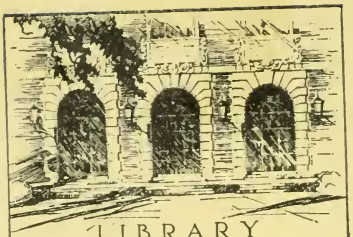

AT FAULT.

VOL. III.

AT FAULT.

A Novel.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF

"BREEZIE LANGTON," "BROKEN BONDS," "SOCIAL SINNERS,"

"THE GREAT TONTINE," ETC., ETC.

"For the lords in whose keeping the door is
That opens on all who draw breath,
Gave the cypress to love, my Dolores,
The myrtle to death."

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. III.

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AT FAULT.

CHAPTER I.

"SERGEANT USHER'S VIEWS."

"OF course you never saw John Fossdyke," said Phil, after a pause of some minutes' duration.

"Certainly not; nor you, as I understand, Foxborough. The likeness is odd, devilish odd," rejoined Morant.

Phil Soames smoked on musingly for some seconds, and then said:

"It's a curious thing that this extraordinary likeness between the two men has never been touched on as yet by any witness in the case.

You were present at the inquest, and know it was never alluded to. You're quite sure you're making no mistake?"

"Quite, if you had not told me that was the photograph of Mr. Fossdyke, I'd have sworn to its being a likeness of Foxborough."

Once again did Phil Soames meditate before he spoke, as if phlegmatic and slow of thought, as the traditional Dutchman. Then he said:

"This is a bit of information that I don't consider I am entitled to communicate to the police without your sanction; but, Herbert, Sergeant Usher, of the Criminal Investigation Department, who has charge of the case, is in the town at the present moment, and I have an idea that he would consider this important."

"Why?" rejoined Morant briefly.

"Well, there you beat me," replied Phil. "I don't know; it's a mere idea of my own, but I'll confess to being considerably im-

pressed with Sergeant Usher. He seems to me, to use Mark Twain's expression, a *lightning* detective."

"That may be, but, my dear Phil, situated as I am with the Foxborough family, it is not clear to me that assisting a *lightning* detective at this moment would be for their benefit altogether."

"Certainly not, if you believe Foxborough guilty, but you have already to-night avowed your total disbelief in his criminality. If you stand by that the discovering of the truth is most desirable for his sake. I go for seeing the thing fairly out, and I have a right to speak; little as you may think it, Herbert, we are almost in the same boat."

"The same boat? Why, what on earth do you mean?" exclaimed Morant.

"It's rather a singular thing, Herbert; and the knowledge only came to me some two days ago, but the girl I hope to make my wife is a half-sister of Miss Foxborough."

"Impossible! James Foxborough has only one child—his daughter Nid."

"That may be, but Mrs. Foxborough had a daughter before she ever married Foxborough —a child who has been brought up by her mother's sister. I don't wish to go further into her history than this. I only mention it now to show that I have almost equal right with you to decide upon what use we shall make of the discovery we have just made. If Foxborough is an innocent man, the more light thrown upon poor Fossdyke's tragical end, the better for him; and then, again, we have no moral right to suppress an important piece of testimony like this."

"Hum! I don't know; I've a sort of idea that standing staunch to one's pals is a primary duty in life, and I don't think I should bother myself much about moral obligations when fulfilling them threatened to turn to their detriment."

"I don't believe, as I said before, that this will be to James Foxborough's detriment. Like you, I hold that even if he was the man who caused poor Fossdyke's death it was a case of manslaughter and not deliberate murder, but remember that, except the one fact of the identification of the weapon, the evidence against Foxborough is all somewhat conjectural. Look here, we will submit this in the first place to Dr. Ingleby, and ask his advice about it."

"I don't half like it, Phil," rejoined Morant, gloomily, "and wish I had never seen your confounded photograph-book."

"But you have, you see; you have virtually given a bit of evidence impossible to recall. I cannot tell you why I think it important, but I do."

"Now," rejoined Herbert, "I'll give in. I know these two things—that your head is better than mine, and that you are sure to do what you think best for both the Foxboroughs

and ourselves. That's so; isn't it?" added Morant, somewhat nervously.

"Not a doubt, old man. Playing straight may be playing bold, but it's very often marvellously effective."

As usual the stronger spirit had carried his point, and before the pair separated that Dr. Ingleby should be informed of the curious discovery was thoroughly settled.

Morant was somewhat astonished at the importance the Doctor appeared to attach to it, indeed it seemed of more consequence in other people's eyes a good deal than his own, but Dr. Ingleby was quite clear on the one point that it ought to be communicated to Sergeant Usher without delay, and the Sergeant was accordingly at once sent for. The message found Mr. Usher in somewhat gloomy cogitation. The story of Miss Hyde he had no doubt was a piece in the puzzle, but by no means a prominent one, and he was just as far as ever from arriving at one of those centre

pieces upon which those pictured problems invariably depend.

"We have a bit of news for you, Sergeant," said Dr. Ingleby as Mr. Usher entered the room. "Sit down and listen to what we have to tell you."

"Good evening, gentlemen," replied the Sergeant, with a comprehensive bow, and without further speech Mr. Usher quietly seated himself. In his vocation the Sergeant was perfectly aware of the supreme advantage of the listener, more especially of that very rare specimen, the attentive listener. Was not his business to acquire information, not to dispense it? Loquacity as a rule leaked; silence absorbed. But that Dr. Ingleby's account of the extraordinary likeness of John Fossdyke and his reputed murderer interested the Sergeant there could be little doubt with any one acquainted with that officer's peculiarities. His quick grey eyes glistened as the Doctor recounted Morant's curious mistake

about Fossdyke's photograph. He uttered no word till Dr. Ingleby had finished, and then said quietly, "Would Mr. Morant permit me to ask him a question or two?"

"Certainly," replied Herbert.

"You know Mr. Foxborough well?"

"Fairly so; I have seen him a good many times, but I wouldn't swear to twenty, remember."

"No matter. You cannot be mistaken about his identity?"

"Certainly not! I know him quite well enough to be perfectly sure of recognizing him should I ever meet him again, unless, of course, disguised."

"Thank you, Mr. Morant. Now, Mr. Soames, I am going to ask you to lend me Mr. Fossdyke's *carte-de-visite;* if you have any objection, no doubt I can get it in the town. I don't suppose you have."

"Not at all," replied Phil, "I have brought it in my pocket on purpose; here it is."

The Sergeant looked at it attentively, and then said, "I never saw this poor gentleman alive, but I should call this an excellent photograph."

"Undoubtedly," rejoined Phil.

"Excellent," echoed Dr. Ingleby.

"Now, gentlemen," said Sergeant Usher, "you are entitled to know what I think of all this. Two of you are, at all events, I presume, somewhat interested in proving James Foxborough an innocent man. Well, you never did him or his a better turn than you have done to-night. I have not ciphered it all out in my own head yet, but I fancy this means what they call at St. Stephen's, when the Government works round and takes up the politics of the party it has turned out, 'a new departure.'"

"You don't seem to think much of the principles of our legislators," observed the Doctor, laughing.

"Lord, sir," rejoined the Sergeant, "I never

troubles my head about politics, all I meant was that, whether they were Whigs or Tories, Radicals or Irish members, their policy is pretty much that of the gentry I pass my life in opposition to, one of expediency. They pass acts of spoliation or levy taxes just as my clients commit burglaries or pick pockets. The necessities of the moment must be complied with, and whether it's supper or place, a man goes for what he wants badly. But, good night, gentlemen. I shall have something to tell you before forty-eight hours are over, unless I am very much mistaken. It's been an intricate puzzle all along, but it's coming out, although I don't pretend I see it as yet. Once more, good night, gentlemen."

"You agree with me this is important evidence, Doctor," said Phil, as the street door closed upon the Sergeant.

"It must be, when we come to think of it. This extraordinary likeness between the two

men cannot have been overlooked. Yet the people at the Hopbine never alluded to it, nor could the mysterious stranger who sat next Totterdell have been Foxborough. Neither Totterdell nor any of the Baumborough people could have overlooked such a startling likeness as this seems to have been. It must either have been some other Foxborough; somebody who assumed his name; or he must have had a confederate."

They continued to talk over the affair in somewhat desultory fashion for some time, but got no further than they should all be extremely anxious to hear what Sergeant Usher might have to tell them when he next condescended to be confidential. The Doctor alone knew how very little was comprehended in the Sergeant's confidences, and thought it was more than possible that Mr. Usher's next communication would contain nothing, but that he did lay considerable stress on the night's news the Doctor felt no manner of doubt.

The Sergeant, as he walked homewards, turned this "latest intelligence" over in his mind, and became more impressed with its importance the more he thought about it. "There can be no doubt whatever now about the confederate," he muttered. "In fact, although Foxborough likely enough instigated the murder, it is quite open to question whether he had anything to do with it personally. Armed with that large command of ready money to which Mr. Sturton testified, he could purchase the services of almost any scoundrel he chose, and nothing is more probable than it was something connected with Miss Hyde's history caused his compassing Fossdyke's death. The latter might have been Miss Willoughby's first lover, and Miss Hyde the consequence of that affair. That is probably the case, and what led Foxborough to seek his life is easy of explanation on those grounds. It's curious, and it never seems to have struck any of those

gentlemen as yet, that we have not so far fallen upon any witness that knew both men, and yet there were two or three people present at that inquest, Mr. Morant one, who, had they viewed the body, must have been at once struck with the marvellous likeness to the accused. Totterdell, without further questioning, is conclusive evidence that Foxborough was not present at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre. He could not possibly have overlooked such a likeness as this. He is a wandering, very wandering witness, but he tries to tell the truth as far as his conceit and natural tendency to talk will allow him. It strikes me that I had better be off to town to-morrow and see if any of the people at the Syringa recognize this extraordinary likeness."

The Sergeant was a man of decision, and the first train next morning saw him on his way to London. He had slept on the thing, and thought it well out, and arrived at the

conclusion that further fishing at present in the somewhat stagnant waters of Bunbury and Baumborough would be productive of no results, but that his casting net next time must be thrown into the wide ocean of the metropolitan waters. The confederate, or rather the real perpetrator of the crime, was the man he wanted. Foxborough at most could be but an accessory in the eye of the law, although probably the instigator of the murder, and that he had fled the country Mr. Usher began to deem probable. That the principal ports had been closely watched was a matter of course, but that his brethren had been beaten before in this respect the Sergeant was only too well aware of.

CHAPTER II.

MR. CUDEMORE'S MANŒUVRES.

SERGEANT USHER, arrived in town, lost no time in making his inquiries. Herbert Morant is confirmed in every respect. People perfectly conversant with the appearance of James Foxborough recognize the photograph for him at once, and these are officials at the Syringa for the most part, who all disclaim any knowledge whatever of Mr. Fossdyke, and deny ever having heard his name till his sad fate put it in all men's mouths. Sergeant Usher begins to have a shrewd suspicion of the truth, but is more puzzled than ever as to the identity of the mysterious stranger who graced the opening of the Baumborough

Theatre with his presence, and yet the Sergeant has little doubt that he was the chief actor in the tragedy. For the present Mr. Usher is at fault; quite undecided, indeed, as in what direction to make a fresh cast for the recovery of the trail. He has called at Scotland Yard to report himself, and learnt that they have no tidings whatever of James Foxborough. Mr. Usher is not much surprised at that; he does not think it probable that any clue to Foxborough's lurking-place will be picked up by his brethren, but has a strong suspicion that he himself can indicate where he is when necessary. In the mean time, he wants the accomplice, or the Foxborough of the Hopbine, who evidently was not James Foxborough of the Syringa Music-Hall. "It is very odd," mutters the Sergeant, "but here I am carrying about in my pocket-book what would probably identify him in a moment if I could only hit off the right person to submit it to. This note

addressed to the dead man is in no disguised hand, and there are doubtless plenty of people could identify it if I only knew 'em. Both Foxborough's bankers and the stage manager of the Syringa don't see any attempt at simulating his hand, and from the writing they showed me I also should say there was no effort at imitation. It only wants a little thinking out. Query, was Miss Hyde the cause of the murder? Why should she be? She is not Foxborough's own daughter, and John Fossdyke from all accounts has been an exceedingly good friend to her. I know a little more about the thing than any one else, but I admit I am still quite in the dark as to who committed the murder, if murder it was, and why he did it."

"Let me see," muttered the Sergeant, as he once more sat meditatively smoking over his own fireside. "Why did Foxborough want all that money he borrowed? I don't know as yet, but I fancy I can get at that. Next, what has

become of Foxborough? I feel pretty certain I can get at that. Then, how did the dagger of Foxborough, with which Fossdyke was undoubtedly killed, arrive at the Hopbine? Lastly, who was the Foxborough who went down to stay at the Hopbine, went to the Baumborough theatre, invited Fossdyke to dine, and undoubtedly caused his death? I have got his handwriting, which he doesn't know. I've got plenty of witnesses to his identity, which he undoubtedly does know, and I feel pretty sure that he has never left the country. Further, I have made a discovery of which he is not likely to get a hint, and upon which he must principally rely as his safeguard. "It's a good game, a very good game," exclaimed Mr. Usher, "but I'll give checkmate for a crown before it is over."

It was a very jubilant evening in Tapton Cottage when Morant's letter from Baumborough reached them.

"My darling Nid," wrote Herbert, "I cannot tell you what, nor could you understand its importance any more than I do, but we have made a discovery about that miserable Bunbury affair, which the celebrated detective in charge of the case deems of the greatest consequence to your father. He told Phil Soames, in my presence, that nobody had served your father better than we had in accidentally bringing to light the trivial circumstance we did. I can't explain it, Nid, because I don't in the least understand its importance for one thing, and I'm bid hold my tongue for another, though I suppose you would say that couldn't possibly apply to you. Any way, dearest, tell your mother it's good news, and that I feel sure your father will be fully exonerated. Dear old Phil has made me a splendid offer, and holds open to me a choice that I shall deserve kicking if I fail to avail myself of. Did you ever hear of a beer king, Mademoiselle? You are, I trust, destined to be a beer queen. Shall you be awfully shocked at treating our friends to beakers of

Soames and Morant's extra, or urging them to try just one glass of the Philerbertian stout. The invention of that composite name, is my first great stroke in the business. As for the alarum about which you chaff me, there is a hatred between us as yet too deep for expression, but he is master, and I obey his brutal behests implicitly. Time, not his time, may bring about a reconciliation, but his horrible indifference at this season to the glories of sunshine are disgusting. He often appeals to me to be up and about long before it.

"God bless you, Nid, remember you are to be a breweress, so don't adopt the blue ribbon, not the Garter, the other one, nor turn up your pretty nose at oysters and stout. I never did even before I was one of the initiated malt and hops brethren. Love to your mother, and tell her, though I cannot explain it, our best news is good news.—Ever, dearest Nid, your very own,

"Herbert."

Yes, a letter like this was certain to spread joy through Tapton Cottage. It was good

news to both ladies, and the bright flush of happiness in her daughter's face could not fail to evolve some sympathy from such an essentially sympathetic woman as Mrs. Foxborough. She warmly congratulated her daughter.

"I think I understand Herbert, Nid," she said, "and a man such as he has described Mr. Soames will be the making of him."

"Mr. Cudemore, ma'am," said Eliza Salter as she entered the room, "wishes to know if he can see you for five minutes?"

"Well, he can't see me," cried Nid, "I hate the sight of him. Oh you, poor mother, I am so sorry for you, but I must run away. Herbert's the only 'disagreeable' I ever take off your hands, and he, of course, has a claim for his pretended gallantry while I was insensible. I have no doubt it was the park-keeper really rescued me, and that he regarded the conflict from a safe distance."

"You don't believe anything of the sort,

you silly child," replied her mother, smiling, "but if you don't want to see Mr. Cudemore you had better vanish, because I must see him. He has come, I know, on a matter of business. Off with you."

"Show him up, Eliza."

Nid gathered up her skirts and fled precipitately, while Eliza proceeded to fulfil her mistress's behest.

"Good morning, Mrs. Foxborough," said Cudemore as he entered. "I am excessively sorry to have to intrude upon you at such an unfortunate moment as this, but business unluckily refuses to be postponed, and your husband's either ill-timed or misjudged absence has occasioned an unpleasant complication which necessitates my appealing to you."

"Pray sit down, I am quite willing to hear what you have to say," rejoined Mrs. Foxborough, who had no very favourable opinion of the money-lender. She knew Mr. Cude-

more had, though in urbane manner, most rigidly exacted his pound of flesh on former occasions. She knew that he was their creditor now for a very large sum, about the investment of which she had no conception. She had bowed meekly to her husband's decision to borrow it. It was not wanted to sustain the Syringa, she knew, but about his provincial speculations she was in total ignorance. He had at times made money out of them, undoubtedly; without one of his provincial companies they never could have mustered the money necessary to start the Syringa, and that they had been obliged to borrow money besides, she was only too painfully aware. Mr. Cudemore had been a very exacting bloodsucker in the early days of that concern; paid off at last, but, as Mrs. Foxborough ruefully remembered, once more a terrible creditor.

"It is most unpleasant for me, of course, and more especially under the peculiar circumstances, but please remember, Mrs. Fox-

borough, I am only the unwilling mouthpiece of others. Your husband's absence has frightened the people who have advanced him this last money on the security of the Syringa, and my instructions are simply to give notice of their intention to withdraw the mortgage at the end of six months. You can't suppose, Mrs. Foxborough, that I wish to be disagreeable, and should you deem this inconvenient, I shall be happy to give you my assistance in raising it elsewhere."

"That, of course, Mr. Cudemore, will be a thing for future consideration. In the mean time I can only thank you for your good intentions."

But Mr. Cudemore was not to be got rid of like this. He had by no means said his say as yet; in fact, this was mere skirmishing. The battle royal is not always fought at our own discretion, but we at all events can endeavour to exercise some pressure about bringing it about.

"I think you had better take me into your confidence," he urged. "These people may get impatient when the time comes, and if you don't find them their money foreclose, and you would lose possession of the Syringa."

"But how can I take you or any else into my confidence when I am in total ignorance myself? If I have to find the money at the expiration of the time, and can't, well then I suppose the Syringa and I must part. But it is most unlikely my husband made away with such a large sum as £6000. Some of it, of course, he may have spent, but I am sure there is something to show for it. He invested it in some manner, and I think before the time you mention it is probable I shall discover where he is, or whether he is alive. I don't know, but I am quite sure he never committed the crime laid to his charge, and I hear the police are coming to the same opinion."

"I am very glad to hear it," replied Mr. Cudemore, suavely, "but I need scarcely say I

can have no wish to touch upon so painful a subject. Still there are circumstances under which I could find you the money."

"It will be time enough to discuss those circumstances when the necessity for finding the money arises," rejoined the lady sharply.

Whatever his design Mr. Cudemore felt that he could not prosecute it any further for the present, and took his departure.

"The miserable trickster," said Mrs. Foxborough, as her eyes sparkled. "He means he would find the money if I gave him Nid, as if I wouldn't see the child dead and the Syringa burnt first. I wonder whether the people who lent the money are altogether guided by him, and what induced poor James to borrow so large a sum. What could he want it for?"

From this date, Mr. Cudemore was constantly proffering assistance. He claimed, too, certain authority over the Syringa, and neither Mrs. Foxborough nor her stage-manager were quite clear whether he had such rights or not.

He said he had a right to examine the books weekly on the part of the mortgagers, and as Mrs. Foxborough had no copy of the deed, she was not able to gainsay him. Mr. Cudemore said that clause had been specially introduced, as she would see when her husband's copy was discovered. Mr. Cudemore's dogged persistence was remarkable. In vain did Mrs. Foxborough decline his offers for assistance. She was almost rude to the man, but he still would keep perpetually calling. Then he tried to frighten her about the loss of the Syringa, but Mrs. Foxborough told him plainly she had done without the Syringa before and could do so again. She did not want to lose it, but if her retaining it was to be a matter of favour then she preferred to go. Cudemore was evidently very much in earnest, or he would never have put up with such continuous rebuffs, and about what his real motive was Mrs. Foxborough had never had any doubt from the

very beginning. He rarely saw Nid upon these occasions, and certainly could not claim to have met with the slightest encouragement from that young lady, but the man was crazed about her, and determined to win her at all hazards. That she had the slightest fancy for him never crossed his brain for a moment. On the contrary, I think a wicked determination to make her pay dearly for her ostentatious indifference should she ever be his wife was much more often in his thoughts.

"Yes, my dainty lady, the time may come when you'll wish you had shown me more civility, ay, and your stuck-up mother too. I shall marry you at last, little as you may think it."

And it did look preposterous, and only that Cudemore was quite off his head upon the subject, he might have seen so himself. Whether she lost the Syringa or not Mrs. Foxborough and her daughter would be in no

such needy circumstances that he might look to bend them to his will against their own judgment, and he must have been blind indeed if he failed to see that neither lady favoured his pretensions. As for Nid, her feelings were more than mere indifference towards him; they amounted to actual dislike, and in face of her engagement to Herbert, no pressure would have been likely to make her accept Mr. Cudemore.

