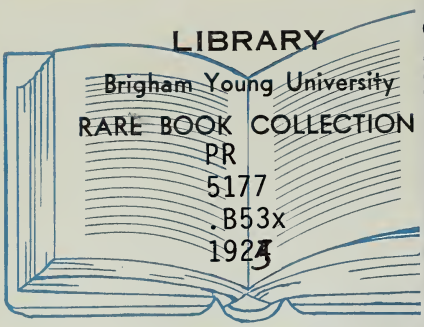
# BLACK WHITE & BRINDLED

EDEN PHILLPOTTS





# BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED

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BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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"PAN AND THE TWINS," ETC.

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# I

## THE THREE DEAD MEN

### i

WHEN Michael Duveen, the Inquiry Agent, invited me to go to the West Indies on a special mission, I rejoiced exceedingly, for the time was late January, London suffered from abominable weather and the prospect of even a few weeks in the tropics presented very real attraction.

"They offer me ten thousand pounds to go," explained Duveen, "and if it meant anything less than ten days at sea I should be pleased to do so. I've a drop of black blood in me myself, you know, and always feel some sympathy with the Ethiopians. But the sea and I are bitter enemies and I'm too old to renew our feuds. I have told them, however, that I shall send one in whom I place absolute confidence; that I shall devote personal attention to the subject from this side; and that, if we solve the mystery for them, a fee of five thousand will content me; while if we fail to do so, I shall ask nothing but your expenses. I hear to-day by cable that they are satisfied with these conditions, and I invite you, therefore, to sail in the Royal Mail Steam Packet *Don* from Southampton on Wednesday next."

"Delighted, chief."

"It will be a feather in your cap if you make anything of the business. The data are involved and one cannot build the most shadowy theory of what occurred upon them. Indeed I shall not trouble you with these voluminous but vague documents. You go with an open and an empty mind, for if I hand you this screed you'll be puzzling at it all the way to Barbados and possibly arrive with some cut-and-dried idea that will stand in your way before you begin. It's a criminal case on the face of it, and involves three dead men, but apparently nobody who is alive. Quite interesting and, I should say, quite difficult; but that's only an impression. You may clear it up yourself without much trouble; or you may put me in a position to do so from England; or it may beat us both. See me again before you go, and book your passage to-day, otherwise you won't get a comfortable berth. There's a great rush amongst holiday people on the West Indies this year."

"Where am I to go?"

"Only with the home ship to Barbados. The case lies in that island alone, so far as I know. Should you have to go farther afield, of course you will do so. Good luck, my friend. I hope it's something that may prove useful to you, and I feel sanguine of your success."

I thanked the great man and withdrew well pleased, for Duveen's compliments were few and far between. He never praised, but his satisfaction

took shape of work, and I knew very well that he had not chosen me for what sounded to be a fairly important investigation without assurance that I should do justice to his international name.

A fortnight later there came a morning when I lounged on the deserted deck of the *Don* and watched a glorious blending of moonlight and dawn. Gazing into the east about four o'clock, I saw a faint wave of rose-colour first touch the sky and quickly change to purest white and palest saffron. But as yet the moon was mistress of her domain; the stars shone brightly; the false Southern Cross sparkled undimmed, and the true constellation twinkled low upon the horizon of the sea. Then came a speedy change. Great flakes and splashes of orange light broke the east; the grey moonlight grew wan and feeble; one by one the stars went out and the Southern Cross was swallowed by the dawn.

Barbados had been for some time visible, lying like a huge sea monster between the flashing white light on Ragged Point and a crimson beacon above a farther promontory; but now the sun climbed up heaven, as only he climbs in the tropics, and the island was limned in every detail under his tremendous blaze. I saw low, undulating, cultivated lands, whereon the miles of sugar-cane looked at first like fields of grass-green wheat or barley; I noted the windmills, the dotted dwellings and brown, tilled earth; while beneath them, crowned with palms that clustered to the shore, spread Bridgetown, with its gleaming masses

of white architecture beside the blue waters and sun-bleached beaches.

The liner took her stately course through a crowd of lesser craft, where a hundred lighters and gay shore boats awaited her ; she threaded Carlisle Bay, dipped her red ensign to a little man-of-war, and then fired her gun, to let it be known that she had arrived at the appointed hour.

A fleet of lighters manned with men of every hue, from mahogany to brown, from yellow to putty-colour, was soon about us, while dozens of smaller vessels crowded in when the shore authorities were satisfied. The sun blazed ; the steam-winches groaned and chattered ; people rushed hither and thither shaking hands and saying farewell, gathering luggage and tipping stewards ere they departed.

Then came a message for me, and presently my trunk and kit-bags were lowered into a smart white dinghy with crimson cushions.

A good-looking man sat in it and greeted me pleasantly while two negroes pulled the boat ashore. He was browned by the tropic sun, but his grey eyes, fair hair and clean-cut cast of features proclaimed him an Englishman. He was tall, well built, and dressed in black clothes, which somewhat concealed his size and muscular development. He might have been forty-five, but life in Barbados had tended to age him, and I learned presently that he was no more than five and thirty.

Amos Slanning, owner of the famous "Pelican" plantations and sugar factories, chatted as we rowed ashore; but he spoke with an object and gave me various items of information that served as preliminary to the story he was to tell.

"Barbados," he said, "unlike most of the West Indies, has had a fairly peaceful history. An English ship took possession of it in 1605, and it has never changed hands since. There's no more loyal corner of the Empire than 'Bimshire,' as we call this island. My family has been connected with it since the great Rebellion, for at that time a good number of broken royalists fled hither, and the Slannings were of the party. Those refugees established monarchical principles pretty firmly, and they still obtain, though perhaps we Barbadians exaggerate a little our importance in the total of things. My forbears, at anyrate, prospered from generation to generation, became great landowners and possessed large colonies of slaves. We were, in fact, before the Emancipation, the wealthiest settlers on the Caribbean, and even that event did not ruin us, as happened in many cases. You see before you the last of the West Indian Slannings. Time and chance have reduced us to one, since my twin brother, Henry, was murdered recently; and though nothing can bring him back from the grave, I shall not go to my own in peace if the mystery of his death is left unexplained."

He broke off here and asked me questions concerning Duveen, while I explained that, though

my chief could not come personally to explore the problem, he had sent me, that I might gather every possible particular at first-hand and report to him. I brought letters from headquarters for Mr Slanning, and presently we went together to the Ice House and sat for half-an-hour in that famous restaurant while he perused them.

During this time I had leisure to regard the life of the town beneath the shady balcony on which we sat.

There extended a street of white houses under wooden tiles grown silver-grey beneath the sun. Shop-fronts opened beneath, while above was a canopy of blue, and the glaring white roadway cast up a shimmer of fiery air, full of dust under the ceaseless footfall of the people. Noisy crowds travelled leisurely up and down. Little trams passed incessantly to Bellfield, Fontabelle and other places beyond the town ; teams of squealing mules brought in barrels of sugar and molasses from outlying estates ; donkeys bore along bright bundles of green cane-tops ; public conveyances crawled by the sidewalks, and private buggies hurried up and down. One big motor car—a curiosity at that time—stood beneath me and attracted general interest. Women filled the footways, the better sort wearing black veils to protect their eyes from the glare. With naked feet, white dresses and gay turbans, the negresses wandered chattering along, their wares upon their heads in baskets. They sold coco-nuts, sugar-cane, oranges, limes, fig-bananas, sapodillas,

mangoes, yams, fish, cakes and sweetmeats, nuts, pine-apples, pickles, and a thousand other comestibles.

The coloured men, too, laboured in easy fashion, dragging hand-carts, driving cattle, jabbering ceaselessly, and shining like polished metal. In cool corners and where balconies threw down patches of velvet-black shadow sat the loafers and non-workers, munching cane and fruit, smoking, bargaining with the women who sold drink, sucking ice, laughing, chaffing, telling stories and playing the fool.

