of a perambulator. It was quite possible to speak to the driver while the vehicle was in motion. When we had gone some distance, therefore, I leaned forward and tapped him between the shoulder-blades, at the same time bidding him to continue to drive on while he listened to what I said.

I offered him twenty-five francs to go to the Matthaus Kirche, where he was to slow down, or even stop for a moment, after which he was to drive back by a roundabout way over the Johanniter Bridge to the Bierhalle. This he promised to do, and I passed him up the money.

I then watched my opportunity to leave the cab. It was not long in coming. We passed through a dark and narrow thoroughfare, and in turning a corner the cab slowed down I instantly opened the door and jumped from the cab, bolting between two dark houses into a little alley, which fortunately opened in front of me. There I waited and looked out.

A moment later I saw the fellow who had been watching the Bierhalle go past. He was on a bicycle, and was following the cab at a leisurely pace. I wished him joy of his evening ride, which promised to be long and tedious, and slipping out of the alley, made off in the opposite direction.

AFTER one or two inquiries, I found my way to the Badischer Bahnhof, where I went to ground in the restaurant. There I ordered a light meal, for, despite the rude plenty of my Uncle Fritz's table, I was still hungry. The station restaurant was an admirable place. It had many doors, some leading to the outside world, some to the platforms, and others again to shaving - saloons and bath-rooms.

I finished my meal at ten minutes past eleven, and after paying for it slipped unostentatiously through one of the many doors, arriving eventually via the bath-rooms on the platform for Hanover. There I found the porter from the hotel with my luggage and my ticket. He had secured me sleeping accommodation, and a moment later I was installed in a first-class sleeping compartment with the door locked.

Ten minutes afterwards the train was under way. I was due at Frankfurt at 6.40 the following morning, and I turned in almost immediately and slept fairly soundly. I must own that I had no little apprehension that I might be detained. It was almost certain that by this time the professor was in possession of the facts, unless by some happy chance things had gone better than we had dared to hope. And, once his suspicions were aroused, I was in a far worse case than when I had been in Switzerland.

I was now in Germany, where the professor could presumably call in the assistance of the authorities if he needed their collaboration. He would, in any case, be in a much stronger position to deal with me on German soil.

As an Englishman with stolen papers, and masquerading as a German subject, my position was precarious enough, quite apart from any support he might be able to command on behalf of the Seven Sleepers.

I accordingly avoided the general waiting-room and took shelter behind a little newspaper kiosk on the platform, where I was screened from possible observation or remark. Nothing untoward occurred, however, and I boarded the train for Hanover without being in any way molested.

I was fortunate in having a compartment to myself, and now that I had been somewhat refreshed by some much-needed sleep, I emptied the pockets of the suit I was wearing and examined the contents with interest.

In addition to the pocket-book which I had already investigated, there was the passport of Karl von Emmerich, by means of which I had entered Germany, and several letters. It occurred to me that if I were to impersonate Karl successfully, it was essential that I should find out as much as possible of his occupation and general habits.

The servant at No. 33, Martinsgasse, had addressed me as "Herr Lieutenant," I remembered, and Karl had, therefore, evidently been in the German Army. On closer examination of his papers, I discovered his regiment. He had, I found, been an officer in the third regiment of foot guards, a famous corps which had fought with great distinction throughout the War; though they had more than met their match in the Coldstreams, at Landrecies, during the retreat.

Apart from that, however, and the fact that he appeared to belong to an East Prussian family—having

been born at Heiligenbeil—I could learn nothing.

I turned to the letters. The first one I opened was a bill, apparently from a tailor for a new uniform, from which I judged that Von Emmerich was still on the active list; though, so far as I was aware, the Prussian Guard had been disbanded, or completely transformed, shortly after the Armistice.

The second was from his mother, and contained various domestic news, most of which was unintelligible to me. The conclusion of it, however, was significant. It ran as follows:

> You will, I hope, my dearest Karl, be careful to bear yourself well in your new and difficult task. Almighty God has graciously preserved you throughout the terrible War. He will, I know, support and strengthen you in your present work. Remember, dearest boy, that you come of a family which has had the honour to serve the Kings of Prussia since the days of the Great Frederick, and though, alas, an Emperor no longer rules in Berlin, you must never be false to the great and honourable traditions of your house. Do your duty bravely, no matter down what paths it may lead you. In doing so, you will prove a valiant son of Germany and make proud the heart of your old and loving.
>
> MOTHER.

There was something very moving in this appeal. Karl was obviously a cherished son, and I found myself hoping that his mother would never learn the facts of his unhappy death.

The third letter was the inevitable billet-doux, from some lady of Karl's acquaintance in Berlin, imploring him not to lose a moment in coming to see his beloved Freda on his arrival in that city.

I spent some little time in assimilating these few facts. The part I had to play would obviously be much more difficult than hitherto. Up to the present I had only had to impersonate my double for a short period, and with a well-defined object.

Now, however, I had been suddenly called upon to work more or less in the dark. I was to deliver a letter to a Captain Z, whoever he might be, obviously a person of great importance, and one of whom even the redoubtable Fritz stood in awe.