"My dearest Herbert," wrote Nid. "So many thanks for the good news contained in your last letter. It is grand to hear that the police have no longer any doubt of papa's innocence."

"Well, upon my word," remarked Morant, as he laid down the letter for a moment, "that is a most ingenious twisting of my words. What I meant was 'Seem to have some doubt of Mr. Foxborough being the delinquent after all.'"

"We get on pretty well, but mamma frets

dreadfully, and to add to her troubles that wretched Mr. Cudemore is always worrying her. He claims some control over the Syringa, though whether he has any real right to interfere we don't know, but he's always coming here pestering about it, and poor mamma has quite sorrows enough without their being aggravated by a monster like that. How very good it is of Mr. Soames to give you such a nice start. Next time I see you—ah, when is that to be—I shall expect to find you have taken a treble x degree. You will grow awfully rich, brewers always do, you know, and that will be nice, because you will be able to give me all sorts of pretty things, and I appreciate pretty things. I don't want to interfere with your work, but do snatch a day the first time you've a chance, and come up and see us. It will do mamma good, and you might make out for us whether Mr. Cudemore is entitled to assume any control of the Syringa. Good-bye, Herbert

dearest. Mamma's love, and believe me, ever your own Nid."

Mr. Morant's first impression upon perusing this epistle was that it behoved him to go straight to town and kick Cudemore, but upon second thoughts he decided to postpone that ceremony for the present.

CHAPTER III.

BESSIE SAYS "YES," AT LAST.

THAT Philip Soames, after what he had stated of his intentions to Dr. Ingleby, would be long before putting them into practice was not very likely, and the very next afternoon saw him striding along the causeway to Dyke—mightily determined Bessie should answer that question in solemn earnest this time, and that there should be no further mystery between them. Miss Hyde, to tell the truth, had passed a sleepless night, a night of starts and shivers, hopes and fears, such as is the luck of few of us to escape experience of; she knew now she had staked her very all upon the case, for she no longer attempted to disguise from herself

that she was life bankrupt in love should Philip resign her. She had talked bravely enough about not being a clog round his neck, of never being a social drag upon him, of giving him up for his own good, and she meant every word of it; but still she had never realized his giving her up. That might come to pass, but it was at an undefined distance, not an immediate question. She might still hope at all events this last stain might be removed from her family, that the step-father she had never seen might be absolved from the murder of him who had been so good a friend to her, that Phil's love might triumph over her own resolution. All this was in the future; now she was face to face with it. Thirty-six hours, forty-eight at the outside, and she would know whether all was over between her and Phil Soames. If he had not spoken before to-morrow night the chances were she would never see him again; if he had not spoken before the night after, she

knew if ever she saw him again it would be as no lover of hers.

To say that the announcement of Mr. Soames made Bessie start and colour would barely describe the girl's agitation, but it had to be mastered, and though she had a violent desire to run away, she knew that was ridiculous, that Phil's early visit was an augury of the best, and that it was impossible for the best-intentioned and most ardent lover to propose if the object of his idolatry persistently refused him opportunity. So she held her ground, and showed no sign of shiver in her manner as she greeted him. Mrs. Fossdyke welcomed him warmly, as usual, and Miss Hyde, albeit her hand shook slightly, handed him his tea with very fair composure.

"I am very glad to see you, Philip," said Mrs. Fossdyke. She had aged and become much more subdued in manner since her husband's death. "I hear you have got a friend staying with you."

"Yes, an old college chum, whom I hope you will permit me to introduce to you before very long."

"Ah, it's getting too late for me to make fresh acquaintances. It is not as it was when John was alive. I'm not going to mope or shut myself up, but I do feel all the spring's out of my life, Philip."

"You can't expect to get over such a shock all at once," he replied. "Is it true that you have taken that cottage of old Morrison's close to us?"

"It is and it isn't," said Mrs. Fossdyke. "I have not as yet, but I am thinking of doing so. It would be quite big enough for me and Bessie, and I don't wish to stay at Dyke even if I could."

"It will suit you admirably, and you will be close to most of your old friends. But I have come out, Mrs. Fossdyke, to beg a great favour of you."

Miss Hyde gave a slight start.

"A favour of me, Philip! You should have come in the days of my opulence."

"There are plenty of favours to be craved at your hands yet, as you will find in due time, Mrs. Fossdyke. What I have to ask is your permission to win this lady for my wife if I can," and Philip rose as he spoke and bent his head to Miss Hyde.

"It's madness!" exclaimed Bessie, faintly.

"Yes, sweet, and with method in it; but let me only have Mrs. Fossdyke's permission, and I'll endeavour to explain it."

"She's as good a girl as ever stepped!" exclaimed the mistress of Dyke as soon as she had recovered from her astonishment, delighted to find that her pet project was on the eve of accomplishment. "You have not only my sanction, but, Bessie, my dear, if you take my advice you will treat him kindly."

"You know all, Philip; you are sure you know all?" faltered the girl.

"Dr. Ingleby has told me everything, and now I know your secret I laugh at it, as I have always prophesied I should; and now, Bessie, before Mrs. Fossdyke, I ask you solemnly, will you be my wife?"

"Stop," cried Mrs. Fossdyke, "I don't like this; more mystery; there's usually misery with mystery, Bessie," she continued, sadly. "What is this secret of yours? Alas! it has brought woe to me already, the bitterest quarrel ever I had with poor John was about that. Is every one to know it but me? Am I to be ever hearing of it, but never hear it? I think, child, I deserve your confidence better."

Bessie half sprang from her chair, then dropped back, and with wet lashes cast an appealing glance to her lover.

Philip responded at once—

"Mrs. Fossdyke, spare me Bessie for a short time, and on her return she shall tell you everything. I trust by that to have

obtained the right to advise her. Come! you came for a stroll with me not long ago, and I hope you will send away a happier man to-night than you did on that occasion."

The two ladies seemed swept away by this decisive, dictatorial young man. Mrs. Fossdyke simply pressed his hand, and wished him success as she bade him good-bye, while Bessie quietly got up and followed him out of the room, took her hat and flung a woollen shawl round her as she passed through the hall, and then they stepped out and he led her to the now leafless rosary, there he stopped abruptly, no word had as yet passed between them, and said almost brusquely, "Bessie, how is it to be?"

For a few seconds she felt indignant at his abruptness, and then she reflected that this was the third time this man had asked her to marry him, that even the knowledge of her history had made no difference whatever in his steady devotion; that she loved

him dearly, and lastly, if they once get over the first shock women more often than not succumb to these blunt wooers.

"Philip," she said at last, "it shall be as you will."

"Then, dearest, you belong to me," was his rejoinder, and he clasped her in his arms and kissed her. "Now, Bessie, I have nothing in the main remember to learn about your history, but I do want to ask you one or two questions. How much do you know of your mother?"

"Next to nothing, as I told Dr. Ingleby. I have seen her only occasionally. Such a fine handsome woman and with a charming voice and manner. She kissed me and fondled me, but seemed always under some sort of restraint, and if, as more than once happened, my aunt interrupted our interview, she immediately became formal and cold in her manner. I am sure she was bound by some pact to my aunt to be nothing more

than a mere nominal mother to me. When I implored her to let me come and see her she said it was impossible, and I never even saw her house, nor do I know where she lives. I think my mother and I could have loved each other dearly if we had ever been given the chance, but we saw each other so rarely."

"And what about your sister—half-sister, I mean?"

"Sister!" exclaimed Bessie, "I didn't know I had one."

"Well, she is only your half-sister, but Nydia Foxborough is, I am told, a very pretty and charming girl."

"I should like that. I should like to have a sister, Philip. Shall I ever know her, I wonder?" said Bessie softly.

"Yes, you will know her, and see a great deal of her, little woman, I hope, in days shortly to come. You have heard I have an old college chum staying with me?"

"You told us so at tea-time."

"Well he, Herbert Morant, is engaged to marry Nydia Foxborough, and I intend that Herbert Morant shall turn brewer and become a partner in the firm of Soames and Son. And it will be Herbert's own fault if it don't all come off, and when a man's really in love I can vouch for his becoming very resolute," concluded Phil, laughing.

"Very desperate," interposed Bessie. "I can't give you back your troth, now, dearest. I'm too selfish, it would break my heart, but I'm afraid, Phil, you are not doing a very prudent thing in marrying me, but to take care of my unknown sister besides is too good of you, for you are indirectly taking care of her, you know. You must bring this Mr. Morant out and let me know him. I shall be so pleased to talk to him about Nydia."

"Yes," laughed Phil, "and, great heavens, won't he jump at the opportunity. I've a good deal of difficulty in suppressing a

tendency to talk to him about you, but I doubt whether I should be allowed if I tried, Herbert has so much to say about your sister. She's a sweetly pretty girl, judging from her photograph, but not in the least like you, though I hear she is a miniature edition of her mother."

"Mamma is tall," observed Bessie.

"And Nid, as Herbert calls her, *petite*. She is endowed with every charm and virtue under the sun. I need scarcely say that the testimony is biassed, and if a man is not biassed in favour of his betrothed he's not in love with her. If she be not all grace and perfection in his eyes, well!"

"Well, what?" asked Bessie, roguishly.

"His fetters are not snapped to," rejoined Soames, laughing. "Mine, darling, are well riveted, and faith, when you talk to Herbert Morant I think you'll admit his manacles are satisfactorily soldered on."

"Ah, well, I shall be charmed to listen to

him for a long afternoon. I have always so longed for a sister, and you say she is nice."

"No, pardon me, I never said so. Herbert does; he knows her and I don't. All I say is, if the sun don't lie, she should be a very pretty girl, but I've only seen her photograph."

"When am I to see her?" asked Bessie.

"Ah! That I can't say. It depends a little upon this miserable murder. I fancy the police have rather changed their views about it of late, but they don't take us into their confidence. Miss Foxborough down here just at present would be an impossibility, you know."

"Yes, and I fervently trust now that Mr. Foxborough will be acquitted of the crime. It would be a wall between Nydia and myself were it otherwise."

"For the present, perhaps, yes, but not of necessity in the future. In the mean while we must not speculate on disagreeable subjects."

"But, Philip," said Bessie, in a low tone,

as they continued to pace up and down, "am I to tell Mrs. Fossdyke all my story? Would it be best?"

"Yes! tell her everything, prefacing it with the intimation that you are pledged to be my wife."

"It shall be as my lord wills," rejoined Bessie; "but I own I think it will pain Mrs. Fossdyke."

Phil Soames gave a low laugh ere he replied—

"To think, dearest, a man's wit for once in a case of this sort should eclipse a woman's. Mrs. Fossdyke may be a little startled at first, but in telling your story you will of course make her clearly understand you never even saw your stepfather. Well, you will satisfy no little curiosity she feels about your previous life, and the announcement that we are engaged will, I am sure, please her. You know, Bessie, as well as I do, that though she has never been so injudicious as to attempt

match-making between us, she has in many little ways never attempted to conceal that she would be pleased if we did happen to take a fancy to one another."

"Philip," cried the girl, as the blood rushed to her temples, "you have no right to talk like that. It seems——"

"Stop," interrupted Soames, "it seems as if you were about to observe that one of the twain was a long while taking that fancy. She can't say it was altogether my fault, for, my darling, if ever a man won a bride by thorough belief in her, devoted love for her, and persistent refusal not to take 'no' for an answer, I think I did. I'll hear no word against Mrs. Fossdyke."

"I wasn't going to say anything against her. What I meant was this—" cried Bessie.

"Which was not in the least the case," replied Phil. "You were going to insinuate that, like Benedick, I was trapped into falling in love with you. Not a bit of it;

before I'd known you six weeks I'd vowed to marry you, and on my word, Bessie, there was a time when I thought I was like to be forsworn."

"For your own sake, my love," she replied softly. "If it had not been for that, Phil, I am afraid I should have surrendered at the first assault, and that the telegraph board on the cricket-field would only have recorded the half of your triumphs."

Soames pressed her arm in reply, and said, "Walk with me to the gate, Bessie, for it is time I got home to entertain your brother-in-law that is to be, after all these family matters are arranged."

"And you are sure I had better tell Mrs. Fossdyke everything," asked the girl, as they strolled down the drive.

"Quite ; because, Bessie, she might learn the story in some shape at any time now. We have thought it best to let the police know everything, and though they promise not to

make unnecessary parade of the knowledge we have afforded them it is quite possible that they may have no help for it."

"Were you right to tell them so much?"

"Yes, Bessie, I think so. One has no right to keep back evidence that seems to bear upon a great crime, or for the matter of that a little one. In our case all I can say is the officer in charge of the case seems to think we have done Foxborough good service. I don't in the least understand how, nor did he condescend to explain, but, my darling, straightforward policy generally seems to me to be most profitable in this world in the long run. Now, pet, give me a kiss, and then scamper home, and remember you've sent a real happy man on his road home to-night." So saying, Phil clasped the girl in his arms, and claimed lawful tribute from her freely yielded lips.

"Good night! and away with you," he said, as he released her. "Don't be afraid, but that, though she may weep a bit after your

story, Mrs. Fossdyke will be very pleased with it on the whole. Once more, good night!"

Bessie sped home with a light heart. Confession to Mrs. Fossdyke might be awkward, but what did it matter, Philip loved her. She was Philip's now, spite of everything. He knew all about her, and clasped her to his breast, and called her his plighted wife, and laughed at the idea of her poor biography making any kind of difference in his feelings. Ah! yes, as Philip's *fiancée* and authorized by him to tell it, what recked she if the world knew her whole story. Personally she knew she was blameless.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. CUDEMORE GETS UNCOMFORTABLE.

That men have infatuations about women past comprehension, is an axiom as indisputable in life as that a line is the shortest distance between two points in mathematics. "What does he see in her?" demand his friends, angrily and with justice; she may be vulgar, and even of dubious beauty, but no matter, she has fascinated that man, it may be for days or it may be for ever, but though of mature age he will be blind as a newly-born puppy to her demerits. What does he see in her? Good Lord, he could not answer that question in the least. He would tell you that she was lovely, deny that she was

vulgar, and assert upon oath that her English was faultless. Useless to reason with these infatuated ones. Safer far to emulate that astute philosopher, who upon being condoled with about his brother's *mésalliance*, quietly retorted: "What is there to howl about? Charlie would never have been happy with a lady."

Mr. Cudemore was quite off his balance about Nid Foxborough. He had fair grounds for his infatuation. The girl was very pretty and had been thoroughly educated. There were none of the vulgarisms mentioned above in her, but she had never given him the slightest encouragement, nor had he indeed ever been afforded much opportunity of pushing his suit; but for all that Mr. Cudemore was most resolute in his determination to marry her. He was working hard to get the Syringa mainly into his own hands, and had already, as he knew, assumed a control there, to which he was by no means entitled. What

distressed him at present was not Nid's indifference to his suit—that he was prepared for; but her mother's indifference to the loss of the management of the Syringa.

Mr. Cudemore had already abandoned all hope of carrying his point as a mere wooer, but he did think pressure about the Syringa might do wonders for him. To his dismay Mrs. Foxborough seemed to care little whether she stayed or left. He had trusted much upon this leverage in the game he conceived James Foxborough's death had opened out to him. Another thing which had gone awry with the money-lender was this. He was, of course, aware that Herbert Morant was his successful rival. He had held some bills of Morant's, and Mr. Cudemore's experience of young men told him that the first bill, like the first woodcock, was but the precursor of the flight. He had looked forward at no little distance of time to having the young man most thoroughly under his thumb, but

to his great astonishment Herbert Morant had promptly taken up his bills as soon as they became due, and shown no wish to contract fresh obligations; consequent indeed on his love for Nid and desire to set to work to make a home for her; but Mr. Cudemore did not know all this, or I am afraid that maledictions would have fallen from beneath his well-waxed moustache, thick and thorough.

He could not be said to be having a rosy time of it altogether, this jackal that preyed on the necessities of his brethren. Your professional affairs may run favourably enough, but most men have some aim utterly outside that, and the mark that particularly attracted Mr. Cudemore's attention at this moment seemed considerably beyond his attainment. Still he was of that pertinacious temperament that sometimes achieves the fulfilment of its desires by its dogged perseverance.

One thing, quietly as he had passed it by, had struck Mr. Cudemore during his inter-

view with Mrs. Foxborough—to wit, her statement that the police no longer thought her husband guilty of the Bunbury murder. It was considerably to his interest, he thought, that Foxborough should be held guilty of that crime, and he resolved to call upon Mr. Sturton, and endeavour to ascertain from him what Scotland Yard had thought of the information he had brought them.

The great Bond Street maestro was at home, or, to speak more correctly, at his place of business. As for home, he resided in a charming house, standing in excessively pretty grounds out in West Kensington, where were plenty of servants, saddle and carriage horses, a French cook, a Scotch gardener and conservatories; his sons were at the universities, and though far more Conservative in their professions than their father, with much less real reverence for a lord. As Coleridge had a contemptuous belief in ghosts such as he might hold in cabbages, because he had

seen so many of them, so had these young men discovered that hereditary rank was simply the result of successful spoliation and corruption in the days gone by, and its descendants by no means gifted above the sons of men. Mr. Sturton was at his place of business, and Mr. Cudemore was at once ushered into the sartorial potentate's private sanctum—a simply furnished room at the back of the shop, where Mr. Sturton, seated at his writing-table, was quietly engaged in answering the heavy batch of letters which each morning brought him.

"Ah! Cudemore," he said, in his usual languid manner; "pray sit down; excuse me for two minutes while I just finish this, and then I shall be ready to talk to you."

A few minutes, and then Sturton threw down his pen, and pulling his chair round, said quietly—

"Now, then, what is it?"

He and Mr. Cudemore were not wont to

indulge in ceremonious calling upon each other.

"What did they say to you at Scotland Yard the other day?" inquired the money-lender, without further preamble.

"You needn't feel the least uncomfortable about my going there anyway, for your name has never been mentioned, while mine they promised to keep dark unless absolutely compelled to bring it forward, which they did not in the least anticipate. I saw Sergeant Usher, the detective officer in charge of the case, and he said my information might turn out of great value to them, but would probably never lead to their requiring any evidence from me, and that certainly at present they would infinitely prefer my keeping my mouth closed on the subject."

"I am told the police begin to think that Foxborough did not commit the crime. Is that true? What does Sergeant Usher think about it?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Mr. Sturton; "and from what I saw of Sergeant Usher, I should say he's very unlikely to let any mortal soul know his opinion on the subject till he's got some one on his trial for the murder. I should think he would talk affably and apparently openly with you for a week, and at the end of it you wouldn't have discovered what he thought about anything. I see a good bit of human nature, you know; you can't help measuring men's minds a little while you are measuring their bodies, that is, if you are an artist. There are customers who never know exactly what they want, and whom you may persuade to do anything. Others who equally don't know what they want, but suspect you if you attempt to assist the wobbling ideas that do duty with them for a mind; there's the customer you can't please, do what you will, angular in body as in opinion; there's the man who hates trying on, hates ordering

clothes at all, and pays ready money; there's the man who delights in both the first, but abhors the latter part of the ceremony. Hasn't Carlyle written a book about it? and, good Lord! if he had only had me to prompt him! Ours is one of the great arts, and the day will soon come when it will be acknowledged as such. You've R.A.'s, and I don't see why there shouldn't be R.T.'s; and as the age gets more advanced, and the general fusion of things begins, there's no doubt, there's no doubt whatever"—and here the great democratic tailor stopped abruptly, his tongue having a little overrun his defined opinions upon the coming upheaval; a thing which happens notably to many of our legislators, and accounts for the consequent abrupt termination of some of the bursts of eloquence with which they are wont to electrify their constituents.

Mr. Cudemore was of a narrow-minded but practical turn of mind. He stared with

undisguised astonishment while his friend delivered himself of the above rhapsody, but would, had his thoughts been put into English, have expressed himself somehow in this wise.

All men have their faults, I know. It's the weak point in their organization which, carried to excess, men call madness. Only I know Sturton to be a thorough business, practical man, I should wonder why his friends didn't shut him up, that is to say, if he ever lets out in this way to them. I! hum, if I could, should charge him another ten per cent. for it.

"Then this Sergeant Usher didn't really tell you he considered Foxborough had nothing to do with the crime?" remarked Mr. Cudemore, at length.

"Certainly not—what put that into your head?"

"The papers, I believe," rejoined the money-lender carelessly; "and then I misunderstood you about your interview at Scotland Yard."

"I told you clearly," rejoined Sturton, "that Usher, like a colourless photograph, expressed nothing. Voluble, very, on occasions; that is, it struck me, if I didn't talk; but mute as a mouse when I'd anything to say. I know nothing about the opinion of Scotland Yard whatever."

"Ah! well, I felt a little curious to know what they thought of your confession," rejoined Mr. Cudemore, rising, "and also whether the making of it had brought you peace of mind."

"The sooner you understand I mean invariably to take my own way the better," rejoined Sturton sharply, and with a quickness that the money-lender had never given him credit for. "It is very easy to transfer such business as I have with you to another of the fraternity."

"And suppose I chose to bruit abroad our former relations afterwards," rejoined Cudemore, sullenly.