There were ancient beggars and swarms of children, like chocolate dolls with woolly heads and great black eyes. From time to time the glare of the street was slaked with a hose ; but the roadway was dry again in five minutes after this operation. Black policemen, dressed in white, kept order, and now and then a ragged, expostulating scamp was led away to justice. More women passed driving lean, wiry animals that looked like greyhounds, but were pigs ; while others carried Muscovy ducks under their arms, or conveyed cackling cocks and hens in wicker baskets. Of well-to-do folk there were black clergymen, black lawyers, black soldiers, black merchants and their womenfolk, flaunting gaudy hats and parasols, showy trinkets and clothes cut to bygone fashions. The store-keepers bustled about in chimney-pot hats and white ducks. Great dragon-flies flashed overhead, and the heavy air was scented with warm odours of dust and fruit.

Subconsciously I soaked in the scene; then Mr Slanning interrupted my observations.

"Now I understand," he said, "and heartily I hope you are not here in vain. We'll go to the club now and lunch. Then I'll tell you the story, as far as I know it; and then we'll drive home. You'll put up with me, I trust?"

This, however, I declined to do, and explained that it was my purpose to be entirely free during the coming weeks.

"To stop with you might handicap me in many ways," I said, and he raised no question.

The great motor car proved to be Slanning's, and we were soon on our way to the club. But an incident broke the brief journey.

There passed us a little "victoria" in which sat two ladies, and the car was stopped, while Amos Slanning dismounted and spoke with them. One, a handsome, middle-aged woman, he addressed, while the other listened. She was a very pretty young creature—an exotic here, as it seemed to me, for she was pale and her blue eyes lacked lustre. One had pictured her at home with roses in her cheeks; here she challenged one's sympathy as a hardy flower seen in a hot-house.

"Tell me you are better," said Slanning to the elder, and she shook hands warmly and assured him that she was.

"Poor May is not, however. I'm going to take her to America for the summer," she said.

"You are wise," he answered, gently regarding

the girl. "Let her have distractions, the dear child—she needs them."

Then his voice dropped, and I doubted not that he was mentioning me.

A moment later he introduced me. The girl bowed, but did not speak; her mother shook hands and hoped that I should be successful.

"All who loved my dear friend's brother share his sorrow," she said quietly. "And there is nobody on earth who knew him that did not love him. But you are faced with great difficulties, for this shocking deed was without motive so far as any human being can see."

She spoke clearly and with deep earnestness, and added that she hoped I would come to see her, if I found it desirable to do so.

They drove on, and Slanning trusted that I had marked them carefully.

"Nothing," he said, "connects them with my brother's death, and yet, to my mind, there may exist some link. They are dear friends, and Lady Warrender's late husband, General Sir George Warrender, was also a close friend to my brother and myself. But, all unconsciously and innocently, the ladies may, none the less, be involved, in some way hidden both from themselves and us. That will be for you to consider when you know all that I can tell you."

"The girl looks very ill," I said.

"She is—with reason. But the illness is of the mind, not the body. She has had a sad shock."

We reached a public square, wherein the object

of chief interest was a green-bronze statue of Lord Nelson; and then arriving at Slanning's club, alighted and presently enjoyed a lunch of many delicacies.

After the meal, he led me into a small, private smoking-room, where we should be alone. He offered a cigar, which I declined, since the business of my visit was now to begin. Nor did he smoke himself, but entered at once upon his narrative.

"Stop me and ask any questions that may occur to you," he said, and then proceeded.

"My mother died when Henry and I were boys of fourteen years old. We were in England at the time and had just gone from a preparatory school to Harrow. From there we proceeded together to Cambridge. During the winter vacations we used to come out to my father here; while in the summer he usually visited Europe and took us with him to France or Italy. We were just completing our years at the university when my father, Fitzherbert Slanning, passed away somewhat suddenly—he had always been a delicate man—and Henry and I were called to the estates. My father always held that absentee landlords were the ruin of the West Indies and, long before he died, made us promise to live and work here. We kept our word.

"It is, I believe, a rooted opinion that twins resemble each other closely in every particular of appearance and character and taste; and doubtless it often happens so; but I cannot flatter myself that I am half the man my brother was.

He possessed better brains, better judgment and a larger measure of self-control. We resembled each other superficially, but he revealed a more thoughtful countenance and a less impetuous disposition. I would not say that I was the optimist and Henry the pessimist; but whereas my nature leads me to be sanguine and trustful, he was more cautious and a far shrewder judge of character.

"We had a valuable overseer, faithful to my father and trained in a school to whom the Slannings were a tradition. He helped to seat us in the saddle, and since we were both workers, and well educated, we carried on with success the great sugar industry that our ancestors had founded. Now I am last of my line, and no other Slanning than myself has any direct interest in the 'Pelican' Estates. They are mine, together with the revenues they furnish and responsibilities they embrace.

"Life passed for Henry and myself uneventfully and prosperously. We were everything on earth to each other, and had not, as I believed, an idea unshared, or an ambition not held in common. I stuck to the business entirely; Henry developed wider activities, joined the administration and did useful public work. He was a man of extraordinary generosity; he loved to advance the welfare of the island and the humblest upon it. If it can be said of any man that he had not an enemy, that can be said of my brother. He was the soul of justice and displayed an enthusiasm for humanity that won the respect of the rich and

the worship of the poor. Yet this man has been deliberately destroyed by a fellow-man under circumstances of the profoundest mystery; and when he perished another died also—one who would have laid down his life for Henry, or myself, a thousand times. This was John Diggle, a full-blooded negro, whose forbears have worked for generations at the 'Pelican.' He was a watchman, and his business required that he should guard the plantations at night. The looser sort of niggers will always pilfer, and none is immune from that annoyance. At the time of cane-cutting, therefore, we look after our boundaries; and if the blackguards who come thieving know that they may get a bullet about their ears they think twice before committing depredations.

"It was an old custom that niggers found by our estate police in the cane by night were challenged, and if they did not respond, fired upon. It is a very ancient enactment—of course not followed nowadays.

"The manner of Henry's death I will now describe. After a night of full moon, he did not join me at breakfast according to his habit, and, sending a servant to seek him, I found he was neither in his bedroom nor study.

"Puzzled, I looked round myself, but could see nothing of him. Then came the evil news from the cane-fields, and I mounted my horse and rode out to a spot, a mile from home, lying in a clearing on the outskirts of the plantations

not very far from the Crane Hotel on the south coast of the island. My brother was lying dead, shot through the breast, and, actually upon him, John Diggle also lay—a corpse. His gun, with both barrels discharged, was found nearly twenty yards from the bodies; and that it was Diggle's gun which had destroyed both my dear brother and himself there could be no question, for the cartridges were of a peculiar bore and the heavy swan shot unlike anything else of this sort in Barbados.

"Another weapon was also discovered — a revolver, brand new, and with all its chambers empty. It had evidently never been fired, and I had never seen it or heard of it; but subsequent investigation showed that my brother had bought it in England with a box of a hundred cartridges which was never even opened. The revolver is one of Forrest's make, and why Henry bought it—seeing his curious hatred and dread of fire-arms—is a part of this mystery.

"Medical examination proved that neither man had been shot at close range—a fact that disposed of an obvious theory. For the local police—coloured people—suspected that poor Diggle had murdered Henry and then shot himself; but this is impossible. First, he worshipped Henry as something more than a man, and would have suffered any imaginable torture rather than hurt a hair of his head; and, secondly, he himself was shot from some distance off. From the nature of the wounds it was calculated that the gun

must have been fired at a range of twenty yards—the distance it was found lying from the bodies.

"Ten yards from the spot where my brother fell, hidden in the plantation, we came upon a pile of cut cane and one of the common axes used for cutting it. This would not have been there under normal circumstances and pointed to the fact of a thief. He had apparently been busy when disturbed. But of him no trace is forthcoming, though a handsome reward and free pardon have been offered to the rascal if he will step forward and tell us anything he knows.