I was ignorant alike of his identity and of his precise whereabouts. I could, therefore, form no adequate idea of the length of time during which I should be compelled to continue my impersonation. Gaston and Réhmy, travelling roundabout as they were, could not be expected to arrive in Hanover until the following day at the earliest.

Finally, I opened the sealed envelope given to me by Fritz the previous evening, containing the instructions as to my movements on arrival at Hanover. These were somewhat elaborate.

My first action was to telephone immediately to No. 5061, Linden. On obtaining that number, I was to ask for Herr Huber, and inform him that I had arrived safely with the parcel of flour. I was then to leave the station, and, taking the first turning to the right, proceed to a small cafe-bar, "Das goldene Herz," which I was to enter.

I was to seat myself at the fourth table from the door on the left-hand side, and call for half a litre of Rhine wine and two glasses, after which I was to wait there until a man wearing a mouse-headed tiepin entered and sat down at the table.

I was at once to offer him a glass of wine, saying as I did so: "Do you prefer wine or beer?" To this he would reply: "Wine that maketh glad the heart of man." All further necessary instructions would be given to me by him.

"On no account," the letter ended, "are you to hand the document to anyone except personally to Captain Z." At the foot of the paper was written in red ink: "Destroy immediately after reading."

I read the instructions through two or three times until I was sure of them. I then tore up the paper into small pieces and scattered them from my window.

The remainder of my journey was uneventful. The train sped out of Saxony into Hanover, through Cassel, near which, I remembered, Napoleon III. had been imprisoned, and Gottingen, with its university. For the most part we ran through rolling country, well cultivated and populous, with little brick villages and many farmsteads scattered over it. It was a day of drifting clouds, and a high wind was blowing.

I lunched in the dining-car. Food on railway journeys is never good, but that must have been quite the worst meal I have ever eaten.

Punctually at 2.2 p.m. I stepped on to the platform at Hanover

Station. I went at once to a telephone box, and after some time got through to Number 5061 Linden, where I inquired for Herr Huber. Presently I was answered by a gruff male voice asking what I wanted. The manner of the man was distinctly unamiable, and I suspected that my message had interrupted him in the digestion of his lunch.

"Is that Herr Huber?" I inquired.

"Yes," came down the wire. "And who may you be?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you," I said, "but I have only just arrived. I am bringing you the parcel of flour."

At this there was an appreciable change of tone.

"I beg your pardon, Herr Lieutenant," he said. "We were not expecting you so soon. We had received word from Major Adler that there were difficulties."

"They have been overcome," I said coldly.

"My congratulations," he replied. "We will lose no time in meeting you."

I rang off and left the station.

HANOVER proved a larger and far pleasanter town than I had anticipated, though I could see but little of it in my brief walk from the station to the little bar.

I had some little difficulty in finding the place, for it was hidden away in a small angle of the street. On the outside it was no more than a door from which a flight of steps led to an underground cellar. Down these I walked, and, pushing open a pair of green baize doors, found myself in a long, low stone room, much overheated. Little tables were arranged all round the walls, beside which were stools and barrels.

I seated myself at the fourth table on the left-hand side, and, summoning a waiter, asked him to bring me half a litre of the best Rhine wine, two glasses, and a newspaper.

He returned with the wine and "Das Berliner Tageblatt," which I read while awaiting the arrival of the man with the mouse-headed tie-pin.

Some quarter of an hour passed, during which several persons entered the Weinstube. None of them corresponded to the description which had been given me in my letter of instructions, and I continued to sip my wine and read my paper, with half an eye on the door.

Presently it opened to admit a short, dark man of about thirty-five with a deep scar on his forehead and an empty left sleeve. He was wearing the ribbon of the Iron Cross in his button-hole. His clothes were neat but somewhat shabby.

He glanced round the Weinstube, and his eye lighted on me. He moved straight to my table, his hand to his tie as he walked, and I noticed that the knot was transfixed by a pin bearing a mouse at its head.

As he came to my table I rose and pointed to the chair.

"Sit down," I said. "Do you prefer wine or beer?"

"Wine," he answered immediately, "that maketh glad the heart of man."

I poured him out a glass of wine and sat waiting. He gave me a sharp, penetrating glance, and then raised his glass.

"Your health!" he said, and in a lower tone: "My congratulations to Section Q."

I bowed.

"Herr von Emmerich?" he continued, with an interrogatory glance.

"At your service," I replied. "And you?"

"Hauptmann von Salsnig. We did not expect you so soon," he continued. "Major Adler telegraphed to us that there were difficulties."

"There usually are," I said shortly. "But we have dealt with them."

"You arrive just at the right moment," he observed. "Everything here is ready. Huber has made all the necessary arrangments, and we can arrange a meeting for you this evening. You know," he added, "it has been touch and go with us here. We had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to see anyone."

"Persuading whom?" I asked.

He looked at me in surprise, and I realised that I had blundered.

"Captain Z, of course," he replied. "It was only when we assured him that you were bringing him all the necessary guarantees that he consented to receive you. It's lucky your father was an old friend of the family."

This was news to me.