"I should deliberately and as assuredly ruin you. Fool that you are! Can't you see that small capitalists like you are at the mercy of the bigger men who employ them," retorted Mr. Sturton calmly. "All the leading men in my *profession* are reported to lend money to their customers whether they do or not. You can't do me much harm, but, my dear Cudemore, I shall assuredly break you. I pull strings that your limited mind has no conception of."

"I don't want to quarrel," replied the money-lender. "Unless with an object it's always a mistake, but when you run counter to my views I like to know the why of it. We'll change the subject. How about young Morant? Is he still on your books? he has taken up all his papers?"

"No, that's the man who stands in your way with Miss Foxborough, isn't he? He has squared up and left us, and when they do that of their own accord it usually means

that they have taken to the business of life in some fashion. Flying kites and West-End tailors don't quite accord with such utilitarian views."

The conversation was again verging a little too deep for the money-lender, and it may be doubted whether Mr. Sturton really comprehended what he meant by his last observation. A tendency to inflated language is one of the characteristics of all platform oratory of the present day. Mr. Cudemore thought there was no more to be said, and no more to be learned, so he gravely and impressively wished the Bond Street magnate good-bye. Somewhat staggered, Mr. Cudemore got out of the house, having found this man of so much tougher calibre than he had deemed him, so utterly unmalleable and determinate about having his own way. Still he did recognize Sturton's grim formula that when the brazen pots and the earthen quarrel it is bad for the latter, and felt that to succumb

with grace to his principal's dictum was all that was left to him. He had been slow to perceive this, but was quite awake now to the fact that this languid man had a most peremptory will of his own, and was hardly to be turned from it.

Musing over this, to him by no means pleasing discovery, he arrived at his house in Spring Gardens, and proceeded, without going into his office, to ascend the stairs to his own private apartments. As he turned the angle of the staircase, he caught sight of his junior clerk coming, as it appeared to him, out of his, Cudemore's, bed-room.

"What the deuce are you doing up here?" inquired the money-lender, angrily, as the pair met.

"I came up to see if you were in, sir. There's a gent of the name of Smithson wanting to see you terrible bad."

"Where's his card?" inquired Mr. Cudemore.

"He hadn't got one," rejoined Tim, for such was the soubriquet by which the junior clerk was known in the establishment; doubtful even whether his master knew his legitimate patronymic.

"Show him up then at once," rejoined Cudemore.

"He's left, sir; said he would call again in an hour, when he heard you were out."

"How the devil did he hear I was out, you young cheat-the-gallows, when you have just made the discovery?"

"I told him I thought you were," replied Tim, flippantly, "and he wouldn't wait till I ran up to see——"

"Look here, my young friend, it strikes me you're lying on a pretty extensive scale. You knew I was out to begin with."

"Certainly, sir, but I was not quite sure you had not come in."

"Clients who come to see me generally

leave or produce cards," said the money-lender.

"Well, this one wouldn't," rejoined Tim, doggedly.

"And what business, sir, had you to suppose you would find me in my bed-room?"

"I didn't. I went to look for you in your sitting-room, and not finding you there ran upstairs on the off chance, the door being open I peeped in, you were not there, and I thought it best to shut it behind me."

"I could have taken my oath, almost, you were coming out of the room when I caught sight of you."

"Well, it may be I'd had my neck and perhaps a foot over the threshold. I'm very sorry if I've done wrong, Mr. Cudemore, but this gentleman was so urgent, and I really didn't know whether you were in or out."

"That'll do," replied the money-lender, curtly, "but remember, if ever I find you above the first floor again, you go, and with

no recommendation for further employment from me."

Tim said nothing in return, but disappeared promptly to his legitimate sphere.

"Now what was that cursed young liar prowling about my bed-room for?" mused Mr. Cudemore, as he entered his sitting-room and lit a cigar.

CHAPTER V.

MORANT MEETS MISS HYDE.

When Phil went over to Dyke next day he was most warmly greeted by Mrs. Fossdyke.

"Sincere congratulations," she murmured. "You can't think how happy you have made me; that you two should come together has been the wish of my heart this year past."

"Ah! I suppose Bessie has told you all," said Phil, emphatically.

"All," replied Mrs. Fossdyke, "and I know what a wretch I was to tease her about her past, but it was not altogether my fault, although at my age I've no business to attempt to shift the blame to other people's shoulders."

"Nobody ever doubted who the real culprit was, Mrs. Fossdyke; but where is Bessie?"

"She will be down in a few minutes, but I asked just to have you to myself for a little. I've known you so long, Phil, and you've always been such a favourite of mine that I wanted to make my congratulations in earnest. She will make you a good wife, even though there be a stain in her pedigree."

"I am very glad to hear you say that, Mrs. Fossdyke, for, even assuming her stepfather is the guilty monster which he is alleged to be, and which every fresh discovery seems to make more doubtful, it would be too cruel to visit his crimes on the head of this girl who never even saw him."

"I quite agree with you. I love her very dearly, and though, of course, I can't repress a little shiver as yet when I reflect upon her connection with that—that man," faltered

Mrs. Fossdyke, "still, Philip, I hope you don't think I could be unjust to Bessie."

"You were so not very long back," thought Philip, but he gave no utterance to the reflection and merely bent his handsome head.

"And now," continued Mrs. Fossdyke, "I want to see the other one, this Mr. Morant who is engaged to Bessie's unknown sister."

"Certainly; I was going to ask permission to bring him out here, as I want him to know Bessie; but if I have leave to introduce him to you also, I shall be only too delighted."

"Yes! I want to know him. Is he nice? is he good-looking?"

"Good-looking? Well, we men never can quite tell what your sex will call so, or I'd say decidedly not; but he is a gentleman, and a real good fellow, Mrs. Fossdyke. He's been an idler so far, but he's got a wife to work for now, and, please God! I'll make a man of him here. I'm bound to say that, so far, he faces his work like a bull-dog."

"With that incentive to work and you as his tutor, Phil, I think he'll do," said Mrs. Fossdyke, laughing softly. "But bring him out to see me, and I'll judge of his appearance for myself."

"Certainly!" And as he spoke Miss Hyde entered the room, and greeted her *fiancé* with a bright smile, to which he responded by warmly embracing her.

"Bessie, I've just obtained Mrs. Fossdyke's permission; nay, I may say more, her command, to bring out your future brother-in-law for your personal inspection."

"You know I am as anxious to hear about my sister and make his acquaintance as Mrs. Fossdyke."

"Yes, and I'll ensure your hearing about your sister," returned Philip, laughing; "no intimate friend of Herbert's will miss that at present, I fancy."

"He will find me an interested listener, at all events. When will you bring him?"

"To-morrow, if that will suit you, Mrs. Fossdyke. Lord, what friends you and he will be, Bessie! A woman who will be a sympathetic recipient of a lover's outpourings about the *object* wins his devotion. He will at once pronounce her a very paragon."

"And pray, Philip, who is the confidant of your 'outpourings,'" said Miss Hyde, laughing. "I presume from what you say such a confidant is a necessity?"

"Oh, yes, my dear," rejoined Philip, gaily, "there are times when I feel it a necessity to dilate on your attractions, and then I'll own at first it came hard. Herbert has no idea of fair play. He expects me to listen for hours to prose poems about your sister, but I regret to state he manifests as yet but a cursory interest in hearing about you. Of course I also had to find somebody to rave to; but I hadn't far to seek. I knew an old friend who says, Bessie, if he could only take off twenty years you would have had to decide

whether he or I was the best man, and he'll always listen while I chant your praises."

"Ah! that's dear old Dr. Ingleby," said the girl, as she slipped her arm through her lover's. "I hardly dare think yet, Phil, that we are going to be married, but if ever we are he will have had as much to say to it as the clergyman."

"'Ever we are, child?' What nonsense you are talking. You know, dear Mrs. Fossdyke, that out of respect to your poor husband's memory neither of us would wish it at present, but after a due interval I know we shall have your best wishes and permission."

"My very best wishes and hearty congratulations," replied the widow: "now run away, the pair of you. I know you must have a lot to say to each other, unless things have changed a deal from the days when I was young."

"Certainly," replied Phil; "I have got to teach Bessie woman's duties as a wife."

"Oh, Phil, Phil," said Mrs. Fossdyke, laughing. "I know you both better. Only make her love you, and she'll want no teaching on that point; but till you slip the ring on her finger it's woman's prerogative that her word should be law; and, Bessie, my dear, don't be false to your sex and forego the privilege."

"Come along, Bessie, come for a stroll; and as you are strong, be merciful. I bow meekly to Mrs. Fossdyke's decision, but don't command more chariots than a mere maltster can afford you."

"Don't chaff your wife that is to be, Phil," said Bessie, with a low, rippling laugh. "You know very well till she came to Dyke cabs and omnibuses constituted her ideas of chariots. No, dearest, I can promise two things—to love you truly and develop no lavish ideas on the subject of expenditure."

"A wise woman in her generation is Mrs. Fossdyke," replied Phil, "and if you'll only

do the first I quite agree with her. I need trouble about nothing else."

A slight pressure of his arm acknowledged the speech, and then Bessie said, "Mind, Mr. Morant brings out Nydia's photograph to-morrow. I am so anxious and curious to see it."

"Of course," replied Philip; "but here we are again at the gate. Still, Bessie, saying good-bye to you now is not what it was."

"I trust not," she rejoined, softly. "You will understand how different it seems to me when I say 'Kiss me, Phil,' and, mind, I must see you to-morrow."

There was no mutiny on Philip Soames's part against his lady-love's first behest, and as he swung into Baumborough at a four-mile-an-hour gait, there was perhaps no happier young fellow in the United Kingdom. Dashing into his own sanctum, he found Herbert Morant staring solemnly at the glowing

coals. Lifting his head, that gentleman glanced at him for a moment and then exclaimed—

"No, don't, please; I can't stand it. There's wedding-bells in every line of your face. All very well for you, who see marriage within measurable distance, but for one to whom it seems a mere possibility of the future—Ah!" sighed Herbert in conclusion.

"Don't be a fool, and don't stare into the fire till oppressed with the doldrums," rejoined Soames, sharply. "Your marriage-bells are within very reasonable reach, if you only stick to the collar as you have done since you came here."

"You really think I shall make a brewer?" asked Herbert.

"There's no doubt whatever about it, and marry Nydia, and settle down at Baumborough, and become a vestry man, a town councillor, and half a dozen other things of which you at present comprehend nothing.

In the mean time I'm pledged to-morrow to take you out to Dyke to introduce you to Mrs. Fossdyke and Nydia's half-sister."

"You are awfully kind, Phil, but won't it—won't it be just a little awkward?"

"Not at all; that is all smoothed away. Both ladies are dying to see you. Bessie wants to hear all about her unknown sister, and if you give her about a tenth of the confidence you bestow upon me there won't be much left for her to learn."

"Don't talk bosh, Phil; I've never said much to you about her."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Soames, "am I like this? Are we fonder when we babble of our love—— My dear Herbert, you discourse of little else."

"Come, look here, old fellow," exclaimed Herbert, suddenly rising and lighting a cigar. "I may chip in about Nid when I get the chance, but you are usually haranguing to such an extent about the angelic qualities of

Miss Hyde I never get a fair opportunity to tell you about Nid."

"Well, my boy," rejoined Phil, laughing, "you're not going to get it now. That cigar should about settle your appetite for dinner. I'm off to dress."

"Good heavens! it's not dressing time, is it?" said Morant, turning abruptly to the clock on the mantelpiece. "By Jove, you are right," and as he spoke he hurled his fresh-lit cigar into the fireplace. "Off we go, old man, white tie and soap and water time."

That he unduly discoursed about Miss Foxborough was a fact that Mr. Morant could not possibly be convinced of. To use a horribly common-place simile, he was in the position of a man who snores; unconscious of misdemeanour, he is not to be persuaded that he has ever been guilty of it. But he looked forward immensely to being introduced to Bessie; although unaware that he gave rein to it, he did know that to talk about Nid to any one

afforded him considerable pleasure, and, of course, from Phil's account was quite certain that Bessie was prepared to give ear to all he might say about her newly-found sister.

Herbert Morant was duly paraded at Dyke next day, and cordially received by both ladies.

"No, Philip," said Mrs. Fossdyke, in an undertone, as Bessie carried the new-comer off into the window to talk to; "there can be no mistake about it, your friend is not a good-looking man. No woman will ever think so."

"I never thought so myself," rejoined Soames; "but what has that to say to it? He is a real good fellow, and I don't think personal attractions, after all, have so very much weight in love affairs. There are so many of us, both sides, would never get married if we entirely depended on that. I know in old days how I have fought for a dance with the belle of the ball, won it at last, and never pleaded for another. I suppose

women are something like us: prone to be smitten in the first place by an attractive exterior; but an angel who can only valse and simper speedily disenchants most men who have anything in them, and a plainer young lady, who can not only dance, but talk a bit, gives her handsome rivals the go by in the long run."

"You've won a wife, Philip, who can do both," replied Mrs. Fossdyke, quietly.

"I know it," he said, smiling; "but I am exceptionally gifted amongst the sons of men."

"I most sincerely trust and believe you are. Nothing can bring my poor, dear husband back to me, and for Bessie's sake and yours, I wish the whole of this investigation could be swamped. I feel no desire for vengeance, and I should like the whole tragedy to be forgotten by the public."

"Spoken like your own true-hearted self," rejoined Soames; and then he thought how marvellously her great grief had transformed

Mrs. Fossdyke. The rather petulant, talkative woman he had originally known was transformed into a patient, considerate lady, taking a kindly interest in all those surrounding her.

"I am afraid, dear Mrs. Fossdyke, the authorities, in the interests of justice, will not quite allow that. That the police are quite at fault this minute I firmly believe. You know, and always shall, as much as I can learn. What they may think exactly I can't say, but so far I fancy they really are utterly nonplussed."

"And it would be best they were left so, for many reasons," replied Mrs. Fossdyke, "but this is beyond either your control or mine; but, Philip, should there be anything to know you will let me hear it, will you not?"

"I promise faithfully. Do you think I might venture to interrupt that couple in the window!"

"Certainly," rejoined the widow, smiling. "You've allowed him to do a very fair

amount of raving about Miss Foxborough; you are quite entitled to do a bit of raving on your own account now."

Phil Soames moved across to the window, and said,—

"Well, Bessie, do you begin to know your sister?"

"Yes, and have in some sense seen her. No thanks to you though, sir, for it seems you quite forgot my instructions."

"Oh dear yes, about bringing her photograph. I plead guilty, and implore pardon; but I see Herbert happily brought it."

"Yes," replied Morant, "I thought Miss Hyde——"

"Bessie," interrupted the girl, laughing. "How much oftener am I to tell you that. I'm not going to be called Miss Hyde by my brother-in-law. We are fast becoming great friends, Phil. I know he's not good enough for Nid, though I've never seen her; and he owns it."

"Of course I'm not; but then, Miss Bessie, I know nobody ever will be, so it is not worth her while to wait till he comes by, but she'll never find any one to love her more dearly."

"You love her better than Philip loves me," interposed Miss Hyde, not a little amused.

"Oh! that's a puzzler," rejoined Herbert; "there are weighing machines, — things to calculate how hard you can blow, &c., but science as yet hasn't got as far as weighing your affections. If it had, Bessie, you would see that though Phil would bring the scale down, I should break the machine."

"What a lucky girl my sister is, to be loved like that. Immeasurable adoration," continued Miss Hyde demurely; "we can demand no more."

"Now she's chaffing," exclaimed Morant rising. "Come, Phil, we had better go."

"I shall keep this photograph, Herbert, as a pledge of your speedy return, though such a

high-pressure adorer as yourself I've no doubt has at least a dozen."

"Yes, I can leave you that. I do happen to have another—and now good-bye."

Bessie shook her head at him laughingly, as she replied,

"You'll never see this again. Another! I suppose he's an album full, Philip. Isn't it so?"

"I think he's another or two," rejoined Soames, smiling. "Good-bye, dearest. I'm awful glad you two have made acquaintance."

"Good-bye, Herbert," said Bessie. "Like the dutiful helpmate I've promised to be, I reiterate my lord and master's observation."

"What do you think of her?" observed Philip curtly, as the young men strode home to Baumborough

"Bar Nid! she's just the nicest girl I ever met," rejoined Morant.

"Ah! I wanted you two to like each other," rejoined Soames, "and I'm pleased

you do. Now, old man, I'll tell you what we'll do. After dinner we'll go over and smoke a cigar with the Doctor. He won't say much to you, but he takes as much interest in our love affairs as we do."

"Nonsense! What an old trump! Smoke with him, of course we will, Phil. A delightful termination to a delightful day."

CHAPTER VI.

THE RIDDLE ABOUT SOLVED.

Sergeant Usher was getting quite angry with himself on account of his inability to put his puzzle together. He had so great an insight to the great Bunbury mystery that it made him quite irritable he could not quite explain it. A good deal that the public could not comprehend was quite plain to him; but who was the confederate? where was the writer of that note? It was not Foxborough's writing, nor was it even an attempt to simulate his hand; he had ascertained that from people whose testimony on the point was thoroughly reliable, yet it must be in handwriting perfectly familiar to the dead man or he would

never have so promptly attended to its behests. It had become quite clear to Mr. Usher that, much as he desired to keep that note in the background, it was no longer possible ; as long as that note reposed in the security of Mr. Usher's pocket-book it was quite evident there could be no opportunity for any one to recognize the writer. The Sergeant was an enthusiast in his profession, and had a whimsical fancy for producing an important bit of testimony at the last moment—hence his desire to keep his treasure-trove of the Hopbine a secret. But it was clear to him now the enigma could not be solved otherwise than by the recognition of that handwriting. Nowhere, he thought, was that more likely to be achieved than by some of John Fossdyke's old friends at Baumborough, notably by Dr. Ingleby, and hither Mr. Usher determined to betake himself without loss of time ; quite possible even Mr. Totterdell might be the man he wanted.

"And though," mused the Sergeant, "he's

a blethering old creature to get information out of, still I mustn't throw away a chance simply because a witness is a weariful, wandering old nuisance."

As he whirled down by the afternoon train Mr. Usher pondered a good deal upon where he should commence this fresh inquisition. He knew the Baumborough world by heart by this time. The local gossip had revealed to him a good deal of the ins and outs, the likes and dislikes, of social life at Baumborough, and he finally thought that perhaps he had better begin with Mr. Totterdell.

"Mrs. Fossdyke would be likely to tell her garrulous godfather as much as she knew of her husband's affairs before the quarrel," mused Mr. Usher, "and, hang it, a woman always knows a deal more than her husband gives her credit for. It's quite likely he might tumble to this handwriting at once. I'll begin with him, and try Dr. Ingleby afterwards if it don't come off."

That Mr. Totterdell would be at home to Sergeant Usher there was very little doubt. The old gentleman was fidgety, and fuming over the non-elucidation of the great Bunbury mystery not a little. What were the police about, he wanted to know? When was he to have an opportunity of coming forward? For he still laboured under the delusion that as soon as his evidence had been taken properly and at length, there would be no difficulty whatever about the apprehension of the murderer.

"Well, Sergeant," he exclaimed testily, as that officer entered the room, "what is it now? It is singular you don't seem to be able to move a step in this matter without my assistance, and yet I can't get you to listen to what I have to say."

"That's just it, Mr. Totterdell; that's exactly what I keep telling 'em in the Yard," replied Mr. Usher. "I can't make head or tail of it myself, says I; there's none of you

here can do any better. If there's one man in England who can throw a light upon the truth it's Mr. Totterdell. Just you let me go and have another palaver with him. If this thing's to be worked out, it's he and I have got to do it. Do as you please, says they, and here I am. With your permission, sir, I'll take a chair to begin with. Nobody knows better than you do that one can't exchange views upon a matter of such paramount importance in a hurry."

"Certainly not, Mr. Usher; certainly not," replied the old gentleman, with the utmost complacency. "Sit down, by all means; and now what have you got to tell me?"

"Well, sir," replied the Sergeant, smoothing his hat with his handkerchief, "the boot happens to be on the other leg. I was rather in hopes you had something to tell me. A gentleman like you on the spot, and gifted with your keen perception in these matters, I thought might have picked up something."

"And so I have," chuckled Mr. Totterdell. "It's a queer thing—a very queer thing; and I got at it by accident. It don't seem much to bear on the case, so we'll talk over what you've been doing first."

Now what on earth, thought Mr. Usher, has this blessed old image discovered? Whether it's any use or not, he of course knows no more than the man in the moon, and the attempt to get it out of him directly I know will be a tedious, if not a hopeless, business. I had better come the confidential dodge, and give him a glimpse of this letter at once, and then, likely enough, he'll boil over.

"Mr. Totterdell, I depend on you not to disclose to a soul what I'm going to confide to you," replied Mr. Usher, in a mysterious whisper; "but the fact is, I've got hold of a scrap of writing of this James Foxborough, the man you saw at the theatre, and I want to know if you can recognize it as one of the

late Mr. Fossdyke's habitual correspondents. You doubtless knew most of their handwriting by sight—so intimate as you naturally were with the family?"