"Why my brother was out that night is, of course, part of this problem; for there existed no shadow of reason that he should have been. He never did such a thing, to my knowledge, before, and though he often took solitary rides and walks, being of a meditative spirit, it was not, of course, his rule to rise after retiring. Yet, on the night of his death, he must have awakened from sleep, drawn on his boots, flung a black alpaca coat over his pyjamas, and sauntered out a mile or more into the plantations, to the beat where he knew that Diggle would be doing his work and keeping his rounds.

"I now come to the third man who appears to have lost his life on this fatal night. Personally I do not associate him in any way with the story I have told you. I see no shadow of connection between the two crimes, and I am tolerably confident—indeed we all are—that the poor wretch

known as Solly Lawson got his throat cut by an enemy.

"He was a half-caste employed at the 'Pelican,' who lived with an old black mother in a cabin near the cliffs. He was a worthless, hot-tempered beggar, with a dog-like affection for my brother and myself; but he quarrelled with his fellows and always gave himself great airs on the strength of his white blood. Solly had a way with the ladies also, and made a good deal of trouble in his own circle of society. He has fought various battles and figured in more than one paternity case; but though the unfortunate fellow thus earned some reprobation, we, weakly enough, forgave him a great many of his faults, for he was a mirth-provoking spirit with ready wit; and as much for his old mother and his dead father's sake as his own, we kept him on and forgave him his stupid sins. He had been locked up twice, and he knew that one more serious offence would be the last, so far as the 'Pelican' was concerned; but it seemed of late that he had reformed and was becoming a responsible member of the community. So, at least, old Mrs Lawson declared.

"Well, on the dark day of this double murder, came news of Solly Lawson's end. The debonair creature, so witty and full of life—such a secret joy to us and such a source of endless exasperation to his fellows—was found dead with his throat cut from ear to ear.

"An accident revealed the murder, for the body lay on a shelf under the cliffs, midway between

the summit and the deep sea that rolled beneath. It was evident that those responsible for his destruction had flung him over, after murdering him, and that instead of falling into the water two hundred feet below, as they intended, the unseen ledge had received him. From this, when found, he was subsequently lowered into a boat and brought ashore. The fall had broken several bones, but the fatal wound was in his throat.

"In his case, also, no motive whatever for his murder has appeared; and though I doubt not it was over some woman that he finally came to grief, nothing throws light on the subject, and nobody in Barbados can be fairly suspected of the business.

"Thus we have three capital crimes, all of which, on the face of it, are motiveless; and while in the case of Solly, as I say, we may feel very sure that he awakened some secret malignity and brought his punishment upon himself—while there probably are those among us who know the secret of his death—yet, so far as my brother and John Diggle are concerned, no shadow of reason for their destruction can be found on the island, or in the world.

"Of my brother I have spoken; while Diggle, in his humble capacity, similarly enjoyed universal respect and regard. We had not a more popular servant on the plantation, or in the factories. He leaves a wife and three youngsters, and my brother was godfather to the eldest.

"That is the dreadful outline you will have to

fill in, young man; and now please ask me what questions may occur to you, unless you would rather leave them for a later occasion."

"I shall have many questions to ask, Mr Slanning," I answered; "but at this point perhaps you will tell me a little about Lady Warrender and her daughter?"

"Gladly. The incident which connects them with my brother's name lies outside those I have narrated; nor can I link it with Henry's death. But you will approach this matter with an open mind, and in any case must hear it and regard it as a strict confidence. This was one of those few experiences that my dear brother kept from me entirely; nor should I have ever known but for the ladies themselves.

"A year ago now Henry told me I ought to marry, and I retorted that it was quite as much his business as mine. He admitted it, and we chaffed one another; but I regarded him as an incurable bachelor and believed myself to be one. In truth, however, Henry desired to marry, and, with what looks now like extraordinary secrecy, cultivated little May Warrender. Her mother did not know it until afterwards; but when Henry died, the girl revealed to her mother that he had much desired to marry her and proposed twice."

"You have no reason to doubt her?"

"None, for she is not the sort to invent such a story. Perhaps, if I had heard such a thing from anybody but these people, I might have disbelieved; but it is impossible to question them.

Henry evidently loved her and strove hard to win her; but he looked old for his age, and doubtless seemed older than he was to a girl not twenty. Whether he was deeply disappointed or not can never be known. He was such a philosopher that I do not suppose he allowed the matter to trouble him more than was inevitable. May liked him immensely, and after he died she was quite ill for a time; but when she told her mother, she also declared that marriage with him would have been impossible. Probably, as I say, his reverse did not cast Henry down unduly, for he was a very quick-minded and intelligent man and a great student of human nature. Moreover, had it made any very poignant impression upon him, I cannot think it would have been hidden from me, even had he tried to hide it. We knew each other too well, and he certainly did not depart at that time from his customary steadfast frame of mind—not before me, at any rate. He was level-headed and well-balanced as usual."

So Amos Slanning's statement ended, and what chiefly struck me were the innumerable permutations and combinations that might be drawn from it. That the speaker had told me the truth, as he saw it, I could not doubt. He was a simple-minded, ingenuous man, and evidently very deeply moved by his loss. For the rest, it became a question how to pursue my inquiries to the best advantage.

The local police had no theory and no clue; while those chiefly interested in the dead were in

the same predicament. Nobody could fit the facts together and make a rational story out of them ; indeed the very material seemed doubtful, for the body of opinion separated the death of the young half-caste, Solly Lawson, from that of the others, and held it only a coincidence that he had lost his life at the same time.

After his recital Mr Slanning took me for a long ride about the island, and we stopped at the scenes of the incidents in his story. Mile after mile of sugar-cane extended upon every side of us. Great jungles of it fringed the road with the drooping polished stems—tawny tangles of dried leaves below and bright green crowns above. Narrow irrigation ditches made a network of the land, and about the prevalent cane ascended sometimes clumps of banana, their broad leaves tattered in the wind. Here and there rose bread-fruit trees and groves of handsome mahogany, or tamarind, to offer welcome shade.

Beside a little house surrounded by a hedge of prickly pear, a calabash-tree grew, and its green, polished fruit hung from jagged, almost leafless boughs.

"That's where poor Diggle's widow lives," said Slanning, "and we are within a mile of the scene of the tragedy. Now you can see the general outline of the 'Pelican' Estates, sweeping in an arc to north and south and ranging almost to the coral cliffs near the Crane Hotel. If you won't come to me, you might take quarters there, to be on the scene of your work."

But knowing not where that work would be, I determined for the present to remain in Bridgetown, and after standing in a clearing on the scene of his brother's death and visiting the stately home of the last of the Barbados Slannings, I returned to town and presently took a couple of rooms in a secluded square not far from the club.

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My object was to work unknown, as much as possible, and in this ambition Amos Slanning assisted me. My business was not specified, though I soon found that most people were aware of it. I wanted, of course, to learn much that the dead man's brother could not tell me, and since the matter still remained a nine days' wonder, all men were glad enough to talk about it, and the conversation in the club smoking-room often drifted round to it.

I had been elected a temporary member of this institution and spent a few days almost entirely within its walls. I found Amos Slanning immensely popular; indeed even more so than Henry had been; for while men spoke of the dead with respect, and deplored his sudden end, it seemed that he had not awakened enthusiasm. Indeed the rest of mankind saw him with different eyes from his twin. A Creole lawyer at the club knew both well, and gave me a friendly but independent description of them.

"Henry Slanning was a man of affairs," he said. "He had ambition and little liked to be

contradicted. But few ever contradicted him, for he was a very sane man, a sound democrat, and knew the trend of contemporary thought. You can form no complete opinion of him through his brother. He had none of the sanguine spirit and natural cheerfulness that marks Amos. He was, in fact, of a sombre cast of mind."

"Have you any theory of events?" I asked for the sake of conversation, and the other answered that he had none.

"Had Henry been faced with any great and crushing disappointment," he said, "or had he found himself up against some stroke of fate beyond the power of his money, or brains, to withstand, I can imagine he might have destroyed himself. His brother, of course, says that under no conceivable circumstances would he have done such a thing; others, however, agree with me so far. But this is no suicide obviously. He was deliberately shot from some distance—twenty yards at least, the doctors say."