"Yes," I said.

"You are some sort of connection, aren't you?" he continued.

"Distant, distant," I replied, since he obviously expected me to say something.

"Well, Lieutenant von Emmerich, the great point is that we have induced him to see you. 'I will trust a Von Emmerich,' he told Huber. 'I know the family.'"

I endeavoured to seem suitably gratified.

"I am glad that we have inspired such confidence," I said.

"But you will have to go very carefully," he said. "I warn you it's far from plain sailing as yet. He has been very difficult to approach, very difficult. More than once Huber has been almost driven to despair."

"You may rely on me, Herr Hauptmann," I replied gravely.

"I am sure of it," he said. "Remember that the document is our strongest card. It goes further than we ever dared to hope."

"It does indeed," I replied, draining my glass.

Von Salsnig rose to his feet.

"I presume you will come at once with me to Huber's? Should Captain Z be unable to see you to-night, you will be able to have your interview with him first thing to-morrow morning for a certainty."

"I am ready," I answered, and picking up my bag, I followed him from the bar.

Outside there was a car into which we climbed, my companion taking the wheel. He chatted pleasantly during the drive, which occupied some twenty minutes. We passed through the more populous portions of the town, my companion indicating various objects of interest.

Reaching the suburb of Linden, we drew up eventually in front of a large house standing in its own grounds.

We were shown into a room on the ground floor.

A fat man arrayed in a purple silk dressing-gown and an enormous pair of fur slippers was seated at a desk. He rose as we entered, and Von Salsnig presented me in the formal German fashion to Herr Huber.

"Lieutenant von Emmerich, I am delighted to make your acquaintance," said Huber. "Pray sit down. I trust you have had a pleasant journey."

"Perfectly," I answered.

We chatted for a few moments on unimportant subjects.

"I am afraid I was a little short on the telephone," he continued apologetically. "But you took me entirely by surprise."

I murmured that it was of no consequence. I noted with interest the efforts made both by Huber and Von Salsnig to be scrupulously polite to a humble lieutenant of the third regiment of foot guards.

Quite obviously courtesy was not with either of them a gift of Nature. It merely meant that I was a necessary link in the chain they were forging. For some reason I was a man who would be agreeable to Captain Z and who would be trusted by that mysterious individual for the sake of his family and traditions.

And yet I was Karl von Emmerich, a man whom I knew only as a bully and a murderer. It was a puzzle which I could not read.

A telephone bell rang somewhere in the house.

"Excuse me," said Herr Huber. "I expect it is the message for which we are waiting."

He got up from his chair and padded across the room.

Von Salsnig and I remained silent, seated opposite each other by the stove. Now that the moment was almost come, I felt a tightening round my heart. I was about to enter the presence of an unknown individual, obviously a man of great importance and of an uncertain temper; an old friend who, for all I knew, had dandled the infant Von Emmerich on his knee. It was a position full of possibilities, and I wished my French friends were not so far away.

The door opened and Huber returned.

"He desires you to dine with him this evening," he said.

I bowed slightly.

Huber came up to me and put a podgy hand on my shoulder.

"We are on the threshold of great events," he said. "We have done our part. The rest now lies with you. Be open with him and all may yet be well."

(Who is Captain Z, of whom even the Seven Sleepers are afraid? Tom Preston is going to meet him—and in doing so carries his life in his hands.)

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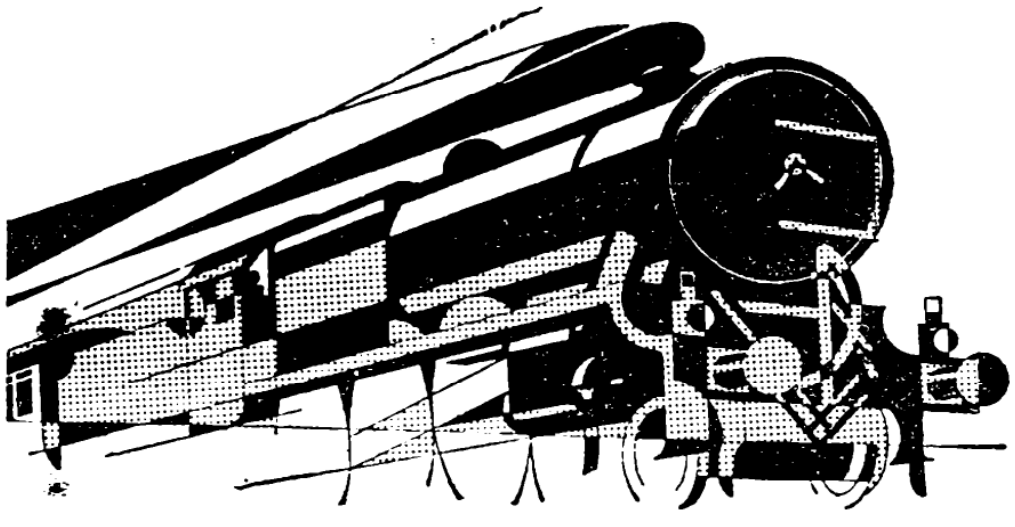

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