"Of course," replied Mr. Totterdell mendaciously, for he had no knowledge whatever of Fossdyke's business relations; but he would have committed himself to a very much bigger lie at any time sooner than miss an opportunity of gratifying his insatiable thirst for gossip.

"Well," said the Sergeant, producing the note, still so carefully folded that there was little more than the signature to be seen, "do you know that handwriting? for that is the writing of the man who took John Fossdyke's life."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Mr. Totterdell, as he put on his spectacles. "You're sure of this, Mr. Usher?"

"As sure as if I had seen him commit the murder. Do you know the hand?"

Mr. Totterdell stared at it for some minutes, and then said: "No, I never saw it before."

"Ah well, whenever I can catch hold of anybody who can recognize that writing, I'll clear up the Bunbury murder in less than no time; and now, Mr. Totterdell, what have you to tell me?"

"Well, it mayn't be much," said the old gentleman; "but it's odd, odd, you see, Sergeant—deuced odd. I'm sure you'll agree with me when you hear it, eh?"

"I've got to hear it first," retorted Mr. Usher shortly.

"Of course, quite so, and I'm telling you as fast as I can; you're like that old fool on the inquest who was always interrupting my evidence," said Mr. Totterdell, angrily.

Mr. Usher, exercising wise discretion, made no reply.

"Well, I have made a curious discovery. You must know when the Baumborough Theatre was first mooted there was, of

course, a great question how the six thousand or so estimated for its erection were to be raised. Poor Fossdyke proposed an extra rate, and to get at the money gradually in that wise; but I, who had just come on the Municipal Council, having ascertained that we had something like that sum out at mortgage, suggested its being called in and used for the purpose instead of levying the fresh rate."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Usher, involuntarily.

"Eh! what? something strikes you?" said Mr. Totterdell, peering over his spectacles into the detective's face.

"Quite right," responded Mr. Usher. "You always are, sir. I was thinking what a thing it was for Baumborough when they got you on the Town Council."

"They might have done worse, Usher," replied Mr. Totterdell, blandly, and utterly blind to the Sergeant's flagrant adulation. "Well, it's a rum thing, but though the

money was all right enough, though John Fossdyke accounted for it all to a copper, yet there never was such a mortgage effected."

"Ah!" once more exclaimed Mr. Usher, softly, "and what interpretation, Mr. Totterdell, do you put upon that?"

"None, Mr. Usher, none, that is a thing for a judge and jury to determine, like many other facts I can testify to when I get an opportunity."

"Well, Mr. Totterdell, I'll not take up your valuable time any more. You've the keystone of the case, whenever we can really get it complete; but it's growing up, sir, it's growing up. I see my way a little bit further every day."

"Capital," responded the old gentleman; "and just between ourselves—quite between ourselves, you know—where do you suppose the scoundrel Foxborough is? Have you any clue?"

"Well, yes, I have," said Mr. Usher, rising; "but to a gentleman of your astuteness and experience I needn't say mum's the word. You understand, mum's the word," and so saying the Sergeant bade Mr. Totterdell good night.

"Quite right, Mr. Usher, you can trust me to keep things quiet. There's nobody knows how to keep a quiet tongue better than me. Mum's the word! ha, ha! Good night!"

"Yes, you are right for once, it is," quoth the Sergeant. "You'll tell nobody this time, because you've nothing to tell; but the puzzle's piecing out beautifully. If anybody can identify this handwriting I'll tell 'em the whole story pretty near of the Bunbury mystery. Half-past nine. Yes, not a bit too late to call upon Dr. Ingleby. I don't suppose he will know this handwriting, but it's worth trying. At all events this run to Baumborough has been good business. I've got an important

little bit of evidence out of the Totterdell creature which just clinches the thing."

Thus ruminating Mr. Usher arrived at the Doctor's door, and, after his wont, followed very close on the heels of the servant who announced him.

He found the Doctor tranquilly enjoying a cigar, and listening to the gay castle-building of Herbert Morant and Phil Soames. The former especially had one of those constitutionally sanguine temperaments that run up palaces on the slightest possible foundations. Their palaces, it is true, come down about their ears like the card houses of childhood, but no whit dismayed, they re-erect them with exactly the same happy carelessness that characterized their nursery days. Dr. Ingleby enjoyed all this immensely, to the quiet, sober, matrimonial dreams of Phil Soames, or the resplendent visions of Herbert Morant, he listened with the keenest interest. He liked both the young men, and it was good to listen to their

healthy love stories, to contrast cool, steady Phil's strong, steadfast devotion with excitable Herbert's passionate adoration. They loved, these two, quite as earnestly as they were capable of; but neither men nor women experience the passion in quite the same fashion.

"Well, Sergeant," exclaimed Dr. Ingleby. "Sit down first, say what it is to be next, wine or alcohol, and then tell me what you want. You I know are much too busy a man to pay calls of ceremony. It's not your health, is it?"

"No, Doctor," rejoined the Sergeant, laughingly. "It's not my health, and I'll call it port if you'll allow me. It's just a little matter of business. I've got this Bunbury business mapped out to a T but for one trifling bit of evidence, and I thought I'd just consult you and Mr. Soames about that. Here's my respects," said the Sergeant, as he topped off the bumper of port the Doctor had

poured out for him, "and very good tipple it is."

"Well, I'm very glad you are getting at the bottom of the mystery," rejoined Dr. Ingleby, "but it's a question whether these two gentlemen or Mrs. Fossdyke will appreciate it. I fancy they would all rather it died out and was forgotten."

"Now, listen to me, gentlemen. It can't be allowed to die out and be forgotten, it would be an everlasting reproach to 'the Yard' if it was. I don't quite know that you'll any of you like the story when we come to it, and come to it we shall, but if it's relief to your mind to know James Foxborough didn't kill Mr. Fossdyke, either by accident or design, you may take my word, he had nothing to say to it."

The trio started at the speaker in blank amazement.

"No, gentlemen," continued the Sergeant, "I don't turn my cat out of the bag until I'm

quite certain I can catch her again. What have I come here for? As the Doctor says, if it ain't my constitution gone wrong, what is it? Well, it is this, both you and Mr. Soames, Doctor, must have known something about Mr. Fossdyke's friends and correspondents."

"His friends, yes," rejoined the Doctor, "his correspondents, no. He was an extremely reticent man about his business transactions, and intimate as I was with him I knew nothing of them."

"And you, Mr. Soames?" asked the detective.

"Still less, if that be possible. He was scarce likely to confide in a young man like me what he concealed from an old friend like Dr. Ingleby."

"Unlucky, but I'm afraid then, gentlemen, you can't help me; however, as I have come to see Dr. Ingleby for a specific purpose, I'm going to play the cards out."

Mr. Usher dived into his breast-pocket for a moment, and then from the depths of a formidable pocket-book produced the famous letter, folded still so that little but the signature was decipherable. "Do you know that handwriting, sir?" he asked, as he handed it to Dr. Ingleby.

"Not in the least," replied the Doctor, after a cool and steady investigation.

"And you, Mr. Soames?" inquired the Sergeant, as he pushed the piece of paper across.

Phil stared at it for some minutes, and then replied as he returned it, "No; to the best of my belief I never saw that handwriting before."

"It's hard, very hard," remarked the Sergeant; "to know who wrote those few lines is to put the prettiest and most interesting case complete before the public I ever took charge of; and yet, dash me, I'm beat on that point, though there must be hundreds of

people who could testify to it. D——d if I don't have it photographed and inserted as an advertisement in all the dailies."

"May I look at it, Mr. Usher?" inquired Morant.

"Oh, Lord, yes. I meant to keep it dark, but anybody's welcome to see it now."

Herbert scanned as much as he was allowed to see of the note for a few minutes, and then as he threw it back across the table to the detective, said quietly, "I am pretty certain I know who wrote that. It was——"

"Hush, sir! for God's sake, hush!" cried Sergeant Usher, springing to his feet. "I'm going to ask you for forty-eight hours to let nobody but myself know the name. If he's in England I shall be able to lay my hand upon him by that, but leakage, gentlemen, is fatal in these inquiries. If you don't know you can't let anything out. Isn't it so? You'll forgive me, Dr. Ingleby, and you, too, Mr. Soames, when I once more say—See me to the

door, please, Mr. Morant; tell me the name, and tell nobody else for two days."

"I think you may do what the Sergeant asks you," said Dr. Ingleby; "Phil's curiosity and mine can last out forty-eight hours. Good night, Mr. Usher; I know you want to be off now. See him to the door, Morant, and breathe your secret on the threshold."

"That's it, sir — that's it; good night, gentlemen. Come, Mr. Morant."

With which words, Herbert and the detective disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. CUDEMORE'S LOVE-MAKING.

Dogged, persistent, and defiant as Mr. Cudemore is in his resolve to marry Nid Foxborough, still he is not altogether quite satisfied with the way his cards are playing. To begin upon, he had reckoned when Foxborough's disappearance threw the Syringa, so to speak, in the hollow of his hand, that Mrs. Foxborough would be at his feet; that her anxiety to retain the lesseeship of the music-hall would render her perfectly subservient to his wishes, and that Nid's hand was to be the price of his assistance he had made up his mind. But Mrs. Foxborough seemed very indifferent as to whether she kept the Syringa

or not, whilst as for Nid, she was difficult to catch sight of; still when the pressure really came, when it was actually brought home to her that unless she begged help from him, Cudemore, her anxiety to retain the management of the music-hall might be unavailing, he fancied Mrs. Foxborough would be only too glad to come to terms. Another thing, too, that somewhat disturbed Mr. Cudemore's equanimity was the discovery of Timothy on the second floor. What the deuce was the boy doing up there? He might say he was only closing the dressing-room door, but the money-lender was quite convinced in his own mind that he really came out of the room. The boy had never come up to that floor before to seek him, what made him do it this time? His people always knew pretty well whether he was in or out; and it was in the sitting-room on the first floor that they looked for him, if in doubt. He could never recall to mind either of his clerks, senior or junior,

seeking him on the floor above. There was no one less likely to stand his affairs being pried into than Mr. Cudemore, and that gentleman speedily made up his mind that Timothy's services might be advantageously dispensed with. He accordingly sent for that acute young gentleman into his private business-room and blandly remarked—

"You are a very intelligent and excellent boy, Timothy, but you might remember I expect my people to keep close to their own business and not trouble themselves about anything further. I engaged you, remember, as second clerk at the liberal salary of fifteen shillings a week, and your duties were confined to the reception of visitors in the outer office, and ascertaining if I was upstairs whether I wished to see them or not."

"Well, sir, how was I to know whether you was in or not if I didn't come to see."

"Just so, Timothy, but you weren't required to look under the bed or into the bath for me,

or to overhaul my boots or brush my clothes, Timothy. It was considerate in the extreme taking upon yourself the duties of a valet as well as a clerk, but you see I prefer my people to confine themselves to what I am paying them for, and therefore, my young friend, here are your week's wages, and henceforth I will dispense with your valuable services."

"I suppose I needn't come no more, then, after to-night," rejoined the boy doggedly.

"Just so, that's it. I shall have no objection to give you a recommendation, and vouch that you are willing and intelligent; a little too willing, in fact, anxious apparently to do everything. Next time, my boy, whatever it may be, take my advice and stick closely to your own business."

Timothy said never a word, but picked up his money, and with a quiet bow to his employer returned to the outer office, over which he still held sway.

Now, this again somewhat puzzled Mr.

Cudemore. He expected the boy to plead vigorously against dismissal, to volunteer further explanation of his conduct, and Timothy had done nothing of the kind, but acquiesced with dogged resignation in his sentence. It was not very likely that anything he could say would have made the slightest difference to Mr. Cudemore, but then that gentleman did expect him to say it, and to one of his suspicious turn of mind this afforded grave food for reflection. Mr. Cudemore engaged in a good many transactions that, though not illegal exactly, were of the kind denominated shady. He was not wont to trust his clerks very much about anything, more especially was he unlikely to place confidence in a boy like Timothy ; he certainly could call to mind nothing of the slightest consequence of which the boy had knowledge, and yet he felt uneasy at Timothy's easy acquiescence in his dismissal. Another curious circumstance, too, was that the mysterious

gentleman who declined to leave his name, had never called again.

Musing somewhat irritably over all these things, Mr. Cudemore seized his hat and determined to call at Tapton Cottage.

He was so peremptory in his demand to see Mrs. Foxborough on a matter of business, that the girl who opened the door succumbed at once and ushered him into the drawing-room, before Nid, who was coiled up in a big arm-chair in front of the fire immersed in a novel, had any notice to escape.

"Miss Foxborough," exclaimed Cudemore, "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure," as he advanced to take a hand which was not extended to him.

Nid had sprung to her feet and greeted him with the most formal reverence; and how stately the little lady could be when she stood upon her dignity, must have been seen to be believed. Cudemore was a bold reckless *roué*, and wild about this girl, and

both Nid and her mother knew it, as only women do know these things. A chit not out of the school-room knows intuitively when a man is at her feet. But to do Nid justice no young lady was ever less proud of a conquest than she, whilst we already know Mrs. Foxborough's opinion on the subject.

"Let mamma know at once, Ellen, that Mr. Cudemore is here," said Nid imperiously.

"Yes, Miss," rejoined the parlour-maid, and she knew at once from her young mistress's authoritative tones that she had done wrong to admit the visitor.

"Pray tell Mrs. Foxborough that it is nothing pressing, and that my time is hers," exclaimed Cudemore, boldly, as Ellen turned to leave the room.

Very angry was Nid at the man's manner, but still he had got into the house and must be treated with some sort of courtesy. So she motioned him to a chair.

"If you knew, Miss Foxborough, how I have longed for this opportunity."

"Mamma, I'm sure, won't keep you waiting long," replied Nid, with wilful misapprehension, albeit a little defiantly.

"It is you I want to speak to more than your mother," he replied. "Young women are not blind, and there is no need for me to tell you how passionately I love you."

"You couldn't expect me to listen to such language at this time under any circumstances," rejoined Nid nervously. "You seem to forget, sir, the affliction that overshadows us, the gloom that hangs over the house."

"I speak, Nydia, because first there is further misfortune threatening you. Your mother will lose the Syringa unless she listens to my counsel."

"Meaning," cried Nid springing to her feet, with her cheeks aflame and her eyes ablaze, "that my miserable self is the price you propose for such assistance."

"You're not in the least miserable; on the contrary, you're devilish pretty," he replied, insolently, "and never looked handsomer than you do this minute."

"I'll not stay here to be insulted," exclaimed Nid. "Were my father alive you would never have dared make that speech to me; as it is you may chance to rue it bitterly."

"I've not heard of your father's death," replied Cudemore, coarsely, as he placed himself between her and the door. "But if you are threatening me with the vengeance of the red-haired admirer, I tell you I am not much alarmed."

"He's a man, sir," cried Nid furiously, "which you are not! He's a gentleman, sir, which you are not; and were he in the room you would be on your back on the floor this minute!"

"Bah!" replied Cudemore contemptuously. "Listen to me, Nydia. Herbert Morant is a broken man. He has no money; he never

will have; there are some men who have no faculty for making it: he is one. Marry me, and you shall have carriages, diamonds, and all that woman's soul rejoices in."

"Some women, perhaps," rejoined Nid, with a contempt bitter as his own. "Go into the market, Mr. Cudemore, and buy for your seraglio if you will, but never insult me again with what you are pleased to term your love. You don't even know the meaning of the word."

"I understand it in my own manner," laughed the money-lender, "and a more tempting little morsel was never put before an epicure than you. Don't be ridiculous, child. Do you think your sentimental idealism of that passion will long survive darning socks and cooking mutton-chops for that red-headed calf in a second floor at Pimlico. I offer you again a good house, a French cook, and your milliner's bills shall be paid and not looked at. What is it you see in him to out-balance all this?"

Nid drew herself up to the full extent of her small stature, and then said, "He is simply a gentleman, sir, which you neither are nor ever will be. He loves a woman and doesn't propose to buy her. I've never been so insulted in my life. Let me pass."

"Not without a kiss, my beauty," cried the money-lender, his brutal nature stung to madness by her last speech; and as he spoke he caught the girl in his arms and impressed three or four passionate kisses on her cheeks.

"You brute, you beast," cried Nid, more vehement than lady-like in her language. "Help, mother! where are you?" As she spoke the door opened, and Mrs. Foxborough entered.

"How dare you, Mr. Cudemore?" she cried, all aflame at the sight of Nid struggling in his embrace. "You coward, to dare lay a hand on my child."

"I apologize," replied the money-lender, as he released the girl; "my passion, I own,

overcame conventionalities. I apologize to you; I apologize to Miss Foxborough, though her attractions are enough to turn any man's head. Still, remember in extenuation, I have offered her marriage, and a superb establishment."

"Which have been indignantly rejected," cried Nid impetuously through her tears. "I would sooner earn my living by sweeping floors, than be his wife."

"Listen, little lady. I've tried to win you by fair promises, such as men most dazzle women's eyes with. Now hear the other side of the question. Marry me, or out your mother goes of the Syringa the day the foreclosure of the mortgage can be enforced."

"And out she will go," rejoined Mrs. Foxborough fiercely, "and reck little about it. In the mean time I'll trouble you to leave this house, and never set foot in it, nor lay hand on its knocker again."

"Good," returned the money-lender, in a

low voice that trembled with passion. "You are right, Mrs. Foxborough, to turn from your door the one man who might perchance clear your husband's character. You hold it in great esteem now; when you are a little more enlightened, perhaps you may change your opinion."

"My poor husband, I have no doubt, I shall never see more," replied Mrs. Foxborough proudly; "and you can hardly expect his wife and daughter to listen calmly to insults to his memory. You have already, by your brutal insolence, frightened this child to death," continued Mrs. Foxborough, clasping the excited and beautiful girl closer in her embrace. "Leave the house this instant, or I shall call in the assistance of the police; and, mark me, I neither desire nor will continue to manage the Syringa while it involves meeting you in any way."

"I will spare your invoking the assistance of the police," replied Cudemore, brutally;

"they have had rather more than their fair share of surveillance of this house lately. You will regret your rude rejection of my offer before many weeks are over, believe me."

Mrs. Foxborough's sole reply was a contemptuous motion to the door, and with an ironical bow, Mr. Cudemore took his departure.

"I couldn't have believed a man of education could be such an utter brute," sobbed Nid, who, plucky as she had been through the tempest, had now broken down completely. Again she passed her handkerchief across her face, and at last murmured, "Pah! Mother darling, I must go and wash it; the stain of his filthy kisses is on my cheek still, and every one an insult, though, thank God, not treachery to Herbert."

"Go and lie down a bit, pet. You are a little upset, and no wonder, at such a trying scene. One word more, darling. I wouldn't say anything about it when I wrote to Herbert if I were you. It would only lead to

unpleasantness for him, which I'm sure you don't want, and I'm quite able to take care you shall never be so insulted again. Trust your mother, sweet, and call in Herbert when she fails you."

"As if I didn't always, and as if she ever did fail me," cried Nid impetuously; and having given Mrs. Foxborough a hug, the girl ran off to her own room.

"Confound it," muttered Mr. Cudemore. "I've made a pretty mess of things. I always do lose my head about a woman; that child looked so pretty to-day, and riled me so awfully, I couldn't resist taking the sauciness out of her. Besides, who could guess the little fool would make such a fuss about a kiss? They don't usually, so far as my experience goes."

Mr. Cudemore's experience had been gathered in a somewhat meretricious school, where the prompt, audacious, and especially the wealthy lover, was highly appreciated.

CHAPTER VIII.

"BREAST-HIGH SCENT."

Men of Sergeant Usher's profession, like all men engaged in the hard practical business of life, are as speedy in resolve as quick in execution. The detective conned the information he had just acquired on his way to his hotel, where he immediately paid his bill, then threw himself and his bag into the omnibus which, as he knew without looking at the time table, caught the last train to town. There are many problems solved on the railway in these days; it is bound to be so. Look at the many hours business and professional men pass on it, and that they should think out intricate

problems in the easy embrace of a first-class carriage is but natural.

"It's a beautiful case," mused Mr. Usher. "I don't know that I ever had the solving of a prettier puzzle. How beautiful it begins to piece out. I could almost tell the public the whole story now, but I've a few minor links to collect before the chain of evidence is complete. I don't think the public will regard the police as duffers much longer when they've heard my exposition of the Bunbury mystery."

"Now, let me see," continued Mr. Usher, "the first person I've got to see is Miss Lightcomb, and the first thing I want is a copy of the 'Era' to ascertain where she may be; that I'll buy at Charing Cross; just a few words at the Yard to tell them what to do, and to-morrow morning I'm off to have a quarter of an hour's talk with Miss L." On arrival at the terminus Mr. Usher, having possessed himself of the

principal theatrical journal, took a cab and drove home to his lodgings in Spring Gardens. A few minutes' study of the 'Era' showed him Miss Lightcomb was at present enacting leading lady at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth.

"It's a nuisance," muttered the Sergeant, "but I am used to it; important witnesses always do get into remote corners when specially wanted; here's this girl plays at Margate, when I can make no particular use of her, and now I want to see her special, of course, she's got to the other end of the kingdom. Well, there's nothing for it but just to give 'em instructions, over the way (and here Mr. Usher jerked his head in the direction of Scotland Yard), and be off to Plymouth by the first train in the morning."