So he spoke, and others also furnished some items of information, or some experiences throwing light on character. All helped to complete the picture of Henry Slanning; but none, from his brother to the billiard-marker at the club, could give a comprehensive portrait; and I perceived the picture might never be completed, unless Duveen himself proved equal to that task.

Almost my first visit was to Lady Warrender, and her description of the murdered man differed slightly from the rest. She said he was of a

religious temperament, but unorthodox and not devoted to any particular form of faith.

"He would have ended his days a Catholic, if he had lived," she declared, and proceeded: "He had an intellectual taste and liked metaphysical and psychological problems. My late husband shared his inquiries, and they enjoyed interminable arguments on the subject of freewill and determination, faith and reason, and so on. There was a side of Henry which you may say was completely hidden from his brother. Indeed Henry knew that he possessed a far subtler intellect and a much larger power of imagination. He loved Amos dearly; but more as a father loves a son than as a brother loves a brother. He never troubled Amos with his own deep meditations, or questioned his brother's faith. He was always very careful never to speak of things before Amos that would have put his brother in a false position, or make him appear mentally inferior in general conversation. He was most tender and sensitive to all. But he hated vain and self-sufficient people, and resented criticism of the West Indies in general and Barbados in particular."

"You did not know that he desired to marry Miss Warrender?"

"I had no idea of it. Sometimes I chaffed him and his brother about finding wives and not letting the famous Barbados Slannings die out with them; but Henry always said that Amos was the marrying man. May would have kept his proposal a secret, as he begged her to do, had it not been for

his death. Then she felt it was only right to confide in me, and I told his brother. One never knows what may bear upon a question."

"You noticed no change in him latterly?"

"None. It was about six weeks after his second rejection that he died."

"Should you have objected to such a marriage?"

"I should not have interfered. He was a distinguished and honourable man—a gentleman in the highest sense of the term. My daughter liked him, and it hurt her much to make him sad; but she did not love him. Though only fifteen years older than May, he seemed far more to her: he was old for his age—a staid, quiet man, averse from society, fond of reading, and with no pleasures in which the average girl could share. He would have made a splendid husband, but not for May."

Gradually I built up the vision of Henry Slanning, yet I cannot say that I ever saw the man very clearly. He came and went, sometimes grew clear, then receded again. Some, I found, held him a cynic, with the warm heart a cynic often conceals; others, of a religious frame of mind, doubted him as a freethinker. None denied that much good could be credited to him; but only in one quarter, and that very unexpected, did I find a suggestion that he had ever committed an act open to question.

I visited the widow of John Diggle, who proved a talker. But she was intelligent, her memory seemed trustworthy and her honesty obvious. She was gathering washing from the thorny hedge

outside her little home, and chattered mournfully of the dead night-watchman and his virtues.

"Him not hab an enemy, sar—de kindest man and de best husband. Him work for Marse Henry an' Marse Amos for years an' years, an' nebber a hard word from dem all de time. Dey fink de world ob him, an' my po' John, he fink de world ob dem."

"Let me come into your house and sit down, Mrs Diggle, out of the sun. I'm sure everybody has been very sorry for you. Mr Diggle was greatly respected."

"A most respectable man, sar, an' only wicked rogues dat tief de cane ebber quarrel wid him."

"Had he any quarrel with Solly Lawson, the poor nigger who had his throat cut?"

"Nebber. He knew Solly was a wild nigger; but John 'markable gentle wid young men, and he said Solly mend some day. He a most Christian person, my John."

"Tell me about him. I am very interested to hear about him."

She rambled on for a while, and gradually I brought her to her last memories of the man.

"Did he ever do anything that Mr Henry didn't approve?"

"No, sar—nebber."

"Did Mr Henry ever do anything your husband didn't approve?"

"No, sar; Marse Henry a good man. But—but——"

"They always agreed?"

"Now you say dat, I 'member a queer fing, sar. One day—one, two, free day before him shot, my John came in sad to him breakfus', an' I say, 'What de matter, John?' An' him say, 'Nuffin'.' But I say, 'Dar somefin,' 'cause yo' head wrinkle up an' you puff fro' your nose.' An' him say, 'You dam silly old woman, Jane.' Den, 'fore he go out in de pigeon peas to work, he say, 'Blast dem wicked folk dat steal de cane—dey make trouble, an' it fall on me.'"

"Was much cane being stolen?"

"No, sar. Dar always a little gwine by night; an' John, he cotch a man sometimes; but it nuffin' much, an' I nebber heard him worry 'bout it. So I say, 'Yo' no' worry, John, 'bout a silly fing like dat,' an' he say, 'I got to worry, 'cause Marse Henry, him worry. An' Marse Henry, him tell me I no' sharp enough an' no' do my duty to de tiefs an' forget how to treat de rogues.' I terrible surprised to hear my husband say dat, an' John, he run on, an' he say he do what he told in de future, whatebber happen, an' no' question orders; an' I say, 'You always do what you told, John.'"

"Did he explain any more about it?"

"No. Him go 'way growling; but him soon get happy again. He said no mo' 'bout it, an' I fink no mo' 'bout it till John gone killed an' Marse Henry gone killed; an' den I wish I knew more 'bout it; but too late den. Po' John—him shot in de side, an' him heart blown to pieces."

"I suppose Mr Slanning couldn't have shot your husband?"

"Me Gard! Marse Henry shoot John? Yo' might as well fink John shoot Marse Henry. Marse Henry a gemman dat hated killing anyfing. Him nebber fired a gun in him life. Him nebber squashed a scorpion. He loved John, for him told me so, when John ill once. An' John—him have died a hundred times for Marse Henry, or Marse Amos. He berry faithful man an' live for his masters."

"Have you any idea in your own mind, Mrs Diggle, what happened? If John has sometimes arrested men for stealing sugar-cane, he may have had enemies."

"No, de man or two dat went to prison no fink bad ob John. It all in de day's work for bad man to be cotch some time. And John—him shot wid his own gun—'member dat. John carry his gun himself. He nebber put it out of him hand."

"It would have been impossible, you think, for anybody to get his gun away from John?"

"Only Marse Henry do dat. If Marse Henry come by night an' say, 'Lend me yo' gun, John,' den John lend him. But Marse Henry no want gun. Him hate guns."

"Did your husband ever say he had met Mister Slanning on his rounds by night?"

"Nebber, sar. He sure tell me if such a funny fing as dat happen, 'cause Marse Henry and Marse Amos, dey never go near de plantations by night."

"Have any of your friends any idea what may have happened?"

"Only silly folk. Dey fink de debble tell Marse

Henry to go out in de night an' put it in John's head to shoot him; an' den de debble shoot John; but what Gard A'mighty doin' all de time? Marse Henry an' John berry good men, an' dey in Hebben now wid golden crowns on der heads an' golden wings an' golden harps, sar; but dat de will ob Gard. An' it no better for de wicked murderer dat dey happy now. He go to Hell all de same whar him belong."

"You don't think Solly Lawson had anything to do with it?"

"I doan know nuffin' 'bout dat. He killed dead too, so nobody nebber know if him dar or not."

"He was a sort of chap who might steal cane?"

"Him tief plenty cane, I daresay, massa; but him nebber do nuffin' against Marse Henry—Marse Henry stand up for him plenty times. De niggers tief cane, because dey terrible ignorant fellows an' no fink how wicked dey are; but dey no fall out wid udder gemmen about it. Dat po' Solly—if him see anybody treating John bad, or treating Marse Henry bad, he run to help dem, I'se sure."

She whined on—a shrewd, sensible creature enough, and one sorrowed for her grief, for she often stopped talking to weep. It was personal mourning at her loss and no fear for the future that troubled her, for Amos Slanning had provided for her and her children.

And elsewhere, a few days later, my inquiries

took me to see another, sad, black woman, the mother of the murdered Solly Lawson.