Arrived there, the Sergeant naturally proceeded to the theatre and inquired for Miss Lightcomb. On explaining who he was he was furnished with her address, and at once departed in quest of the lady. But here he

was once more disappointed, the actress had gone to a picnic party, and would only return in time to fulfil her duties at the theatre. Musing sadly over the absurdity of a witness in a great murder case condescending to the frivolity of picnics, and reflecting that after all Miss Lightcomb had very little conception that she could give any evidence whatever concerning the Bunbury mystery, Mr. Usher remembered that it was time to sustain nature, and went off in search of something to eat. Like an Indian on the war trail, the Sergeant could do without either food or sleep if exigencies required it, but as an old campaigner he understood the husbanding of his resources, and neglected taking in neither when a lull in affairs permitted. He meant returning to town by the night mail if he could, but he had come down to have ten minutes' talk with Miss Lightcomb, and, of course, was not going back till he had achieved that. But the actress only

arrived at the theatre just in time to dress for her *rôle*, which, as it happened, was a heavy one, and sent word upon receiving Mr. Usher's card that it was impossible she could see him till after the performance, so the Sergeant was fain to sit and pass critical judgment on Miss Lightcomb's histrionic powers in the "Bride of the Caucasus." But the curtain fell at last, and then Mr. Usher made his way rapidly behind the scenes.

"I cannot say I am glad to see you," said the actress, as the Sergeant entered her dressing-room. "You frighten me, and I really know nothing of this Bunbury mystery."

"Now, don't you be alarmed, Miss Lightcomb. Nobody for one moment supposes you do, or that there is any little bit of information you would not willingly put at our disposal if you only fancied it bore the least upon the case."

"I have told you I cannot recollect all who spoke to me that night, there were so

many gentlemen complimented me on my acting," rejoined Miss Lightcomb wearily.

The girl was tired out with her day's pleasure, and her night's acting, and was anxious to get her supper and go to bed, and had no fancy for being cross-examined by Mr. Usher.

"Don't you get fidgety, Miss Lightcomb," replied the Sergeant, taking in the state of things at a glance. "I shan't detain you three minutes. Do you know the original of this photograph?" and as he spoke he produced the *carte* of John Fossdyke.

"No," rejoined the actress after glancing at it.

"I didn't suppose you would," rejoined Mr. Usher. "Now, do you know Mr. Cudemore?"

"Certainly, of course. Why?"

"Didn't you speak to him behind the scenes on the opening night of the Baumborough Theatre?"

"Yes, now you mention it, I recollect I

did," replied Miss Lightcomb, after a minute or two's reflection. "I remember being so surprised at seeing him there."

"I need not detain you another moment, Miss Lightcomb, that is the one fact I wanted from you. If I don't tell you what it means the daily papers will in three days' time. If you could only have recollected that when I called upon you at Margate."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, Mr. Usher, but really his name never occurred to me."

"I know it. Of course it is difficult seeing so many new faces, as you must do, to recollect who you may speak to on any particular night, and unluckily I wasn't in a position then to assist your memory."

"But surely I shan't be called upon to appear in court?" asked the actress, somewhat dolorously.

"I am afraid," replied the Sergeant, "you will, but you won't be detained five minutes in the box, and you must comfort yourself that

disagreeable as it is for a lady it will bring your name prominently before the public, and prove a valuable professional advertisement. If you have only a friend or two on the press it may do you a deal of good in the long run; and now I'll wish you good night, with many apologies for giving you so much trouble."

Very polite and considerate was Sergeant Usher, and Miss Lightcomb's horror at the idea of being compelled to appear in the witness box, was considerably mollified at the idea of what a great gratuitous advertisement the being mixed up in such a *cause célèbre* would be for her. Moreover, she had so little to do with the whole thing, and was so utterly innocent in the matter that she felt pretty safe from awkward questions. Mr. Cudemore had never been more to her than an ordinary acquaintance.

The ubiquitous Usher was off to town by the morning train, and drove, as usual, first visit

to head-quarters, there to learn that, according to his instructions, Mr. Cudemore had never been lost sight of, and could be laid hands upon at any moment; that he had apparently no intention of absconding, but that he was watched day and night, and would be arrested at once should he show a sign of doing so.

"No, let him alone another day or two. It's a lovely case, and upon my soul, when I've got it complete, I must put the bracelets on him myself," replied the Sergeant, "but never let him out of sight, mind."

"It's risky, Usher," said one of his colleagues. "A cunning fox like this, with command of money, may slip you any moment, watch him close as you like. You know best what reason you have now for leaving him at large, but mind, once lost sight of, he may take a deal of catching."

"Right you are, Dickinson," replied Mr. Usher, rubbing his hands softly; "but an artist like yourself would do as I do. It's

one of the most perfect riddles ever I solved, and I have only two more inquiries to make. One in London, and another in Baumborough. Superfluous, it might be urged, and quite to be gone into after you had jugged your bird, but I do like to get my case quite complete before I pounce."

"I know it, old man," replied Dickinson, laughing, "only don't wait to pounce till there's nothing to pounce upon. Remember a hawk may hover too long."

"Never fear, never fear," rejoined the Sergeant, "this one won't slip us, I'll go bail," and with this observation Mr. Usher betook himself to the Wellington Restaurant, Spring Gardens, to dine.

The Sergeant greatly affected this place. It was a quiet, modest little dining-room, close to his own lodgings, frequented by sedate, steady-going people who lived in the immediate vicinity. Bank clerks, lawyers' clerks, &c., but nobody who affected swelldom

ever appeared across its threshold any more than did the gentish or raffish element of London life. It was too slow for these latter, a terra incognita to the former. That a detective officer should be a mere shade, or impersonality, or abstract fact is no doubt true, but still they must be known to some few people, and at the Wellington the famous Sergeant Usher was both known and respected.

"Something to eat, quick, William," he observed to the waiter, as he made his way to a rather favourite corner table.

"Pea soup, sir, a nice slice of cod, and a beef steak would perhaps about meet the case, Mr. Usher," returned William, who was quite a privileged functionary with the *habitués*.

"That's about it," rejoined the Sergeant, "with a pint of stout and a little hot grog to follow."

"Very good, sir, I'll give 'em the order at once," and the waiter bustled away. He soon returned, and whisking about the table after

the fashion waiters have when business is slack, of putting a knife straight there, shifting a cruet-stand from one side the table to the other here, and then taking a glass into custody on suspicion of not being quite clean, and putting it through a severe course of polishing with the napkin under their arm, combined with a rearrangement of the three or four sticks of property celery always on hand in such places in the winter season.

At last he bustled out and returned with the stout and the soup.

"There's been a boy hanging about here, Mr. Usher, very anxious to see you all yesterday and to-day. Don't know what he is exactly, but he's in one of these offices up the way. He's a plate of cold meat here at lunch time now and again, and is wolfish about the vegetables, but he ain't a bad sort for his time of life. Never forgets his penny, sir, to me, and pennies ain't plentiful with him, neither, I'd bet."

"Then why do you take it from him?" asked the Sergeant drily.

"Now, Mr. Usher, what is the use of talking like that. Did you ever know of a waiter who refused his fees? No, sir; and what's more," continued William, dropping his tones to a mysterious whisper, "if any one of us did, it's my impression he'd quickly become a case for your professional investigation."

"Go and get the fish!" retorted the Sergeant, grimly.

"Certainly, sir, certainly," and William vanished, only to return speedily with a handsome slice of boiled cod.

"But about this boy, sir. I really have to pretend not to see him, he's that wolfish about the greens, and—God bless my soul, sir, here he comes."

As he spoke, Tim entered the room, and at once seeing the Sergeant in the almost empty room, for the detective was dining at

a rather nondescript hour, walked straight to his table.

"Mr. Usher, sir, isn't it?" inquired Tim.

"Yes, my lad," replied the Sergeant, quietly.

"And I see by the papers you are in charge of the great Bunbury murder."

"Just so."

"Well, there's a deal of money for any one who'll give information concerning it."

"Now, look here, my boy, don't you fall into any mistake of that sort. There's £200 for anybody who can give information that may lead to the apprehension of James Foxborough. Offer withdrawn to-night, because I know where to find him."

"Then if I'd a bit of valuable information to give I should get nothing for it," replied Tim, in a disappointed voice.

"No, I don't say that, you would get something, but certainly not £200 nor anything like it. William, you had better go and look after the steak, and you needn't hurry with

it for the next five minutes," added the Sergeant, significantly.

"Now, my lad, look here, I know all about you. You're Cudemore's clerk, that's what you are."

For a minute Timothy stared in simple awe of the omniscient detective, whose knowledge in this case was by no means singular; then he replied, "I was, but he's discharged me."

"Ha, what for?"

"I don't know, exactly, it may be he thought I knew too much. He caught me coming out of his bedroom, where I admit, Mr. Usher, I'd no business. He said he had hired me as a clerk, and not as a valet, and gave me the sack there and then."

"He was about right," rejoined the Sergeant; "you're one of those young gentlemen who are just a shade too sharp to live."

"No; but, Mr. Usher, if I could tell you where Mr. Cudemore was on the day of the

Bunbury murder, what would you give me for that?"

"Nothing; what's it got to do with the case?"

"I don't know, but it might have."

"Precisely, and so might your dismissal; but it don't strike me as bearing much upon it?"

"Then I suppose it's no use saying anything more," rejoined Tim, doggedly.

"You know best about that. You know best what put it into your head that Mr. Cudemore's journey to Bunbury had anything to do with the Hopbine murder."

"You know that?" exclaimed Tim, and his open mouth and utter bewilderment really tickled the detective's vanity more than anything he had encountered for some time.

"Of course I do, and everything else about it. Look here, my lad, I can do perfectly well without you, but if you really have any evidence to give, now's your time, and you

must leave it to me to appraise. It may be worth a fiver, but I doubt it. Remember I can find you any time, and make you speak now."

Tim was utterly crushed. He recognized that the great detective carried too many guns for him, and it was quite meekly he replied, "Well, sir, all I know is this, there's a Bunbury railway label on Mr. Cudemore's portmanteau, and that he returned from the country the morning the murder was discovered, and has never been out of town since."

"That'll do, my lad. You'll make a pound or two out of that; leave your address here, and now you can go, I'm tired. Come along with that steak, William, and bring me six of Irish hot, please."

Timothy slowly left the place with a respect for Sergeant Usher that bordered on grovelling.

CHAPTER IX.

LOOKING OUT THE KEYSTONE.

SERGEANT USHER over the Bunbury mystery is now a sight for the Gods, as the old books say. One can understand it; when we have achieved the solution of any great mental problem there is always an inclination, speaking figuratively, to stand upon our head or throw our hat into the air; notable especially in the solving of that great annual spring riddle on Epsom Downs, when those who have successfully elucidated the great conundrum are wont to express their satisfaction in fantastic fashion.

"It's a lovely puzzle," chuckled Sergeant Usher, as he smoked his pipe in his own

lodgings in Spring Gardens, "and it's all put together now with the exception of the last few bits, and they are obvious."

"First thing is to see if Sturton knows this handwriting," and here Mr. Usher tapped his breast-pocket in which he kept the precious note and the photograph of the late John Fossdyke, "according to my reckoning he will."

"Secondly, to see if that wearisome old creature, Totterdell, recognizes this as the photograph of the man who sat next him at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre, which, of course, he won't."

"Lastly, if I can, to get hold of a photograph of Mr. Cudemore, and then show Totterdell that, and if it don't give him fits well I'm mistaken some. Now, how the deuce am I to get about this last business. Yes, I think my precocious young friend, with his still more precocious views regarding the £200 reward, might really earn a £10 note over this

little bit of business. In the mean time," said Mr. Usher, still chuckling with satisfaction at his piecing of the puzzle, "a man of fashion like me really ought to get a new rig out from Sturton. None of your reach-me-down ready-money tailors for a man of my position. Dukes and detectives should be waited on by first-rate artists, and, yes, by first-rate "*tickists*"; Sturton taking my order for a frock-coat and all to match, and doing my little ninety days' bill for a hundred. O Lord," said Mr. Usher, bursting into a fit of laughter; "just to think of myself as a real Bond Street lounger. It's a rum 'un, it is."

Sergeant Usher had put the obtaining Mr. Cudemore's photograph last in his cogitations because it was by far the least important of the three last bricks in his arch of evidence. Miss Lightcomb, Mr. Totterdell, the people at the Hopbine, and the label on the portmanteau, all sufficed really to identify the money-lender if he was the man, as the Sergeant had

now no manner of doubt he was; but, as was before said, Mr. Usher was an artist, and liked to hand his cases over to the Solicitors of the Treasury without a flaw in them.

The first thing the Sergeant did was to send for Timothy Whipple, that very junior, and now dismissed, clerk.

Gentlemen of Mr. Cudemore's vocation usually find one confidential clerk quite enough for their actual requirements, although a junior or two of the Whipple calibre are useful. Timothy, although he had been sternly disabused of that Golconda-like dream of grasping the £200 reward, still cherished hopes that he might realize something handsome by his information, and responded to Mr. Usher's summons with alacrity. It would have been utterly wanting in accordance with the Sergeant's practice to ask any one to call upon him at his own lodgings, so the Wellington Restaurant was the trysting-place he selected. There he found Timothy duly

awaiting his arrival over a pint of ale and some bread and cheese.

"Now, my lad," said Mr. Usher, "you really, considering your age, have some little gumption. That portmanteau business is creditable; not much importance to us, but creditable. Now it's just possible you might earn an honest ten-pun note over this business. It might run to that, although we can easy do without you. But remember this time you're working to orders, and when people don't act strictly to my orders, they'd best lead lives of virtue and circumspection. Now, I shouldn't think, my young friend, that'll be quite your future. If you don't turn gamekeeper you'll become poacher; if you don't join us you'll drift into the ranks of the criminal classes."

"I'm sure, Mr. Usher, I'll do anything you tell me," replied Timothy, meekly.

"Well, look here, my lad. Mr. Cudemore's given you the sack, but still for all that you

might be able to get what I want, and that is Mr. Cudemore's photograph. Do you think you can?"

"I can't be sure, sir. He's a book of 'em in his sitting-room, and I'm pretty sure there's one of himself in that; but you know, Mr. Usher, I can't make very sure of getting into that room now."

"There's no making sure of anything much in this world," rejoined the Sergeant, sententiously, "but you'll make sure of a tenner if you'll manage that, and to a young gentleman of your sort, who's out of employment, and don't permit his imagination to run riot, that should represent profitable business."

Tim simply thanked the omniscient one, promised to do his best, and withdrew.

"It ain't of much account," muttered the Sergeant, "but I do like to send in a case complete."

The next thing that Mr. Usher had to achieve was obviously to interview the fashion-

able Bond Street tailor, and there, accordingly, the Sergeant proceeded next and sent in his card.

Mr. Sturton was at home, and at once sent out word that he should be happy to see the eminent Scotland Yard official.

"Well, Mr. Usher, what can I do for you?" inquired the Bond Street maestro urbanely.

The humour of the situation tickled the Sergeant, and it was with a grim smile that he retorted, "Well, you know a gentleman in my profession wants a good many costumes at times. Now, suppose I ask you to pitch me out as a real swell about town."

The great sartorial artist was some two or three minutes before he made reply, during which he eyed his visitor gravely, at last he refused. "No offence, I trust, Mr. Usher, but it's best to be candid in these cases. I'd do my very best for you, but you couldn't look it, not if we did our utmost to oblige you. Now, please, don't get angry, because I shall be only

too willing to do all I can to assist. Listen to me! as the slightly eccentric member for West Broadacres, member of the Carlton, and with violent Conservative tendencies, I can turn you out to the nines, or if you like it better as the advanced Radical member for Flare-upperton, rejected of the Reform, because he goes a little too far for that played-out institution, I also can do you justice. As a man of fashion, Mr. Usher, you won't come off."

The Sergeant gave vent to a grim chuckle at his little joke, and said, "Well, Mr. Sturton, it's not quite true then that men are what their tailors make them."

"Good heavens, Mr. Usher," cried the enthusiastic Sturton, who really did believe in his profession, "it isn't every clay suits the sculptor, and goodness knows it isn't every clay that suits the tailor. No disparagement, my friend, but it's not in the power of broad-cloth, tweed, serge, or angola to turn out a lord."

"And you wouldn't if you could," retorted the Sergeant, perfectly aware of Mr. Sturton's weakness, "not you; nobody knows better the days that are coming, and that coronets will be amongst the relics of history, eh!"

"Well," replied Mr. Sturton, who, despite his professed Radical opinions, entertained a servile adoration for the aristocracy, "they are not quite to be overlooked as yet by my profession."

"Quite so. Now, Mr. Sturton, we'll come to business," rejoined the Sergeant, curtly. I suppose you're a judge of handwriting?"

"I don't understand you," replied Sturton, in blank amazement.

"Well, I mean this: in the course of your business you must have had 'a wrong 'un' given you occasionally."

Again did the eminent tailor stare blankly at his questioner.

"What I mean is this," said the Sergeant, confidentially, "you've taken a cheque or two

in your time when the drawer's imagination had proved too much for him; when, in fact, he had forgotten his own name."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Sturton, "that, of course, has happened, but you know, Mr. Usher, as a rule they are rather lucrative things than otherwise; the family always pay to avoid an exposure, and never object to a pretty stiff percentage under the circumstances."

"Just so," rejoined the Sergeant quietly, "but to return to my original observation, you're a judge of handwriting. What do you think of this?" and here Mr. Usher produced the famous note that was so nearly burnt at the Hopbine.

It was folded after the mysterious manner in which the Sergeant invariably had shown it, so that you could see little more than the signature, but one glance at it sufficed for Mr. Sturton.

"Yes," he said, "I know that hand, but

I have no intention of telling you whose it is."

Mr. Usher broke into a low laugh as he replied, "I don't want you to tell me whose handwriting it is, because I know, but you will be wanted to give a court of law your opinion before three weeks are over your head, and I can only tell you with what I am in a position to prove, it would be madness on your part not to speak out."

The collapse of Mr. Sturton was quite equal to that of Timothy Whipple. He knew well that there could be no fencing about his relations with Mr. Cudemore in a witness box. The more candid he was, the less harm would it do him, but he saw to his dismay that the detective meant to have him in the witness box, and so replied quietly, "Yes, it's Cudemore's. I know nothing about the note, and you have given me no chance of knowing; but even if you

did I fancy it is a thing with which I had nothing to do."

"Not you, Mr. Sturton," replied the Sergeant, as he picked up his hat. "I know that well enough; but you'll have to testify to that handwriting. Good day, sir, and it's real trouble to me to think you could not make a genuine Bond Street "toff" of me."

Very uncomfortable was Mr. Sturton after the detective left him. He was far too shrewd a man not to thoroughly comprehend the whole situation. He saw that he should be called upon to identify Cudemore's writing in court, and quite understood how very unpleasant a sharp cross-examining barrister might make it for him. That he lent money to his clients was no particular mystery in a select set, carefully as he endeavoured to make it so, but he certainly did not want that fact advertised in the journals. Mr. Sturton d——d the Bunbury mystery with no little

energy, fascinated as he was by it, as soon as Sergeant Usher had departed. It had never occurred to the great Bond Street maestro before that he might be actively and disagreeably inculpated in the elucidation of the crime.

"That little bit of business is settled," mused Mr. Usher, as he wended his way leisurely back to the Wellington Restaurant in Spring Gardens, where he had appointed Timothy Whipple to meet him.

As he expected, Tim was waiting for him.

"Well," said Mr. Usher, "have you got what I wanted?"

"Yes," said Tim, "I have, and a good deal of trouble it's caused me. I had to watch the governor out, and then wait for my chance to steal up-stairs; but I've got it, Mr. Usher, and here it is."

"Good, my lad," said the Sergeant, as he took a capacious pocket-book from his breast. "Now," continued Mr. Usher, as he dropped

the photograph into one of the pockets and extracted a bank-note from another, "there's ten pounds for you, and, remember, my young friend, it's not many of us can ever knock that out of their first murder case."

"It ought to run to more, Mr. Usher, indeed it ought. You know you've incited me to steal that photograph. There's penalties, you know, for prompting any one to commit a felony."

The Sergeant's face really was a study at this retort. He looked Tim Whipple over for a moment, and then said solemnly—

"My young friend, your sole chance of escaping the gallows is joining 'the Yard.' If you don't devote your talents to hanging your fellow-creatures, they will some day undoubtedly hang you. I told you to, if possible, procure a photograph of Mr. Cudemore. I never authorized your stealing it; and if I did what I ought, should take you into custody now on that charge. I should

know then where to lay my hands on you. I should save this ten pounds, and, in fact, damme, I believe that's the best way out of it."

But here Tim Whipple's audacity utterly gave way. He burst forth into no end of apologies for his presumption, declared he was perfectly satisfied with his remuneration, that his address was always at Mr. Usher's disposal, and that if the Sergeant would at some future time recommend him as a candidate for the police force or the criminal investigation department—his ambition would be satisfied. He quite grovelled before the great detective, and even offered to restore the ten-pound note.