She dwelt by some coral steps cut in the cliff face not far from the seaward boundaries, and her cabin was approached over a parched headland where grew opuntia and hugh aloes on the scorched earth. Great, winged grasshoppers leapt and flew lazily, their gauzes flashing; lizards basked in the blaze of naked sunshine, and a deep silence reigned, only broken by the husky stridulation of the insects. One black goat stalked here, and, in a dried water-course, there hopped a solitary frog. Upon the fleshy leaves of the aloes holiday folk had cut their initials, and lovers, too, had set their names enwoven.

Mrs Mary Lawson's cabin stood near the place of her son's death. She was a little, withered negress who had married an Englishman—an old sailor, who found work at the "Pelican" when he left the coasting trade in the Antilles. Mary could add little to my knowledge; but she confirmed what others had said of Solly.

"Him no berry bad, sar—only fond ob de gals an' berry good-looking—my dear boy was. He lost him head and did silly fings an' fell out wid de neighbours; but him no wicked deep down, an' him always terrible sorry after. Him so much full ob life dat it run away wid him—a berry 'scitable boy, sar, an' dash at fings an' often get in a mess, but ebb'rybody forgib him after him sorry. An' Marse Henry—he nebber rough wid Solly, 'cause Solly so quick wid him tongue, he

always get round Marse Henry, an' Marse Amos too, an' make dem laugh."

"He was fond of them?"

"He lub dem—nuffing too good for dem—he tell me dat a fousand times. All de world lub dem—dar nobody on de earf dat would hurt dem. An' if Solly see anybody do harm to Marse Henry or Marse Diggle—he—so fierce him be—dat he fight dem an' no care if he kill dem."

"He was friendly with John Diggle too?"

"Yes, sar—he friendly to Marse Diggle. Marse Diggle a berry nice gemman, an' kind to my son when odder folks cross wid him."

"But suppose Marse Diggle had seen your son stealing sugar-cane?"

"Den Marse Diggle would hab got Solly lock up. God forgib my Solly, dat happened one or two times; but John forgib Solly after him punished, an' Solly no angry wid Marse Diggle after. When a fing done, it done, sar."

"You wouldn't say that Solly might not have been stealing cane that night?"

"No, sar, I wouldn't say dat. He might; but I no fink him dar. I no fink him far from him home. I fink some bad men quarrel wid Solly ober a gal, an' lie hid for him, an' pounce on my po' boy while him come home, an' kill him."

"More men than one?"

"Yes, because Solly berry quick an' strong. Dar no nigger in dese parts strong enough to kill my Solly single-handed wid a knife, an' den fro him over de cliff. It take six, sebben men to do dat."

She dwelt on her son's great strength with mournful satisfaction.

"You cannot give a name to anybody who might have had a grudge against him?"

"No, sar—nobody. Him been berry good boy for long time now. An' I ask all de niggers if dey know anybody what hab a down on Solly, an' nobody know. But dar must be somebody done it. I fink sailor men, who sail away de next day, might hab done it."

"You know of no girl who cared for your son, or quarrelled with him?"

"Plenty gals, sar; but he only friends wid one gal in Georgetown now, an' she hab no friends but Solly, an' she terrible fond ob him."

"He treated her well?"

"Berry kind an' good to her. She tell yo' de same if yo' ask her."

Further inquiries respecting the character and history of John Diggle and Solly Lawson confirmed these reports of wife and mother. Independent witnesses agreed with them and with Amos Slanning, who had already told me the same story. It was indeed a curious coincidence that the three dead men all lacked any sinister or dangerously unsocial qualities. Of the young half-caste, though it was clear he had been lawless and more or less disreputable, it seemed unlikely that he could have wakened sufficient enmity to lose his life for his sins. The negroes threaten great things; but I learned they seldom rise to capital crime, and a cold-blooded,

premeditated taking off, such as had fallen to the lot of the unfortunate Solly, seemed difficult to explain, or parallel from experience. That it had actually happened was clear enough; but that it could have happened without leaving a sign or clue behind, without wakening a suspicion in any quarter, or incriminating, however remotely, a single soul, greatly puzzled the local police.

These gentlemen I found intelligent enough, and it was clear they had pursued the original inquiries in an effective and thoroughly professional manner after conventional and sound methods. No difficulties were thrown in their way, and there was not a soul in Barbados, apparently, who would not willingly have assisted their inquiries had it been in his power. Not the most shadowy explanation of the crime rewarded their energetic investigation, nor could the hundred and one amateur detectives who strove to solve the mystery throw any light upon it.

Most people I found separated the death of Slanning and Diggle from that of Solly Lawson. Indeed the only thing that might link them was the pile of cut cane near the spot where Henry Slanning and his watchman had fallen. But while this appeared to be the work of a nightly robber who had been surprised, none could say that Solly was the man. And had he been, it was exceedingly certain that he would have made no attempt on the life either of his master or the night-watchman. Indeed the rolls of the "Pelican" Estate, or any other estate, held no character, among many

workers, who could be pointed to as capable of such a crime. To be caught stealing cane was a very venial offence in Ethiopian eyes. The possibility of a white man stealing cane appeared remote; yet some shared Mrs Lawson's impression that a sailor, or sailors, might be implicated. No justification for any such opinion appeared, however.

To explain why Henry Slanning had gone out in the night challenged me as the pregnant point; and, given the reason for that most unusual step, everything else might have followed from it; but no reason offered; at every turn in this exasperating inquiry I was headed off, by a blank wall as it seemed, for the purpose and motive, though they must have existed for every secret incident in this web, proved absolutely beyond my power to discover. Henry Slanning had clearly gone where he knew John Diggle was to be found on his rounds; but whether he had actually sought Diggle, or another, could never be known, unless a living man, or woman, furnished the information. None, however, came forward; there was an extraordinary lack of all evidence; for in such cases, nine times out of ten, chance offers a foothold for a first step, through some incident, or observation, that may open the way to inquiry, or suggest a train of research. But no such thing happened for me. None bore any testimony of any sort whatever, and none actually came within the radius of the inquiry. Here apparently one stood confronted with three barefaced and deliberate murders, committed

in one night on a small island, yet not a shadow of any motive explained them, and not a living being could fairly be pointed at as suspect in the slightest degree.

I made very copious notes and, of course, pursued inquiry through many minor channels, which all ended in failure and contributed no light. I stood in the disagreeable position of being unable to make a case, and after six weeks of very hard and conscientious work, was forced to own it to myself. A loss of self-esteem resulted. I began all over again, only to complete another circle of failure. Nor could it be called comparative unsuccess. The futility of my investigation was almost absurdly complete. I arrived at no theory of any sort or kind, and though once I glimpsed the truth darkly, as afterwards appeared, I wandered from the right road the moment it began to appear wrong.

My last week at Barbados, the last of six spent upon the subject, was devoted largely to Amos Slanning. He had been extraordinarily kind to me personally and insisted upon my spending a few days at the "Pelican" Estate, as his guest, before I left the West Indies. He was frankly disappointed at my failure, but not more than I myself confessed to being. It is true that, though trained to this work by instinct and native bent, with already some fair share of success in various obscure cases, I failed utterly here.

I could only admit it and hope my chief might prove more fortunate. We talked much of Henry

Slanning; indeed I kept the conversation to him as far as one decently might, and not only with his twin brother; for now I saw the truth of what men had told me—that Amos entertained an opinion of his brother that differed from the truth. He did not undervalue his rectitude, or the regard and respect universally extended to the dead man; but he had never fathomed a character very different from his own, and probably never felt, even if he had seen, the intellectual and inquisitive side of Henry Slanning's mind. For example, when I returned to the possibility of suicide, a thought that haunted me in connection with the case, though the facts were there to prove murder, Amos Slanning assured me that nothing was more unlikely, and even when the revolver was proved to have been bought in England by his brother, he stoutly protested that it could not have been purchased with any thought of such a purpose. Others, however, saw no improbability in the idea of Henry Slanning's suicide under certain circumstances; but, since an obvious murder and not suicide confronted us, they saw no object in raising the question.

I begged a photograph of the dead man to take home with the rest of my elaborate *dossier*. The picture he lent me resembled Amos himself closely in feature, but the expression was different—subtler and more melancholy. Indeed it was a face where unrest had made a home, and one had judged that the man who looked so must be defeated of his life's ambitions. Yet no cynicism

clouded his features, and the mouth was as kindly as his brother's, if firmer. The photograph had been taken before Slanning's love affair; but what proved more interesting to me came into my hands by accident two days before I left the island on my homeward way. Amos, searching among his brother's things, had found a diary, which contained nothing that threw illumination upon the past and evidently abstained of set purpose from any mention of Henry's romance; but, in addition to this, he discovered a pile of manuscript—the musings of an intellectual man on a variety of subjects, all of direct human interest. Study of Henry Slanning's personal library had already convinced me of his activity in the domain of thought; while Lady Warrender had confirmed the fact. His books were for the most part philosophical, and I found a translation of Gomperz that had clearly occupied much of his time, and translations of other German writers, including the English version in twenty volumes of Nietzsche. He had Gilbert Murray's Greek tragedians also, with Plato and Aristotle, deeply read. His interest evidently ran on the great pagans. As to his own writings, they reminded one of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. They abounded in curious quotations and tended to the morbid; but they were full of illumination and revealed the character of the man through his interests. He had compiled on love, passion, ambition, patience, duty, suicide, justice, free thought, and free will as opposed to destiny. He was clearly a rationalist at this stage

of his life, and acknowledged no supernatural inhibition to conduct; but his sense of duty was exquisitely keen; he debated questions of justice with a mind as impartial as distinguished, and one felt in the presence of a man who was almost weighed down by his obligations to his fellow-creatures. He wrote of mastery and domination, of craft and the unhappy need for falsehood in the affairs of life, of heredity and environment as rival, or twin, forces in development of character.

I begged these voluminous documents, since, in my opinion, they must prove of great value to Duveen when he came to investigate Henry Slanning's fate; and his brother was content that I should take them with me.

"I shall publish the whole thing presently," he assured me. "It will be a valuable memorial of Henry and help to show the world that he was a remarkable man, and a far greater thinker than people supposed."

And so I left the West Indies (picking up the steamship *Don* on her return voyage from Jamaica), and departed, grateful for much kindness and consideration, and the richer for a good friend or two—men who are still my friends. But I was disappointed and chagrined to the very roots of my being at this blank failure to advance, by a single fruitful speculation, the problems I had gone so many miles, and worked so exceedingly hard, to resolve.

My utter failure had one good result, for it awoke the interest of Michael Duveen, and he

did not conceal his astonishment at a fiasco so complete.

"A dozen theories, of course, I had," I explained; "but each in turn came up against a blank negation. I could find no sort of explanation that fitted all the facts—worse, I could find no explanation that fitted any of them. So far as I could discover, as a result of sleepless search, these three men had not between them a real enemy in the world; nor was it possible to meet anybody living, or hear of anybody living, who gained a thing by the death of any of them. You'll say, of course, that Amos Slanning gains; but in reality he does not, for he and Henry had practically everything in common and were very deeply attached to each other. If one thing is certain, where all is so uncertain, I should say it was the absolute innocence of Amos Slanning. The weirdest thing is, that against the evidence of my own senses and the fact of murder duly proved—murder, of course, by a person or persons unknown—I still find my mind coming back and back to the conviction that it simply cannot be. There was nobody on earth to murder Slanning; but there was a reason in his own mind for him to commit suicide. And yet he didn't."

Duveen patted me on the shoulder.

"We shall see whether you are to be forgiven," he said. "You have at least roused my curiosity, and I may better judge, when I set to work on your notes, if you have failed as hopelessly as you imagine. Meantime there is plenty to do. Come

and dine with me a week hence, if nothing happens to prevent you; then you shall hear your sentence, or your acquittal, as the case may be. The change has done you good. Save for your remorseful expression, I never saw you looking so well."

Thus he dismissed me, and I felt glad to think of other things until the evening came on which I was to dine with him. He put me off for a further week, however, but saw me at his office and asked a few questions concerning the West Indian problem. These I answered, and he made no comment on my replies.

Then I dined with him, and after the meal he read me the following report.

"I have solved the problem," he said.

"Solved it?" I gasped.

"To my own satisfaction; and I shall be disappointed if not to yours also. You are not to blame. You did everything that I should, or could, have done myself. You lacked the necessary synthetic inspiration to put the pieces of the puzzle together after collecting them—that is all."

"That is everything."

"You were right. Your intuition had only to be followed, but, basely, you deserted it."

"How could I follow it against an absolute fact?"

"My dear friend, no fact is absolute."

"But murder can't be suicide."

"Murder may be suicide and suicide may be murder. Don't make rash assertions, but light

your cigar and listen. I'm rather pleased with this ; though it is quite possible that nobody but our noble selves will appreciate it at its true value. From your description of Amos Slanning, I am quite sure that he will not. Therefore let us expect no reward."

Then he read me his solution of the mystery.

iii

"Only through a close and exhaustive study of character is it possible to reach any explanation of this problem ; and in the case of Mr Henry Slanning, on whose death the destruction of the lesser men, John Diggle and Solly Lawson, will be found to depend, ample material for an estimate of his complex temperament exists. Not only from the facts recorded concerning him, but also from his own dissertations and meditations, he may be measured ; and it is from my estimate of him, built on elaborate data, that I reconstruct the incidents which deprived him and the other two victims of their lives.

"Emphatically, Solly Lawson's end forms a part of the larger problem, for I find in him a very vital component of the whole. Accident involved him in the heart of the catastrophe, and without him we should have had one dead man instead of three and a tragedy of an interesting psychological nature, but no mystery whatever. For the mystery now to be explained is not the premeditated work of man, but the blind operation of chance.

"Let us then glance first at character, and take

the dead in rotation. As I shall show, we are concerned alone with them. No undiscovered villains lurk in hiding ; no living man, unless it be myself, yet understands the secret. These three alone are responsible for their own undoing ; or it would be more correct to say that an egregious action of Henry Slanning precipitated the death of the other victims.

" Henry Slanning we find to be of cultured and refined tastes, averse from even the incidental violence of sport. Mrs Jane Diggle said of him that 'he could not squash a scorpion.' He was shrewd, sagacious, and a good man of business. The power of wealth he inherited and did not abuse. He worked hard with an exemplary humanity and consideration for all he employed. He was generous, thoughtful and kind-hearted; nor did he lack for ambition beyond his own prosperity and the well-being of his many employees, for we find him accepting civil offices in Barbados and devoting no small measure of his time to unpaid labour for the general weal. This is the outer man and the personality familiar to his brother, his friends and acquaintance; but there is another Henry Slanning — an 'intellectual' of inquiring spirit, a ceaseless searcher after curious knowledge, a voluminous reader and a keen thinker along certain lines. He is interested in many things; but particular subjects possess for him a peculiar fascination, and one above all others would seem persistently to intrigue his mind. It is a morbid

subject hardly to be associated with a prosperous, hale and popular young man of thirty-five; but there can be no doubt of the fact, since not only was it reported to my colleague from more than one quarter in the course of his independent inquiry, but we also find it an ever-present theme of Henry Slanning's careful memoranda. He commits himself to a definite opinion upon it; he ransacks profane literature for his support and also finds justification for his conclusions in Christian history.

"To this we will return. For the moment it is necessary to show how, what possessed, in the first place, no more than an abstract and academic interest for Henry Slanning, rose to become a personal problem and a personal temptation. He had tasted what life could offer and had, apparently, reached to the summit of his own ambitions, when there came into his life a new and tremendous experience. He fell in love for the first time. His brother, who was never absent from him, assures us that he had not before declared or revealed any affection for a woman; and though we have no absolute proof of this, since in the case of his known attachment, Mr Amos Slanning was entirely ignorant of it until after his death—though, therefore, we cannot say with conviction that Henry never loved before, it is reasonable to assume that no master-passion overwhelmed him until he found himself in love with Miss May Warrender.