"Well, my lad," said Mr. Usher, at last, "I think you've the making of an officer of my department in course of time. The sooner you get over bumptiousness and thinking things out for yourself at present the better. We don't stand that sort of nonsense amongst

our subordinates. We do the thinking, and merely expect them to do what they're told, and any one who can do that satisfactorily in our line is certain to come to the top of the ladder if he's any gumption in him at all."

"Oh, Mr. Usher, if I thought that," exclaimed Jim.

"Beware of bumptiousness," rejoined the Sergeant, solemnly, "and it's possible you may escape the gallows yet. Now, my lad, hook it—I've done with you."

CHAPTER X.

LAST LINKS.

Once more did Mr. Usher take train for Baumborough — the riddle was solved, the whole story of the Bunbury mystery was clear as noon-day to him, with one exception. What had been Cudemore's motive? Why had he killed John Fossdyke? and about that, rack his brains as he might, the Sergeant was compelled to confess himself beaten. He had no doubt whatever about Cudemore's guilt; he had no doubt whatever about proving it in a court of justice; still, just as a great artist insists upon either having back, or detaining, a picture for a few final touches, so did Mr. Usher want to complete two or three trifling links before arresting Cudemore.

The first person the Sergeant desired to see in Baumborough was Mr. Totterdell, and no sooner had he deposited his modest luggage in the hotel he affected than he started off to that gentleman's residence. Mr. Totterdell had gradually taught himself to believe the Bunbury mystery could only be elucidated by himself; that the police "were born fools, sir," he expressed to every one unguarded enough to listen to him; and if that idiot of a coroner, and still bigger imbecile, Mr. Trail, had only listened to his evidence that the murderer would have been arrested, was a fixed fact in the Totterdell brain, and fixed facts in the Totterdell brain were apt to become just a little hard upon other people, especially those of an irresolute turn of mind, who had not nerve to risk the loss of a lapel sooner than submit to button-holing.

Still Mr. Totterdell was conscious of having been somewhat snubbed by Mr. Usher at their last interview, and with all his contemptuous

opinion of the police in the abstract, had a dim idea that the Sergeant in particular was a little awkward to put down; while, on the other hand, his curiosity was insatiable, and therefore when Mr. Usher's card was put into his hand he gave prompt directions for his admittance. The Sergeant, after his wont, trod close on the heels of his name, and the fussy Town Councillor received him with no little effusion.

"Ha, Mr. Usher," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands, "so you're come back to me again, eh! No getting at the bottom of this complication without my assistance, eh! Well, sir, what is it now? if I'd been listened to earlier the whole affair would have been cleared up long before this."

"I'm beginning to be of that way of thinking myself, sir," replied the detective. "I'll take a chair with your permission, and then, perhaps, you'd answer me a question or two."

"Sit down, sit down, by all means," replied

Mr. Totterdell with pompous patronage. "I'll help you all I can, my good fellow; anything, you know, to forward the ends of justice."

"Quite so," replied the Sergeant. "I know I can rely upon you. Now, Mr. Totterdell, you couldn't possibly be mistaken about the identity of the man who sat next you at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre, I presume?"

"What, James Foxborough? Certainly not; I'd swear to him anywhere."

"Just so; you never saw him before, and, like everybody else, apparently have never seen him since."

"No, I never saw him except on that occasion," rejoined he; "but I tell you what, Mr. Usher—"

"Half a minute, sir," rejoined the detective, as he took the stout pocket-book from his breast; "half a minute, if you please," and producing a photographic carte, he handed it

to Mr. Totterdell, and said abruptly, "Is that him?"

The old gentleman glared at it for a minute, and then exclaimed, "Good God, no! Why, that's poor Fossdyke, any one could recognize him!"

"Dear me, dear me," said Mr. Usher, "how stupid I am, I've given you the wrong carte! Excuse me, sir, but this is the one I want you to look at," and as he spoke the Sergeant exchanged the photograph for that of Mr. Cudemore.

"That's him, that's him, Mr. Usher," cried Mr. Totterdell; "that's the scoundrel who sat next me in the stalls; that's James Foxborough. It's an awful thing, Sergeant, so to speak, to think you've hobbed and nobbed with a murderer."

"Well, I don't know about the hobbing and nobbing," rejoined the detective, "but, you see, I've had intimate relations with so many in my time that it don't strike me that way.

They're, as a rule, inoffensive creatures, and one rather wonders how they came to do it."

"Well, Mr. Usher, this was a nice, civil-spoken gentleman — the last person in the world you'd have suspected of any, any sad, any——"

"Sad games," rejoined the Sergeant, curtly. "Bless, you, sir, they usually are. The worst of 'em generally goes to church pretty regular, and you wouldn't think would wring the neck of a sparrow, much less, as one I made professional acquaintance with, polish off a whole family."

"Dear me," rejoined Mr. Totterdell, with both eyes and mouth wide open, "you don't say so! Now, Mr. Usher, I really should like to hear the particulars of that case."

"Well, sir, one of these days, if you'll give me a dish of tea, I'll be proud to tell you the story, but just now I really am pressed for time. We can't afford to let this fellow slip through our fingers, eh, Mr. Totterdell?" said

the Sergeant, as he gently withdrew the photograph from the old gentleman's fingers.

"Certainly not; and you know where to lay your hand on him, Sergeant?"

"Undoubtedly, and you shall be face to face with him before many days are over. Yes, sir, I'm going to hang your friend of the theatre, and you may take Silas Usher's word for it. I don't make many mistakes, and this is about as lovely a case as ever I worked out."

"All right, Sergeant, if you'll just ring the bell they'll bring you some tea, and then if you'll just tell me the story as far as you've got it worked out, why I'll give you my advice about it," rejoined Mr. Totterdell, his face all aglow, and his inquisitive old eyes positively glistening with excitement.

"That's just it," replied Mr. Usher, rising. "You're the very man I want to talk the whole thing over with; but time, Mr. Totterdell, don't admit of my doing it just now.

There are telegrams to send off, sir, orders to despatch, other people to see, so I'll bid you good day, sir, for the present. Once more thanking you for your valuable assistance," continued the Sergeant, as he brushed his hat with his coat-sleeve, "allow me to wish you good day."

"They can't get a step without me in the business," murmured Mr. Totterdell, with a complacent smile as Mr. Usher's footsteps died away in the distance. "When it comes to a question of law,—ha, ha,—I fancy they've nobody quite so good on the Bench. Usher sees it at once. Good man, Usher. This case will probably make him, and who's worked out this business for him?—why, *me*." And then Mr. Totterdell threw himself back in his chair, and indulged in ecstatic slumber.

"Darned old fool," muttered the candid detective as he walked leisurely away from Mr. Totterdell's residence. "Still I've got the

one fact out of him I wanted. Cudemore was the man at the Baumborough Theatre. Well, I fancy Cudemore is one of those this world must suffer by the loss of. The next thing is just to show old Marlinson and one or two of the Hopbine people the photograph, and then the case is just as complete as ever I turned one out. But the motive. Why did Cudemore kill Fossdyke? why did he think of it? I'm dead beat about that; if he meant going in for money and bleeding him, it was the last thing he'd have done. Wringing the neck of the goose that lays the golden eggs is not done in practical life, whatever may take place in fable; especially philosophers like Cudemore, who make their living out of the weaknesses of their fellow-creatures, don't fall into such mistakes. Cudemore has owned too many geese of this kind in his time to do anything so foolish as that. Well, we shall perhaps have it out of him at the trial; and, moreover, a man goes to the gallows for con-

clusively proved murder, even if the why of it is never made clear. Some of the most remarkable on record have never been cyphered out in that respect."

The next day saw Mr. Usher lounging leisurely into the Hopbine at Bunbury, to the extreme horror of old Joe Marlinson, who, by his surly greeting, quite gave the Sergeant to understand that he had no desire for his patronage.

"I'm glad to see, my old friend," said Mr. Usher easily, "that you've not forgotten me. As for me, you know, I never forget anybody."

"If you could make an exception in my case," rejoined the landlord of the Hopbine, "I'd take it as a favour; I don't want any more murders or inquests committed in this house."

"No, my man, and you don't want to appear in a witness-box, no doubt," observed the Sergeant, jocularly.

"It's a scandalous thing at my time of life,

if I'm dragged into court to be worried about an affair I know nothing about. Do you suppose I keep a throat-cutting hotel? Do you suppose murder and robbery is licensed on these premises? I ain't going to have it, nor inquests either—no, nor detectives loafing about my place."

"Now, look here, Mr. Marlinson," rejoined the Sergeant; "it's not a bit of use your getting shirty over the matter. The murder was committed in your house, and if you didn't actually do it, I'm not quite so clear you didn't have a hand in it. Just you pay attention to what I've got to say to you, or you'll find yourself in the dock instead of the witness-box."

Mr. Marlinson's face was simply a comic study for the moment, then he went deliberately to a cupboard, from which he produced a couple of glasses, and taking a greenish bottle from the liqueur rack of the bar-parlour, solemnly filled them.

Mr. Usher was quite equal to the occasion; although an abstemious man, he tossed off the Chartreuse or Kümmell proposed to him, and then said, "Now, Mr. Marlinson, you'd know this Foxborough again if you saw him; could swear to him anywhere I suppose?"

"I should think I could, and I should rather think I would," replied Mr. Marlinson, excitedly, to which no doubt considerable absorption of liquors contributed. "D——n him, what's he mean by coming to a respectable hotel to commit his murders, when there's any amount of hedge ale-houses about the country that seem special for him. I don't want no more inquests here, Mr. Usher. I don't want to have anything more to do with the business; but I don't mind swearing to a scoundrel who's brought disgrace upon the Hopbine. Hanging he deserves, and hanging I trust he'll get, dash me."

"Quite so," replied the Sergeant, quietly; "now look here," and somewhat to Mr.

Marlinson's dismay the detective produced that fat leather pocket-book, which might almost have been called "his familiar." It was the black poodle of Faust.

"You see this photograph," continued Mr. Usher, as he produced from its depths Mr. Cudemore's carte. "Who is it?"

"That's him—that's the —— villain who has caused all this trouble. I could swear to him anywhere."

"We sha'n't trouble you to do that; if you'll swear to him in a court of justice it's about as much as we shall ask you to do. But now, I just want Eliza Salter and Thomas Jenkinson, the waiter—a mere matter of form, Mr. Marlinson, but when people outrage respectable hotels, houses with a county and crusted port reputation, they must be punished, Mr. Marlinson, eh?"

"They must be thinned, sir, that's what it is. Have another glass, Mr. Usher, it's mild as mother's milk this Chartreuse, and comfort-

ing under affliction," and as he spoke Joe Marlinson poured out a couple more glasses of the insinuating compound. "We can't have such vipers about, sir, they must be scotched. I don't quite know what that means, but I believe it's a term applicable to vipers."

"Well, just send for the waiter and chamber-maid, my friend, you may rely upon it that this particular viper won't come across your path any more."

"I hope not, Mr. Usher; it's upset me altogether. For all I know, I've been harbouring and entertaining murderers for years. Here's a gentleman comes here with all a gentleman's manners, and shows a taste in wines and cookery that stamps him as a member of the upper circles, and then he just in the middle of the night sticks a fellow-creature as if he where a pork-butcher. I give it all up, sir. I never believed the aristocracy were up to such rigs as this, and

now they tell me there was a French duke took to it only a score or so of years back."

"Don't you trouble, Mr. Marlinson, and take my advice and be a little careful of your fine Chartreuse. Good tipple but demoralizing. Now run in Salter and Jenkinson, for I've no time to spare, and must catch the next train for Baumborough."

Thus advised, the landlord of the Hopbine speedily summoned those servitors, and Mr. Usher exhibited the carte of Cudemore for their delectation. Neither had the slightest doubt about it. Yes, that was number eleven; Mr. Foxborough, as they knew him to be afterwards. The photograph was an excellent one, and they could swear to him anywhere. Was there any chance or immediate prospect of apprehension."

"You needn't fret yourselves about that. I, Sergeant Usher, tell you that I know exactly where to find James Foxborough when I want him, and that there's never a man

in England less likely to change his abode. That you will be all able to recognize Foxborough when you see him in the dock is all I want. And now just tell Bill Gibbons I'll run down in the 'bus."

That stolid, open-mouthed admiration characteristic of country folks was visible upon the faces of the whole Hopbine establishment, from the landlord to the boots, as the great detective took his departure.

Arrived at Baumborough, Mr. Usher made his way straight to Dr. Ingleby's, and was at once admitted. He found the Doctor alone.

"Sit down, Usher, and have a glass of port," remarked the medico. "Am I to have the story of the Bunbury mystery to-night?"

"Well, sir," said the Sergeant, as he filled his glass, "to tell you the truth, that's just what I came to do; but I should like both Mr. Soames and Mr. Morant to be present when I relate it."

"Ha! a little unlucky. I'm not going to make any mystery to a man so completely behind the scenes as yourself, but Herbert Morant took Miss Hyde up to London to-day to introduce her to her half-sister. The girl was mad about it; and young Morant, well, I suppose, he was pretty keen too to get a look at his sweetheart."

"Yes, sir, yes," said the Sergeant, with a low chuckle, "that's human nature, about one of the few cards you can depend upon being played straight in the world. But I'll tell you what it is, I'll put off telling the story of Mr. Fossdyke's death till they come back if you'll allow me. The story is all plain as noonday, but I want to tell it before Mr. Soames, Mr. Morant, and Miss Hyde. I'm beat about the motive, and I've a strong idea that either Mr. Morant or Miss Hyde might give me the clue to it. As for who killed John Fossdyke, he'll be in custody to-morrow, and to prove the case

is as simple as possible; but why he did it I'm beat about still. Good night, doctor; nobody keeps such port as you, but fine Chartreuse at the Hopbine in the afternoon is not the best foundation for it," and with this profoundly philosophical remark the Sergeant vanished.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. FOXBOROUGH'S CONFESSION.

THAT Miss Hyde should be anxious to make the acquaintance of the mother she hardly knew, and of the half-sister she had never seen, was only natural; but her feelings had been so aroused by the enthusiastic manner in which Morant spoke of them that her desire to do so had become feverish. Herbert spoke of Mrs. Foxborough as one of the noblest, greatest-hearted women it had ever been his lot to know; and it is not every day that sons-in-law elect show such passionate admiration for the mothers of their sweethearts. That he should rave about Nid was only natural; if a man of

Herbert's age don't express himself in somewhat extravagant fashion regarding the girl he is about to marry, he must be either of a very phlegmatic temperament, or very mildly in love, and of those failings nobody could possibly accuse Mr. Morant.

Phil Soames too could not resist feeling some curiosity to see people to whom he was likely to be allied so nearly as Mrs. Foxborough and her daughter, and it took very little persuasion on Bessie's part to induce him to agree to run up with her and Herbert to London, and be presented at Tapton Cottage.

"You must come, Phil, dear. You know what Herbert is. When he once gets beside Nid, I shall never see him again, and be left to take care of myself; and though Herbert in his reckless way declares that mamma will be delighted to see me, I don't feel quite sure about how she will brook my intrusion on her home. She has always

been charming and tender upon the rare occasions on which she has come to see me, but she has never hinted that I should come and see her"—a speech that shows Mr. Morant and Miss Hyde had speedily arrived at terms of easy confidence.

"What reasons there might have been, Bessie, for Mrs. Foxborough handing you over to the care of your aunt I can't guess; but I think no mother is likely not to be proud to own you as a daughter now."

"Oh, Phil, Phil," cried Bessie, laughing, "to think of your giving utterance to such shameful flattery!"

"I don't know that there's much flattery about it, darling," replied the young man as he wound his arm round her waist. "If after a hard struggle one gains the prize one's set one's heart on, I think one's justified in being just a wee bit proud of the prize."

"How you do spoil me, and how was I

ever so mad as not to tell you my story at once?" replied Bessie, as she dropped her head on his breast with the inevitable result. "But you'll come to town with Herbert and me to-morrow, that's understood?"

"You don't suppose I'd give a chance, child, for any other fellow to run away with my property?" and then came some further assertion of his being the rightful owner of "the property," scarcely interesting to readers or lookers-on.

And so the very morning that Usher, the ubiquitous, was upsetting Mr. Marlinson's equilibrium at the Hopbine, Phil Soames, Morant, and Miss Hyde took the train for London. They were not, however, destined to depart altogether unchallenged. Mr. Totterdell, in his thirst for information concerning the doings of everybody and everything, was on the platform buying newspapers. He was a great frequenter of the station. He liked to know who came

to, and who departed from, Baumborough; and the why and the where of their journey was a special object of interest to the old gentleman. The sight of Phil Soames and his friend Herbert Morant, with Miss Hyde, all evidently awaiting the London train, was like the trumpet to the war-horse.

"Going to London, Mr. Soames?" exclaimed Mr. Totterdell, as he sidled up to them. "Can hardly be pleasure, I suppose, while this terrible mystery, in which we are all so interested, remains unsettled."

"Yes, I'm going to London," rejoined Philip drily.

"Got a bit of shopping to do, eh, Miss Hyde?"

"A lady always has that, Mr. Totterdell; but I'm not going to London for that purpose."

"On business of importance, eh?"

"Just so," rejoined Herbert Morant, cutting into the conversation. "We are all going up to see the pantomimes."

"Pantomimes, my dear young friend," said Mr. Totterdell; "why, bless you, they don't commence for another six weeks."

"No," rejoined Morant serenely, "but there's nothing like being in time to get a good seat. Never, Mr. Totterdell, neglect that golden advice on the playbills, 'Come early.'"

Here Phil Soames and Bessie could control their laughter no longer; but just then the London train fortunately glided into the station, and the two jumped hastily into a first-class carriage, leaving Mr. Totterdell jibbering impotently in his wrath.

Arrived in town, they drove straight to Tapton Cottage, and, as pre-arranged, Morant jumped out and knocked, leaving his companions in the cab. Bessie was fearfully nervous. She feared how the scarcely-known mother might take this unauthorized intrusion; and, poor girl, she so yearned for some near relations she could love. The

bitter experience of her puritanical aunt and waspish cousins had left sad memories in her mind; and though Phil Soames had in great measure succeeded in obliterating them, still Bessie craved for the love of that handsome mother she had so seldom seen.

"Do you think she's very angry at my coming, Phil?" she whispered, as she stole her hand into her lover's.

"Nonsense, child!" he replied, as he pressed it. "Don't be foolish. Morant must be given a few minutes to explain matters."

Suddenly the door opened, and a tall, handsome woman, with a wealth of chestnut hair crowning her head, rushed down the steps, and exclaimed as she impetuously wrenched open the cab-door—

"Bessie, my darling, where are you? Come in at once, dearest, and you too, Mr. Soames, for of course you are Mr. Soames. To think, child, that your mother would not be glad to see you in your own home. Oh, my darling,

I've a long story to whisper into your ears when I get you inside."

When they entered the drawing-room, Nid was standing, her face all aglow with excitement, waiting to welcome her new sister. For a second or two she regarded her shyly; then the girl's impulsive nature asserted itself, and without more ado, she made a rush at Bessie, threw her arms round her neck, and kissed her passionately.

"There, that will do, Nid," said Mrs. Foxborough, in a low voice, as she gently separated the two girls. "Take her into the library, Herbert, and let her there make acquaintance with her brother-in-law that is to be. You will forgive me, Mr. Soames, but I have a full confession to make to my daughter, and I am sure," she continued, addressing herself to him as her voice sank almost to a whisper, "you do not wish to make the story of a woman's weakness harder for her to tell than necessary."

"I assure you, Mrs. Foxborough," interposed Phil——

"No," she continued, still speaking to him, and recognizing instinctively that he was the master spirit of the party, "I know you don't, and lowering her head as few people had ever chanced to see the proud Nydia Willoughby do before; "but Bessie must learn the truth from my lips at last. You and she, I dare say, know the outline of it already. Spare me its being further bruited abroad."

She presented so sad a sight in this her hour of humiliation, and the low tremulous tones vibrated so painfully on the heartstrings of her hearers, that the two girls burst into tears, while Mrs. Foxborough stood silent and abased. Phil Soames, however, rose promptly to the occasion.

"Kiss and comfort her, Bessie; go to her, child," and he placed the weeping girl in her mother's arms, and raising Mrs. Foxborough's hand to his lips, kissed it. "Take Nydia to

the library, I will follow you and try to make my sister-in-law's acquaintance."

For a second Nid hesitated to give way to Morant's light grasp upon her arm, then she mutely clasped Phil's hand, and yielding to her lover's gentle compulsion, drew him after her as they left the room.