"It is certain that he was deeply attached to

her, though his reserved and sensitive nature concealed the fact from all but the young lady herself. He paid his devotions with such delicacy, such humility, and such refinement as might be expected from such a man; and we may assume he was sanguine, for his life had moved easily and successfully. He had much to offer, and the object of his affections, as we know, was inexperienced, and declares that for a long time she did not appreciate the significance of his friendship. Few girls who did not yet know the meaning of love would have refused him; and she had, in all innocence, welcomed his advances, so that we may assume that he felt little doubt of acceptance.

"I insist on the extent of Mr Slanning's disappointment when he heard that his hope was vain; and I believe that so violent and complete was the shock of the news, that a man, who never appears to have loved life for itself, for the time being revolted from it and found existence a tyranny no longer to be endured. With his rare mental endowments, it is reasonable to suppose that, presently, he would have survived this painful experience and recovered from his disappointment in the manner of a normal man; but he permitted himself no time. He turned to the subject of his philosophic research, and under this hard blow of fate—a fate that had always used him kindly until the present—he found in that theme no longer a mere preoccupation for thought, but an invitation to action.

"That theme, the ever-recurring possession of his mental activity, was suicide. And the fact appears in his own handwriting a thousand times. Again and again he opens on some other subject, yet, like a phantom in the noonday, amid intelligent considerations upon love, hope, faith, honour, duty, and other subjects worthy of a high-minded and altruistic man, there creeps into the argument self-destruction. He cannot evade it; there is for him a fascination in the topic that brings him back to it again and again. It vitiates his thinking; it is a black thread woven through the fabric of his thoughts. He exhausts literature in his search for every high example and significant reference to it.

"He held with the great pagans that to live in want, dishonour or suffering was folly. He echoed Cato, Pomponius Atticus, Epicurus. We find him quoting Seneca: '*Malum est in necessitate vivere; necessitas nulla est*': that it is miserable to live in need, but there is no need so to do. He agrees with Marcus Aurelius that if the cabin smokes a wise man takes leave of it. He says with Quintilian, '*Nemo nisi sua culpa diu dolet*': no man endures suffering save through his own fault. But he is not content to justify the practice of suicide from the pagans alone; it is not enough that the Medes and Persians, the Greeks and Romans are with him and that all nations of antiquity furnish admirable and laudable examples of what in Christian eyes is generally regarded as a sin. He seeks instances through the sacred

Jewish writings, and finds in the Apocrypha an authentic instance, when Razis, one of the elders of Jerusalem, slays himself (2 Maccabees), and is applauded by the historian for so doing. We find him also concerned with lights of the Christian Church—Pelagia and Sophronia, canonised for their saintly self-destruction; and of men, especially Jacques du Chastel, that bishop of Soissons who charged an army single-handed and gloriously committed *felo-de-se* for his faith. John Donne's famous apology for suicide, *Biathanatos*, he also quotes at length.

"Then, having concluded with Cicero that it is agreeable to nature in a wise man to take leave of life at its height of prosperity, he writes a learned essay on a saying from Josephus, that he who dies sooner or lives longer than he ought is equally a coward.

"With respect to Henry Slanning, then, I affirm that, after his disappointment in love, life lost its flavour and, led thereto by habit of mind and natural predisposition, he determined to destroy himself, having long convinced his reason that such an act is justified and agreeable to philosophy. We will leave the unfortunate gentleman in that resolution for a few moments and turn our attention to the other victims of the tragedy on 'Pelican' Estate.

"In the case of John Diggle, the night-watchman, no difficulty of character presents itself. He was a direct, single-minded man against whom nothing evil can be advanced—a

good husband, a good parent, and a loyal and honest servant. He carried on the tradition handed to him by his grandfather and father before him, and worked with one sole purpose—the welfare of his employers. Their relation to him was closer than that of master and man. They valued him for himself, and in many ways revealed their personal regard and esteem.

"This negro's duty was to guard the sugar-cane plantations by night, and we find, in connection with that work, an old but general understanding and unwritten law, that thieves stole at their personal peril. It was not uncommon in former days for these pilfering gentlemen to lose their lives, just as a poacher, or other nocturnal robber in England, has also paid the extreme penalty. But human feeling naturally sets against such a strenuous course of action as principles of humanity gain ground. A hundred years ago the man-trap and spring-gun were sanctioned; yet such barbaric engines are now by law swept into oblivion. So with this old pre-slave proscription; and we may take it for granted that John Diggle would not have fired upon a thief, even under greater provocation than he was ever likely to receive from one.

"In this connection, nevertheless, we find a cloud arise on the life of John Diggle some few days before his end. Too much importance cannot be attached to this incident, since upon it hangs the whole theory about to be elaborated. We must, therefore, dwell on the statement made

by Mrs Diggle in Barbados. If necessary, Mrs Diggle can be further questioned, though in my judgment she has already said all that need be said.

"What does she say?

"That on a certain occasion her husband came in sad to breakfast. He denies his trouble at first; but upon his wife insisting that he is not himself, he curses the cane thieves, and says that he has got to worry about them, because Mr Henry Slanning is worrying about them. Mr Henry has told Diggle that he is falling short of his duty and forgetting how to treat the thieves.

"Immediately before the tragedy, therefore, John Diggle has been reproved for laxity in his work, and he resolves that, come what may come of it, he will obey his orders to the letter. We shall find what those orders were in a moment; and there can, I think, be little doubt that the commands issued to Diggle by Henry Slanning were of a nature that Diggle did not expect. They surprised him, and we can see how. In the first place, it was highly improbable that Slanning would bother his head about the petty pilferings of cane, or care a button concerning such a trifle; and, in the second, still more improbable that he should seek to put a stop to them by reversion to obsolete, drastic measures that he, of all men, would have been the first to censure. For so I read John Diggle's trouble, coupled with his resolve. He is going to obey, regardless of con-

sequences; he is going to do exactly as he is told, 'whatever happens.' He therefore apprehended that something might happen; but he was under orders and did not attempt to shirk them, though the orders had astonished and even dismayed him.

"Leaving him also, on the threshold of the disaster, I turn to Solly Lawson and find a character that can be very fairly appreciated from the information at our disposal. This young half-caste is seen as a youth of strong animal passions, uncontrolled, but not malevolent. He was of little worth, sensual, lazy and quick-tempered; but he had wit and a ready tongue, and—what alone matters—his attitude to his master was one of steadfast and deserved devotion. Nor does the fact that Solly would not scruple to steal cane detract from his affection for the gentlemen who have forgiven so many sins and still employed the poor fellow at the time of his death. Solly would steal Henry Slanning's cane to-day and die for him to-morrow. That dog-like trust and affection displayed by many negroes and half-castes is a part of young Lawson's nature. He has expressed to his mother a thousand times his regard for both his masters.

"What does Mrs Lawson say? 'He dash at fings so.' Solly is ill-governed, impetuous and impulsive. For good or evil, he 'dashes at things.' And there is a still more remarkable statement recorded to the dead man's mother. Such is her son's affection for his employers that he would

have died for them. Much follows from this assurance; but we have to admit also that Solly had no grudge against John Diggle. Even in the event of Diggle getting him locked up, Solly would not have allowed enmity against the night-watchman to inspire him on regaining his liberty. In his mind, to repeat his mother's forcible words, 'when a fing done, it done.'

"Here, then, is the third party in this trinity of the dead, and his character stands clearly before us. Had he been different; had Diggle been different; had Henry Slanning been different, my reconstruction of the events that destroyed all three would not be feasible; but it is built upon the only foundation that remains for any superstructure—the foundation of character; and, frankly to my surprise, I find it ample for our purpose. I had suspected that any theory based on character alone must have needed modification and some special pleading when it came to details; I had anticipated the need to rely upon probability, the need to exercise no little ingenuity in rounding the narrative and gathering the tangled thread into a complete skein; I had even feared that known factors of character might presently confound me and make it impossible honestly to develop a consistent story; but, to my satisfaction, I find this is not the case. Effect, in shape of facts, follows cause, as furnished by character, directly and lucidly; motive is at last revealed, like the sun breaking from behind a cloud, and the series of events follow upon each

other logically, inexorably. These things had to be, and they could not have fallen out otherwise.

"Henry Slanning is responsible for the entire concatenation. He designed a certain action and took elaborate means to ensure its operation; but, the event he planned being duly accomplished, accident willed that it should serve as a prelude to other events beyond his calculations—events fatal to the second and third actors in the drama.

"Thus we arrive at the threshold of our mystery.

"When the house sleeps, Henry Slanning rises and makes his way to the plantations, choosing that region where John Diggle will be perambulating, gun on shoulder. Slanning goes of set purpose to his death. He is willing to die, but not by his own hand. It is part of his character that, while he seeks death, he cannot inflict it upon himself. He has, however, intended to do so. He has taken first steps towards that end; and the revolver, found by his dead body, was ordered by him from Messrs Forrest, New Bond Street, London. He wrote for it a week after his great disappointment, and he duly received it, with a box of a hundred cartridges. But he could not use it. For a moment he had dreamed of so doing, when he laboured under the bitterness of his rejection. It was, however, an aberration of character that drove him to send for the weapon, and long before it reached his hand he had sufficiently returned to himself to make its use impossible.

"Why, however, did he take it to the plantation empty? To make sure of John Diggle. He went out in his pyjamas, a light alpaca jacket, and a big straw hat, similar to those the negroes wear. Thus attired, in such a place, at such a time, he must naturally be mistaken for a common marauder; and having already directed Diggle to do his duty in such an event and fire at sight upon any thief, he trusted him to do so. But the revolver was an inspiration, calculated to nerve Diggle and banish the least remaining trace of hesitation. Diggle would challenge, and, if he received no reply and no surrender, would fire. How much more certainly, then, might he be expected to fire, and with how much sterner efficiency of aim, if the thief threatened him!

"Two of these three men died in the clearing of cane, where cutting was in progress; and the plans of the place show the pathway extending through it to the cliffs beyond. To the clearing goes Henry Slanning and begins to cut down cane with one of the little, familiar hatchets used for the purpose. He knows that in the silence of night the noise must soon reach Diggle's ear; and it does so. The watchman thereupon hastens to the spot, and it happens that Solly Lawson, homeward bound by the short cut through the cane, arrives a few moments afterwards.

"We may describe what follows with the eyes of Solly Lawson.

"He sees Diggle challenge, and marks a man jumps up before him. With head down, the

robber approaches, and for answer to Diggle's demand to surrender produces a revolver and points it at the watchman. The steel flashes in the moonlight, and Diggle's response is to get in his shot first if he can. He fires and the unknown falls. Solly sees Diggle drop his gun and run forward; but he sees more. Henry Slanning has fallen backward, away from the stroke that slew him; his hat is off and, in the moonlight, he lies revealed. All that the dead man had so cunningly provided for and planned, Solly sees happen just as Slanning had designed it should happen; but the advent of young Lawson is fatal to himself and Diggle.

"He has seen his dear master murdered before his eyes, and the horrible sight provokes him to instant revenge. A moment's reflection would have saved Diggle and himself, but he cannot reflect. He sees the murderer run towards the fallen man, and, fired to frenzy by the destruction of one he dearly loved, he acts on impulse, stays not a second, but seizes Diggle's gun, probably screams out some fierce words of hate, and fires at short range into the watchman's kneeling body. Then he drops the gun, runs forward, and discovers that it is John Diggle he has slain. He then flies to sound the alarm, while Diggle lies dead upon his master and their blood flows together.

"But Solly's feet grow slower and his passion abates. His fiery brain begins to work, and presently he understands the thing that he has

done. Is it an evil dream from which he will emerge, or can it be true that his master and John Diggle lie dead in the plantation and that he himself is a murderer? He begins to appreciate his own position. What living soul would believe that John Diggle murdered Henry Slanning? Such an event would demand proofs beyond possibility. How shall Solly's worthless word convince any man?

"One might devote pages of psycho-analysis to the meditations of Solly Lawson in his present plight; one might show how, by gradual stages, he probably wore out his wits and reached a situation of despair. But it needs an artist rather than an inquiry agent adequately to paint the picture of his horror and downfall. Had he gone home and taken counsel with his mother, some light might have fallen upon him; but this he did not do. Darker and darker became the lad's thoughts, and more hopeless the promise of the future.

"Another and abler man, or a criminal, had doubtless kept his mouth shut and gone his way, preserving his action a secret and defying his fellow-creatures ever to associate him with it; but this man was stupid, impulsive, and no criminal. I conceive that his intelligence was not equal to the strain put upon it, and that, by what train of terror we can only guess, he reached at last a conviction that he would be found guilty, sooner or later, of a double crime. His record would be against him, and there was none to

speak a word for him. He had left Bridgetown on the previous night and walked home through the small hours; and all he could say was that he had seen John Diggle shoot Henry Slanning and taken vengeance into his own hands. To utter such nonsense would be to stand self-condemned.

"To me the result of these reflections on Solly Lawson can be predicted with certainty. He feels, at the morning hour of lowest vitality, that it is better to die than live for what must now lie before him. By this time he has drifted back to the cliffs, for he has been walking subconsciously homeward. The sea lies beneath him, and a few moments of suffering will end all. Better to perish thus than on the gallows, with the execration of all humanity in his ears.

"Again impulse decides him. He sees not a ray of hope, but hungers to end his mental torture as swiftly as may be. Feeble now and worn out in body and mind, he dashes at his doom, designing to vanish off the earth for ever and leave no link by which he can be connected with the dead men in the plantation. He will leap down into the sea and so disappear, where none can find him. But a common instinct in suicide, to pile one death upon another, manifests itself in Solly Lawson at this supreme moment. Men often destroy themselves so; and there is undoubtedly some subtle, psychological instinct that tends to make these double deaths less fearful to the self-destroyer. A man will drink poison

and then blow his brains out; or, as in the case of this ill-starred youth, he will cut his throat and leap over a precipice with his remaining strength.

"Thus did Solly act; and had he fallen, as he designed, into the depths below, no explanation of these incidents would ever have won to mortal mind; but he fell on a projection of the cliff; his body was thus recovered and his secret, as I believe, revealed, to play its intrinsic part in the larger mystery with which we are concerned.

"That, then, is what happened, in my opinion; and if it be argued that not a shadow of actual and tangible proof exists to support such a conclusion, I admit it. It is granted that I present nothing but a theory of events, and the reality makes it impossible to do more; but I repeat that the view I submit is based on character, than which no surer foundation of action can be discovered; and since these three men all do exactly what may be predicted of them, given the circumstances, it is hard, and for me impossible, to see how any other rational explanation of their death can be advanced.

"M. DUVEEN."

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It remains only to add that while many accepted Duveen's conclusions, others did not, and among the latter, as he prophesied, was Amos Slanning. The West Indian held this explanation of his brother's death to be merest moonshine; though, as I explicitly learned from various Barbadian

sources, the majority of Henry Slanning's friends and acquaintance in the West Indies believed that the matter must have so happened. At first they also protested; but when the novelty of the idea grew worn they came to believe it. The probability, in fact, increased rather than diminished.

As for Michael Duveen, he felt no shadow of doubt concerning his conclusions, and while declining the large honorarium offered to him, since it came from a client unconvinced, always held the case to be among his own purest analytical achievements.

"It is an example," he used to say, "of how motive may sometimes be unearthed through the track of character, when every other possible channel is blocked by death and cannot be explored. For my part, I have often doubted the most luminous circumstantial evidence, if opposed by radical facts of character; and though in many cases crime suddenly appears in soil of character where one would have suspected no such seed could spring, for temptation will break through the bars like a strong man armed; yet, as a general principle, if we know what an individual has been, and what forces have always guided and controlled his acts, we may safely judge as suspect any charges which openly contradict the massive proofs of his past conduct, but accept as worthy of close examination such actions as support them."