"Oh, Bessie, darling," exclaimed Mrs. Foxborough, as she wound her arm about her daughter. "It is a terrible story for a mother to have to tell, how she ever came to desert a child like yourself, but there are really extenuating circumstances—that is, if anything can excuse a woman so doing. Listen, child, to a very common-place story. Your grandfather was a Presbyterian minister at Plymouth, and we—that is, myself and your aunt—were brought up after the fashion of girls in a very serious family. There were only us two, and Augusta cheerfully conformed with the views of our parents. It may have been the romantic name which my

mother, with 'The Last Days of Pompeii' still seething in her mind, insisted upon bestowing on me; but from the very first I rebelled against the solemnity of our home. While your grandmother lived it was somewhat mitigated, but after her death your grandfather and my sister, who was some five years my senior, seemed to think even laughter a crime. Novel reading, theatre-going, and all the innocent amusements that a girl most delights in were in my case sternly repressed. Can you wonder that I fell into a state of chronic and sullen revolt against the gloomy existence I was condemned to lead? As long as my sister remained at home, despite my having no scruples about indulging in any of the forbidden pleasures whenever I could get a chance, my opportunities were few. A woman is not easily blinded by another woman, and Augusta was not easy to deceive; but when she one day married the son of a prominent member of our congregation and

went away to her new home in London, it became comparatively easy. The bribing the two maids that comprised our modest household were hardly necessary, their sympathies were entirely with me ; they agreed that Miss Nydia ought to see a little more life and have a little more amusement. Novels I obtained now as many as I liked, and I may say lived in the fairy-land of fiction, while now and again I enjoyed the stolen delight of a visit to the theatre in company with Ruth, our parlour-maid."

"Poor mother," murmured Bessie. "No one, as you know, could understand your dreary life better than I."

Mrs. Foxborough, who was seated in a low chair, fondled the head of the girl who was crouched at her feet.

"Then, Bessie sweet, came my agony. I met there upon one occasion a very good-looking young man, who was excessively civil about getting us a cab. It was a wet

night, and cabs were somewhat scarce. I soon found that he was the *jeune premier* of the company, but not being wanted in the last piece had strolled round in front. I was only seventeen, Bessie, and we met and met again. To a romantic fool as I was then an actor was a species of demi-god. I fell violently in what I thought was love, and when the company left Plymouth was easily persuaded to elope with him. A little more than a year afterwards I found myself a mother, and deserted, with the additional agony of discovering that my betrayer was already a married man. What was I to do? Thanks to my *soi-disant* husband, I had already got a footing on the stage, but how to carry you about with me and take care of you I knew not. My salary, I need scarcely say, was scanty, while in the matter of new parts country managers are simply merciless, and one has to play almost any *rôle* at forty-eight hours' notice. What with study and rehearsal

I could simply take no adequate care of you. Go back to my father's house I couldn't—I really had not the courage to undergo the humiliation that awaited me there even if he would receive me, which was not exactly certain. At last I bethought me of your aunt. I took you there, and bore meekly the reproaches that were showered upon me, and then, Bessie, I assented to the cruel terms proposed to me—That I was to give you solely over to her; that it was her duty, if possible, to snatch a brand from the burning, and her duty she would do; but that she must make it a positive condition that I saw you but rarely, and never attempted to remove you from under her care even for a day. What cruel justice Augusta dealt out to me at that time I forgive her for your sake, but I can never forget it. She did her duty by you honestly according to her own narrow lights, and I, God help me, did not."

Here Mrs. Foxborough ceased, and in a second Bessie's arms were wound round her neck, and the girl was seated in her lap.

"Oh, mother," she whispered, "what a hard life you must have had."

"No, I don't know that it was harder than is the lot of most of us, except the having to part with you. Soon afterwards I got a lucrative opening in the music-hall line, and there I have continued ever since. It was at that time I met poor James, and we were married, but I told him about you before I became his wife. He didn't get on well on the stage, and was too proud to live upon me, so we agreed to separate for a little. Fond as he was of me, and though he would have lavished money on me if I would have let him after he began to make it, he was always strangely reticent about his business. He did well whatever it was, and bought and rebuilt the Syringa entirely for me. He called his business, Bessie, the managing of

country theatrical companies. I always affected to believe it, but I very much doubt whether that was what it was really. But he's been a good and dear husband to me, child, and had nothing to say to this murder I'd stake my life, though I've a presentiment I shall never see him again. And now about yourself, child—do you love this bonnie wooer of yours?"

"With all my soul, mother. You can't think how kind, courteous, and considerate he is, and he must care a good deal about me, or he'd never take such a penniless child as me to keep."

"Oh, darling!" replied Mrs. Foxborough, as she toyed a little nervously though fondly with the girl's hair, "there are plenty of men about who would gladly take you with just the gown on your back. May you be happy, child; and now we'll go and call back the others. I have hardly seen this tall sweetheart of yours."

CHAPTER XII.

MR. CUDEMORE GETS UNEASY.

MR. CUDEMORE was getting somewhat uneasy in his mind. He did not at all like Mr. Sturton having put himself in communication with the police relative to the large sum of money that James Foxborough had borrowed. He would have liked it still less, had he known of Mr. Usher's visit to Bond Street, but of that he was in ignorance. He had called once or twice to see Mr. Sturton lately, only to be told he was not in. This in itself disturbed the suspicious money-lender. He had never found any difficulty about seeing the fashionable artist before, why should he now? The truth was, Mr. Sturton kept purposely out of the way.

Although Mr. Usher, after his wont, had kept his own counsel pretty close, yet he had made no secret that Mr. Sturton would be called upon to testify to that handwriting, and further, it was clear to the latter that the Sergeant attached great importance to that note. Mr. Sturton had always followed the Bunbury murder with morbid interest, and he had arrived vaguely at the conclusion that Cudemore was somehow implicated in the crime. He could be cool enough on all matters of business, but he had no nerves for horrors, and the Bunbury mystery, which had absorbed him from the first, now kept him in a state of nervous irritability.

Mr. Cudemore was very dissatisfied with the progress of his love-suit. His chance had not looked a particularly rosy one before he lost his head that afternoon in Tapton Cottage, and now he knew that nothing but coercion remained to bring it to a successful termination. Not that Mr. Cudemore would

have cared about that, had it only promised a favourable result, but it did not. He interfered more and more in the affairs of the Syringa; he insisted upon it that he must see the manageress on matters of business. Mrs. Foxborough steadily refused to take the slightest notice of him. In spite of her prohibition he had again called at the cottage; the door remained closed in his face. He had written to apologize for his conduct, but no reply was vouchsafed him. He had written once more, pointing out that if the six thousand pounds borrowed by James Foxborough was not forthcoming at the expiration of the notice given the mortgagees would foreclose, and the Syringa Music-Hall go altogether out of Mrs. Foxborough's hands, and Mrs. Foxborough again was perfectly indifferent, and abstained from answering his letter. Then the money-lender had pushed persecution as far as he knew how, and was fain to admit with no result.

He was infatuated with his mad passion for the girl, and it to a certain extent lulled to rest that shrewd instinct of coming danger now newly awakened. In the days before he had avowed his admiration he had begged a photograph from Nid, and she, who was turning over a lot of freshly-executed sun likenesses of herself, gave him one without hesitation. Musing one afternoon in his rooms over his mad desire to make Nid his wife, he suddenly bethought him, as he could not see the girl herself, he would look at her picture. He fetched his photograph book from a side table and turned over the leaves till he came to her likeness, and then he was struck with something else—the opposite carte had been removed. He knew perfectly well whose it was. It was his own. He had placed it there as men will at times in order to see themselves coupled with the object of their idolatry. Who had taken it? and why? The division from which it

had been abstracted was slightly torn, as if it had been removed with some haste, and once more a feeling of uneasiness came over the man. He had no intimate friends likely to commit such petty larceny, in fact, friends were a luxury Mr. Cudemore professed himself unable to afford. He was a great admirer of the fair sex, but his *liaisons* were transient and of that meretricious order that involves no great amount of sentiment on either side.

He lit a big cigar and sat there for an hour brooding over various little suspicious circumstances, all tending to confirm his views that Scotland Yard had come to suspect him of being concerned in the Bunbury mystery. What was young Whipple doing in his dressing-room? why did Mr. Sturton persistently avoid him? and lastly, with what object had some one abstracted this photograph? He wondered if he was under surveillance; whether he was watched as he

knew the police could watch a man upon occasion. Then he thought it would be as well to realize some securities, so as to have a good bit of ready money always at hand, in case it might seem good policy to abscond. Bah! he was losing his nerve. Let them suspect, he was in no danger; it was little likely they would ever penetrate the mysterious disappearance of James Foxborough, and until they did that he was safe. No, while there was a chance of securing Nid Foxborough for his wife he would stay, happen what might, and then he actually began to muse over impossible schemes for her abduction. His fierce lustful passion for the girl—love it cannot be called—was of that kind that led to savage outrages of such sort in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but is fortunately not quite so feasible in the days we live in. Did he but know it, Mr. Cudemore was as well policed as the Prime Minister or the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland.

Still the more he reflected the less he liked the aspect of affairs. He looked at the clock; yes, with a good hansom there was just time to catch his broker and give him instructions to sell Guatemala bonds sufficient to realize a thousand. He would do it. "I shall want money for either tour," he muttered grimly, "whether it be a wedding one or the other."

On the track of his hansom stole another tenanted by a wizened little old man dressed something like an old-fashioned bank clerk, but one of the deadliest beagles in all the detective pack. He was not a man of anything like Mr. Usher's calibre, he was not good at finding his game; but once shown his quarry, and he hung upon the track like a sleuth hound. Old Nibs, as he was affectionately termed by his brethren of the Yard, was a very valuable officer in his own line; a very difficult man to slip when he had once sighted his prey.

Mr. Cudemore arrived in time, and a little surprised his broker. Guatemalas were now going up and promised to be an uncommon good thing ere the month was out. Did not Mr. Cudemore think it would be advisable to hold on a week or two, or, if he must have money, realize some other property? No, Mr. Cudemore didn't think so. His orders were peremptory to sell Guatemalas to realize a thousand the next day, and that done he drove off and recreated himself at the Gaiety restaurant, and went into the theatre afterwards; but let him go where he would, that little wizened old bank clerk followed him like his shadow till he finally reached his home in Spring Gardens, and there another member of the force was ready to take up the watch.

Mr. Cudemore slept the sleep of the just. Whatever his connection with the Bunbury mystery might be, it affected him no more than it might make it advisable for him

to leave town, and this, in consequence of his wild infatuation about Nid Foxborough, he did not wish to do. The money-lender thought that he could easily baffle the police whenever he should deem it necessary, and though he had pictured himself watched, had little idea that such watch had actually commenced. He thought he might to some extent have fallen under their suspicion, but he deemed they had barely got hold of the clue as yet, much less unravelled it. Uneasy he was, he felt there was danger in the air, but he'd no idea he was already completely in the toils, that the indefatigable Usher had his, Mr. Cudemore's, photograph multiplied, and that there was not a leading police-station in England without both that and a complete description of him, more especially all the principal seaports, so that even should he evade the vigilance of the Yard he was not likely to get very far.

The next morning Mr. Cudemore, having

had his breakfast, betook himself to the Syringa Music-Hall, where he, as was his habit, harassed the stage-manager with business inquiries and demanded to see Mrs. Foxborough.

"She's here, I know," said the money-lender, "for I saw her brougham waiting in the street."

"I've Mrs. Foxborough's express commands to say she will never see you, that she doubts whether you really have any right to interfere with us at all until your time comes. I don't quite know what she means by that, but I give you her message as I have given it you before."

But Mr. Cudemore was determined to see Mrs. Foxborough this time, and he lingered in the entrance until she came out, and then, taking off his hat, boldly requested to speak to her on business.

The manageress of the Syringa drew herself up proudly and passed on towards her

carriage without a word or hardly even a glance at him, and Mr. Cudemore fell back discomfited as the stage-manager put her into the brougham. He was verily not doing much with this game of persecution, and Mr. Cudemore walked moodily away. "She must have a good bit more than I thought," he muttered, "or she'd never take the prospect of the loss of the Syringa so lightly; and yet I thought Foxborough had pretty well all he had sunk in it; but of course I know now he had other resources."

Now it so happened that the very morning upon which Mr. Cudemore made the last attempt to intimidate Mrs. Foxborough was the day upon which the party from Baumborough, under Morant's guidance, arrived at Tapton Cottage. If Mrs. Foxborough kept a brave presence before the money-lender, she was in reality considerably dismayed at the loss of the Syringa. Her husband might have other property, but she knew nothing about

it, and it was the Syringa that kept Tapton Cottage going. Of course she could fall back upon her profession and command a very fair engagement, but it would mean a very different income from that which she derived from the music-hall. She wondered whether Cudemore had the rights he claimed over the place at present; but the mortgage she knew was a fact, and where to get six thousand pounds she didn't know. She had come down to the Syringa early as she always did, in order to avoid observation, and hurried back to the cottage in consequence of a letter from Morant received that morning.

When she and Bessie had fetched the other three back from the library, as it was the custom to call James Foxborough's own den, Mrs. Foxborough sat down to make acquaintance with Phil Soames, while Morant was left to entertain the two girls. Mrs. Foxborough was a quick-witted woman, and she had heard of Phil's business qualifications

from Herbert. She was much struck with his quiet, shrewd remarks, for she had turned the conversation on his (Soames') own business and position, and what he thought of Herbert's chance of prospering in the opening his firm had so kindly afforded him, and her heart felt light about the prospects of her daughters as she listened to Phil's clear exposition of the future. Suddenly it flashed across her that she sorely needed some one to advise her. Why should she not confide her trouble about the Syringa to this clear-headed son-in-law that was to be?

She paused for a moment and then said, "Mr. Soames, I want your advice," and without further preliminary, she poured into Phil's ears the stories of her difficulties with Mr. Cudemore.

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Foxborough," replied Soames, quietly, as she concluded. "I've no doubt, in the first place, when this bullying money-lender is confronted with a

sharp solicitor we shall find his power over the Syringa to be mythical. Secondly, I have no doubt that when the mortgage has to be paid off I can obtain the money for you if the property is anything like what you represent it to be. Lastly, with your permission, I'll call in my partner in embryo. I've a notion in days gone by he also patronized this Cudemore; he might give us a hint, and mind, Mrs. Foxborough, I'm training him to business. Come here, Herbert, we want you for a minute."

"Yes, and he's rather popular on this side of the room just now," replied Nid. "Mamma monopolizing two young men is sheer tyranny."

"We only want him for two minutes, Nid," replied Soames, laughing. "A matter of business."

"Oh! dear; we don't require him in that capacity in the least; you had better go, sir."

"What is it?" said Herbert, as he crossed the room.

"You told me one night at Baumborough, if I don't mistake, that you once had some dealings with a money-lender of the name of Cudemore?"

"Yes, the thief, he's slippery as an eel. What about him?"

"May I tell him, Mrs. Foxborough?" asked Phil.

The manageress nodded assent, and then Soames told the story of Mr. Cudemore's audacious claim to look into the books, see the receipts, and otherwise interfere with the management of the Syringa.

"The confounded scoundrel," exclaimed Morant, "I've half a mind to break every bone in his body, only I've an idea it is unnecessary. Listen, Phil, the forty-eight hours stipulated is up. We came prepared to stay the night in town. Let Bessie stay here as originally proposed, but let you and

I, instead of going to an hotel, take the train back to Baumborough. Be guided by me this time, Phil."

"Herbert's quick enough, Mrs. Foxborough, when he takes the trouble to think. He knows what he's talking about now and I don't, but I have no hesitation about putting myself into his hands."

"Good! Mrs. Foxborough," said Morant, "I may be mistaken, but I've an impression Cudemore will trouble you no more."

"And I feel sure," said Philip, as he bade his hostess adieu, "that mortgage can be arranged. Remember, you've a right to claim my assistance now."

Then the two young men made their farewells to the girls. Bessie kissed her *fiancée*, and shook hands with her future brother-in-law; if they thought it necessary they should go no doubt it was so; but Nid was not to be dismissed so easily. The little coquette affected to pout, and said that if

Herbert and her new brother were satisfied with such a flying visit as that she was afraid the sight of her was not good in the king's eyes, and here she looked at Phil; but at this juncture her lover caught her in his arms, and, lifting her off her feet, snatched half-a-dozen kisses, then putting her down breathless and indignant, rushed out of the room, followed by Phil.

"Ah!" said Nid, when she was able to speak, "that's what it is to be little; nobody, not even strong tall Phil, could subject you to such an outrage."

"Oh, yes," rejoined Bessie, laughing, "I fancy he could if he tried, and I don't think, my dear, I should feel any worse about it than you do."

"Miss Hyde, I'm ashamed of you," rejoined Nid, demurely; "come and have some tea."

CHAPTER XIII.

NO LONGER "AT FAULT."

As soon as Phil Soames and Morant arrived in Baumborough, they hurried off to the home of the former, and had just time to tumble into their evening clothes previous to joining the dinner-table, at which their unexpected advent occasioned no little surprise on the part of Phil's parents. However, as this worthy pair were completely ignorant of what had taken the young men to town, some vague excuse about having changed their minds amply sufficed to allay their curiosity. The meal over, Phil and Morant adjourned to the former's sanctum, as they often did for an after-dinner cigar.

No sooner had they gained it upon this occasion than Morant said, "Of course, Phil, we didn't come here to smoke to-night. We'll just light our cigarettes, and then we must go across to Dr. Ingleby's, and see if he has any news of Mr. Usher. He should have."

"All right," rejoined Soames; "you're in command, you know."

So off to Dr. Ingleby's, only some quarter of a mile away, the two started. The Doctor was as much astonished to see them as had been old Mr. and Mrs. Soames.

"Why, I thought you were not coming down till to-morrow," he exclaimed, the customary greetings over.

"Quite right," replied Morant; "but something we heard in London made us think it desirable to see Mr. Usher as soon as possible. He promised me to be here to-night."

"And he has been. He came, he said, to tell us the complete story of the Bunbury mystery; but when he found you two were

not here, he asked permission to postpone his story, as he seemed to think it probable you might clear up one or two points about which he is still doubtful, if you only heard the story. He hasn't been gone a quarter of an hour."

"How deuced unlucky," exclaimed Morant.

"Nonsense, Herbert," cried Phil Soames. "He can't have left the town. Where does he put up, Doctor?"

"At the Woolpack; and we shall probably find him there, if I send for him."

"Nonsense, Doctor; I'll go myself," exclaimed Morant. "You two just wait quietly here, and I'll be back with Mr. Usher in a quarter of an hour at furthest," and with these words Herbert vanished.

Little was said between the Doctor and Phil Soames during the interval of Morant's absence; they were both too anxious to listen to the coming revelation to speak much.

The quarter of an hour had hardly elapsed

when Herbert entered triumphantly, closely followed by Sergeant Usher.

"Good evening, Mr. Soames; and once more good evening, Doctor Ingleby. I'm very glad, gentlemen, you came back, and that Mr. Morant came and fetched me, for I should like to tell you the whole story of the Bunbury murder before I leave Baumborough, as you have been, so to speak, all a bit mixed up in it, and are certainly all interested in the riddle. I must leave for town by the 11·30, but I've got a good hour and a half to spare, which will much more than suffice to tell my story."

"You can easily imagine, Sergeant, we are all extremely anxious to hear it," replied Dr. Ingleby; "indeed, these two gentlemen came back from London for nothing else."

"So Mr. Morant tells me, sir," rejoined the Sergeant, as he quietly seated himself and commenced his narrative:—

"James Foxborough (and as far as I

know that is his real name) started in life as articled clerk to an attorney in London. Like many of that class, he had a great fondness for the theatre. Somehow or other, at one of the minor suburban theatres, he scraped acquaintance with Miss Nydia Willoughby, then a struggling young actress, and concerning whose earlier history I know no more than I learnt from Mr. Soames in this room a few weeks back. Nor is it in the least necessary I should. The two fell in love, and after a little married. James Foxborough broke his articles, and managed, through his wife's influence, to obtain a small engagement on the stage. But unluckily he was not possessed of what the literary people call histrionic powers. His wife kept steadily fighting her way upwards, but he just as steadily dropped into a mere super. He was entrusted with letters to carry on, and about two lines to say; and his salary, gentlemen, was about as short as his part. Well, to do

Foxborough justice, he was clear grit; he'd no idea of living on his wife's earnings, and as soon as he had satisfactorily ascertained that he couldn't earn bread and cheese on the stage, he announced his intention of seeking it elsewhere, and they parted, quite amicably. Mind now, you may ask how can I know all this? I only reply, I know the main facts of the case so far, and have filled in the remainder by inference, as any one of you might, and probably would do.

"Now," continued the Sergeant, "the idea that had occurred to James Foxborough, by way of earning his living, was to fall back upon his old profession. His experience as an actor had made him pretty sick of the stage as a profession; the gilt was all off the gingerbread as far as he was concerned; but remember, he had broken his articles; and though I don't suppose—though I honestly confess I don't know—that there is any very severe penalty for that, still it

was quite sufficient to make him change his name, and leave London. To begin upon, he was not an attorney, and how he managed to get his name on the rolls I can't say—I lose sight of him here for two years or more; when I next pick him up he's practising in Baumborough, under the name of John Fossdyke."

"What!" cried Dr. Ingleby, "you mean to tell us that John Fossdyke and James Foxborough are the same man?"

"Not a doubt about it," rejoined Mr. Usher.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Morant. "Very much alike, if you will; but the same man—ridiculous."

"I told you it was a beautiful case," rejoined the Sergeant; "and the reason we could never find the slightest trace of James Foxborough, is that he is buried in John Fossdyke's grave."

"But, good God! Mr. Usher, if your story

is true," said Dr. Ingleby, "poor Mrs. Fossdyke was never married."

"Undoubtedly not. Her husband's name wasn't Fossdyke, for one thing, and he was already married, for another. Now Foxborough," continued the Sergeant, "when he first came to Baumborough was a very poor man. He constantly ran up to town, and received, I fancy, a good bit of assistance still from his wife. And now, Dr. Ingleby, I should feel much obliged if you would continue the story."

"Certainly," replied the Doctor, "and the bit you want nobody can piece in better than myself. Fossdyke, or I suppose I should say Foxborough, gradually began to acquire a fair practice here; he was a pushing man, who would have his finger in every pie that was baking. He was a plausible man, with great command of words, a popular man, and to some extent a clever man, and the farmers around especially took to him. You see he

had some sporting proclivities, liked a day's hunting, a day's shooting, or a day's steeplechasing, when he could find time for it, and in those days he was clever enough to know that it paid in the long run to make time for it. His practice rapidly increased, and he became a man of mark in the town; then he made his great hit in life — I'm speaking of him as Fossdyke — he married Mary Kimberley. This at once gave a status it would have taken him some years yet to acquire, and thanks to the interest his marriage gave him, he shortly afterwards acquired the post of Town Clerk. I have got nothing further to add than this, that though his income was an exceedingly handsome one, and though he apparently lived well within it, yet there were invariably tales about the difficulty the tradesmen had in getting money from him.

"Yes, Doctor," interposed Mr. Usher, "that's where it was; that'll be about the time

he went into a good many provincial theatrical specs which terminated all the wrong way, and it was on these speculations he contrived to make away with the best part of Mrs. Fossdyke's money. Then at last came his first theatrical hit — he built and started the Syringa Music-Hall, and to do that, Doctor, he appropriated between five and six thousand pounds of the Corporation funds."

"Impossible, Mr. Usher, if such a thing had not come out in his life-time it must have done at his death."

"And that is just what has happened," replied the sergeant, "that wearisome Totterdell creature has discovered it, though he is not exactly aware of the real meaning of his discovery. When the Corporation, as I'm told at Mr. Totterdell's instance, voted for the calling in of that mortgage on the houses and buildings belonging to the railway company near the station in order to pay for their new theatre, the discovery of Foxborough's fraudu-

lent appropriation of their moneys was imminent. It was then that he went to one Cudemore, to whom he had often applied before, indeed, had recourse to him about the building of the Syringa, the misappropriated money not proving sufficient, and raised from him with the assistance of Mr. Sturton, the great Bond Street tailor, the requisite sum to cover his deficiencies, and but for Mr. Totterdell, who is always nosing round like a truffle dog about his neighbours' affairs, I don't suppose any one would have ever known anything about that quiet borrowing of the Corporation's money. He somehow found out that no such mortgage was ever effected, although five per cent. interest was regularly credited to the Corporation on account of it."

"Most extraordinary," said Dr. Ingleby. "I can't conceive this never having come to my ears."

As for Phil Soames and Morant, they sat

silent and absorbed in the extraordinary history that Mr. Usher was slowly unfolding for their edification.

"Not at all, sir," replied the Sergeant. "Mr. Totterdell so very imperfectly understands his discovery that he is actually unable to talk about it. You must bear in mind, gentlemen, that though I can prove all my leading points, I am filling in my story here and there from what I suppose to have been the case. We next come to the opening of the Baumborough Theatre, and here for the first time the author of the Bunbury mystery appears upon the scene. What brought Mr. Cudemore there I honestly say I don't know, but——"

"Good gracious! you mean to say, then, that the money-lender was the murderer of poor Fossdyke?—I should say Foxborough," exclaimed Dr. Ingleby.

"Just so," replied the Sergeant, perfectly unmoved. "These two gentlemen have heard

his name before, I fancy, at all events Mr. Morant has. As I was saying, what brought him down to that ceremony I can't fathom, but I do know this, that for the first time he became aware that John Fossdyke and James Foxborough were one, were the same individual. That a man of Cudemore's stamp should attempt to make capital out of such knowledge is a mere matter of course; that he wrote the note which took Mr. Fossdyke over to Bunbury I can prove. Mr. Morant, there, can swear to the handwriting for one, and I have another unimpeachable witness to testify to it besides. Now, gentlemen, just consider what that note meant to the dead man. He, of course, recognized the handwriting, and the signature, James Foxborough, told him his secret was discovered. He goes over to Bunbury to see what terms he can make with the man who has surprised his secret. He knows Cudemore well, and no doubt is prepared for exorbitant demands on the part of the money-

lender. What Cudemore did ask we shall perhaps never know. It may be he demanded a very large slice back of that six thousand which he, in conjunction with Mr. Sturton, had lent. That, as we know, Foxborough could not comply with. He had already used the whole of the money to conceal his breach of trust in connection with the funds of the Municipal Council. But whatever Cudemore wanted, we may feel pretty certain it was not Foxborough's life. That he did slay him I believe, but it was undoubtedly an unpremeditated murder. When men of this stamp get a hold over their fellows, and intend to make them what my brethren in Paris call "sing," or as we term it,— black-mail them, of course the victim's life is the last thing aimed at. They want perpetual hush-money from him, and his death naturally puts an end to all that. Now, gentlemen, if any of you can give me any clue to what Cudemore's motive can have been—that is to say, what it was he

wanted to wring from Foxborough—I shall be obliged to you?"

"All we know amounts to this," said Soames. "Ever since the murder Cudemore has shown a great desire to get the Syringa Music-Hall into his own hands. He has given notice of foreclosing the mortgage, evidently relying upon Mrs. Foxborough's inability to find the six thousand pounds with which to meet it."

The Sergeant thought for a few minutes, and then said to Mr. Soames, "I can't think that could have been the cause of the murder. Has Cudemore any quarrel with Mrs. Foxborough that you know of?"

"Certainly Mrs. Foxborough thinks he has treated her very badly about the Syringa," replied Morant, "and declines to have anything to do with him, saying when the time comes if she cannot find the money he must take the music-hall."

Neither Soames nor Morant were in the

least aware of the money-lender's mad passion for Nid.

"No," said Mr. Usher, "that is a consequence of the murder, but certainly not the cause of it. Even in his first moments of exasperation at finding he couldn't have his slice back of the six thousand he had lent, Cudemore would never have been such a fool as that. With the hold he had over Foxborough he could have become a partner in the Syringa on his own terms. Well, gentlemen, it's no use trying to guess a riddle now, which the trial will probably solve. We have brought the thing down now to this: Cudemore, at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre, convinced himself that James Foxborough and John Fossdyke were one man. Whether he suspected it before I don't know, nor does it matter. Taking advantage of his discovery, he summons Fossdyke to dine with him at Bunbury, and what concession he demanded to hold his tongue we don't know,

but in the sitting-room the two men quarrelled, and either by accident or design Cudemore stabbed his companion to the heart. He then carried him into the adjoining room, divested him of his dress coat, and placed him as he was found."

"But don't you think," said Soames, "that a man like poor Fossdyke might be stung to such madness by finding his secret at the mercy of a man like Cudemore as to lay violent hands on himself."

"Quite possible, sir; but first Dr. Ingleby will tell you that from the peculiar direction of the wound it could hardly have been self-inflicted. Secondly, if he is an innocent man why did not Mr. Cudemore come forward and tell his story; and lastly, there's that third point, which was pretty well proved at the inquest, if the door was not locked from the outside, where was the key?"

"It might have been thrown out of the window," said Herbert.

"Now really, Mr. Morant, rejoined the Sergeant, with a deprecatory smile, "that's a cutting observation to a crack officer of the Yard. You can't suppose but what I had every inch of ground under that window searched that very afternoon as far round as it was possible for a man to throw a key. No, it was an off chance, but I didn't overlook it; and now, gentlemen, I must say good night, as I have to catch the mail train."

"One word more, Mr. Usher," said Soames. "I suppose Mrs. Foxborough need fear no further molestation from Mr. Cudemore?"

"Neither she nor any one else for a very considerable time to come. Mr. Cudemore will be in custody about breakfast time to-morrow morning. Once more, good night, gentlemen."

"Usher's case is beautifully clear," said the Doctor, as the detective left the room, "but there'll be no conviction of murder, I fancy."

"No," said Soames, "he'll get off with manslaughter, I'm inclined to think."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CUDEMORE'S ARREST.

On his way home from the Syringa Music-Hall after his final rebuff from Mrs. Foxborough, Mr. Cudemore first awoke to the fact that he was dogged. A rather less expert tracker than Old Nibs had for a little taken that worthy's place, and the money-lender's eyes had fallen mechanically upon a shabby genteel young man as he left the Hall. Coming down Portland Street he rather suddenly struck into one of the side streets leading into Portland-place, then suddenly recollecting the want of some small article of haberdashery such as he was accustomed to purchase at a shop in Oxford Street, turned about abruptly

to retrace his steps. At the corner he ran almost into the arms of the shabby genteel young man he had noticed outside the Syringa. In an instant all the money-lender's suspicions were aroused, he pursued the even tenor of his way into Oxford Street, but like a woman now he had eyes in the back of his head. He walked home quite leisurely, and knew perfectly well that shabby young man followed him like his shadow. To take a cab Mr. Cudemore knew would be useless. If he was, as he had no doubt now, under the surveillance of the police, they knew perfectly where he lived, and any attempt to evade his unwelcome attendant was ridiculous. Besides, go home he must, if it was only to get that thousand pounds which he had just procured for this very emergency. Peeping from behind his curtains, Mr. Cudemore caught occasional glances of the shabby young man lounging pensively up and down the street. He was a young officer, new to his business, and un-

doubtedly rather too pronounced in his manner of conducting it.

"If they were only all such duffers as that,' muttered the money-lender, "the idea of not being able to slip the police at any moment would be preposterous."

And then he prepared to go out and dine and enjoy himself. He dined and drank a bottle of champagne at the Criterion, and then once more adjourned to a theatre. He did not see the shabby young man any more, but felt quite sure that he was accompanied by an attendant Sprite, and troubled his head little about it. To-morrow he would make a bolt of it. He would complete all his preparations that night, and disappear from London next day at such time as might seem to him most favourable. He had no doubt about compassing this little matter of evasion of the police, but still he regarded it as a delicate operation, and not to be carried out at any fixed period. After the play, Mr. Cudemore felt that his

spirits required sustaining to the extent of a pint of champagne and a dozen of oysters, and accordingly so sustained them. Then he drove quietly home to make preparations for his flight. These consisted for the most part in the burning of several letters and papers. Then he packed a small hand-bag with great care, and laid out his overcoat and railway rug. Finally he took from his writing-table a well-stuffed note case, and placed it on the dressing-table, and then Mr. Cudemore undressed and went to bed.

As to what direction his flight was to take Mr. Cudemore was not so clear, but he had a leaning towards Scotland. As for baffling the police at the rate of abandoning his hand-bag, railway rug, &c., that he thought would not be difficult. He thought that once he had taken his ticket and his seat with such slender baggage they would feel quite sure of his absconding, and fancy they knew all about it. His idea, then, was to get into a second-

class carriage at the last moment, and leave the train at the very first station. For this purpose he intended to take two tickets—one first right through for Edinburgh, say if he took that line; the other second for the first station out of London, and it need scarcely be said he had no intention of travelling by express. The idea was ingenious, and it is much to be regretted that Mr. Cudemore was never destined to put his scheme to the test, but his passion for Nid Foxborough was destined to prove fatal to him as the candle to the moth. Mr. Cudemore might have left the country at one time without let, hindrance, or suspicion, but that time was now gone by. The toils were around him, and that mighty Nimrod of criminal humanity, Mr. Usher, had marked him for his own.

Having ascertained from one of his myrmidons on his return to town that Mr. Cudemore was in his own house, the Sergeant, with that consideration for his victim which

always characterized his proceedings, resolved to allow him one more night in his own comfortable rooms, and having warned another officer to come over to his (Mr. Usher's) quarters punctually at eight, the Sergeant went home and tranquilly slept within fifty yards of his intended prisoner.

The appointed time found Mr. Usher all dressed and ready for business. No sooner did he see from his window the approach of the constable than the Sergeant descended rapidly to the street and joined his colleague. The habits of Mr. Cudemore's establishment were accurately known. The charwoman who cleaned out the offices arrived at eight, the office-boy (or third clerk, as he loved to designate himself) at nine, and the other two clerks at ten; consequently when Mr. Usher presented himself he found the charwoman sweeping the steps, banging the mats against the neighbouring railings, and the door wide open.

"Lawk-a-mussy, it's the perlice!" chimed that lady as Mr. Usher, followed by the constable in uniform, pushed past her. The Sergeant knew all about the house quite as much as if he had lived in it all his life, and ascended at once to the second floor; there he paused, and turning round, said to his follower:

"Wait here, Brooks, and don't come in till I call you;" and then Mr. Usher quietly opened the bed-room door and found himself face to face with Mr. Cudemore, half-dressed, and grasping a hairbrush in either hand.

"Who the devil are you? What the deuce do you mean by coming up here in this sort of way?" exclaimed the money-lender angrily, but even as he spoke his lips tightened and he knew that the avenger was upon him.

"Now, Mr. Cudemore, it's no use making a fuss about it. I'm Sergeant Usher, and I've come to arrest you for the murder of John Fossdyke, at Bunbury, last September."

"Arrest me for the murder of John Fossdyke!" repeated Mr. Cudemore, and putting down the brushes he fell back some three or four paces and stole his hand towards the lid of a small davenport in a corner of the room.

"Yes," said the Sergeant, as he sprang forward, quick, agile as a wild cat, and pinned Mr. Cudemore by the wrist. "None of that nonsense! What's the use of your fumbling for a revolver. Bless your innocence, you'll find another man on the landing, and another at the door, and will never get fifty yards without being arrested. Do you think shooting me is the way to prove yourself not guilty. Don't be a fool; just finish dressing yourself before I slip on the bracelets, and we'll have a cab and go across to the Yard quietly till it's time to go down to Westminster."

"All 'right, Mr. Usher," said the moneylender. "Excuse a slight error of judgment owing to the excitement of the moment."

Cudemore then proceeded leisurely to com-

plete his toilet, and at last emerged from the dressing-room with that particularly well-stuffed note-case in his hand.

"Shall I be allowed to keep this?" he asked. "There's a good lot of money in it."

"Chuck full of bank-notes, I can see?" replied Mr. Usher. "Of course, it will be yours till you are committed, and you will be that before mid-day. Then, you know, we take care of it for you, or hand it over to any one you please to name."

"Yes, there's a good deal more than *two hundred pounds* here," said Cudemore slowly. "I've nothing to say to this Bunbury affair, of course, but the mere accusation is an awful stigma for a professional man like myself. I've often heard men of your craft have made more money by missing a thief than finding him."

"Stow that, Mr. Cudemore. I understand what you mean of course, but Silas Usher's never worked on the cross yet, and he isn't

going to begin. Now, sir, as soon as you're ready I'll send Brooks for a cab. All right," continued the Sergeant, as the money-lender signified a sullen assent; then putting his head outside the door, Mr. Usher briefly observed, "growler, Brooks, quick as you can."

They had not many minutes to wait before Brooks announced the cab was at the door, and then Mr. Usher advancing said, "I don't want to be uncivil, but I must slip these on."

"One moment, please," exclaimed Cudemore, "reach me an envelope out of the davenport behind you. They will never take this from me?" he asked anxiously, as he removed a photograph from the book.

"No," said the Sergeant, eyeing him curiously. "I fancy you'll be allowed to retain that."

Cudemore put the photograph carefully into the envelope, and then placing it with the note-case in his breast-pocket, simply held out his hands and said, "I am ready."

In an instant the steel handcuffs snapped round his wrists, and he quietly preceded Mr. Usher to the door at which Brooks stood waiting. Mr. Usher followed him down the stairs, and having seen the money-lender and the constable into a cab, delegated to the latter worthy the task of conveying the prisoner to Scotland Yard, some two or three hundred yards distance only, and turned back into the house to make a cursory overhaul of Mr. Cudemore's apartments.

It was not that Mr. Usher expected to get much out of the investigation, but it was a piece of mechanical work that he never neglected. None knew better than the Sergeant the curious monomania that compels murderers to preserve some damning evidence of their crime. It is always so trivial that in their eyes it cannot matter, and yet that little link is just the thing that knots the noose round their throats. Few now recollect the great Stansfield Hall murder, and yet the want of

a wedding certificate brought Rush to the gallows. He was hung on the evidence of his mistress, whose evidence, had she been his wife, was inadmissible.

Mr. Usher flitted and peered about the sitting-room and dining-room like a magpie, but without any result; though it is fair to say the money-lender's locks were respected and only his open repositories subjected to search, and then the Sergeant once more ascended to the second floor. His investigations here met with little more result till he came to the dressing-table and threw open the drawers; the first contained simply some half-dozen razors and a packet of shaving-paper, but in the second, amidst a lot of knicknacks, such as old studs, disabled pins, and broken sleeve-links, Mr. Usher observed something which set him a pondering.

"It would be odd if it were," said he, "but nevertheless it's odd its being here by itself.

Still, it's so astonishing the mistakes they all make that the man who can bring off a great murder is a genius almost. Anyway I'll take you," and what Mr. Usher put into his pocket was an ordinary chamber key.

CHAPTER XV.

"THE TRIAL."

The Bunbury mystery had pretty well died out of men's minds, and when alluded to people shook their heads and opined the police would never take Foxborough now; so when the first edition of the 'Globe' came out with the "Bunbury Mystery—Arrest of the Murderer," in the largest type, there was quite a sensation in London. Newspaper boys trotted along, bellowing at the top of their voices what sounded like "Bum'stery arrest of the murdrer," and got double prices for their wares. At the clubs tongues were wagging; and when it was known Mr. Cudemore, the money-lender, was

in custody on the charge, wagging faintly expressed the pace at which they oscillated.

There were members, for instance, at the Theatine who could speak with undoubted authority regarding Mr. Cudemore, and not in that loose and desultory fashion in which they had manufactured biography for James Foxborough. Although the money-lender had been prone to invest his money in theatrical circles, Mr. Sturton sent him many a client from the *jeunesse dorée*, and there were members of the Theatine who pondered gravely how this would affect certain acceptances, the renewal of which would be so infinitely simpler than the taking of them up. And the members of the Theatine being, as a rule, like the Heathen Chinee, of a disposition "childlike and bland," always preferred the simpler course.

The arrest of the murderer sufficed to fan the waning interest of the public once more into a flame over the Bunbury mystery.

That the accused should be one whose trade was usury added an additional whet to the public appetite, always prejudiced against these philanthropists, regarding them invariably as endowed with hearts of granite and no bowels of compassion — a view of the London money-lender which the Northumberland Street tragedy of some twenty years ago tended much to strengthen. Arraigned of any such crime, and public opinion is apt to condemn the luckless usurer without waiting for the production of evidence. The later editions contained an account of the prisoner's appearance at Westminster, which, of course, ended in his being remanded.

In these days, as we all know, a man accused of a capital crime is generally tried three times. First, before the coroner; secondly, before the police magistrates; and thirdly, before a judge and jury. Our system of justice is doubtless perfect, but no one can say it is either speedy or inexpensive. It will be only necessary,

therefore, to say that after some few days, during which the public were once more roused to fervent interest about the great Bunbury murder, Mr. Cudemore was committed to Newgate, there to await his trial.

A great artist was Sergeant Usher. If ever there was a man, to speak metaphorically, who delighted in keeping a few trumps up his sleeve, it was him. Very little of the real story oozed out at Westminster. He confined himself entirely to proving that Cudemore was the stranger at the Baumborough Theatre, that Cudemore was No. 11 at the Hopbine, and that Cudemore was the writer of the note, and the man John Fossdyke dined with. Quite sufficient this to justify a committal, and concerning the identity of John Fossdyke with James Foxborough the Sergeant adduced no evidence whatever. To his intense disgust, even Mr. Totterdell was not brought to London to give his evidence, Mr. Usher preferring to rely upon Miss Lightcomb's

testimony as to Mr. Cudemore having been present at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre, while he only called upon Morant to testify to the prisoner's handwriting. In the smoking-room of the Theatine it was agreed that if more evidence on this point was desirable they could furnish it, and then some astute rhetorician started the problem as to whether when a usurer came to his death by premature strangulation, acceptances become void or payable to the Crown, and this knotty point led to much wordy argument and consumption of drinks.

But the very fact of so little having come out in the public court only further awoke the curiosity of the public. Where was Foxborough? What had become of him? He, of course, was in the background; the man couldn't be a myth. Foxborough, lessee of the Syringa, was a fact, an undoubted fact. There were plenty of people who knew the Syringa, and knew that James Foxborough

was the lessee, but when it came to any knowledge of the man's personality, these people were lamentably abroad, and constrained to admit they had never seen him. Still, the Bunbury murder was once more the topic of the day, and Radstone assizes were looked forward to with absorbing interest by no inconsiderable section of the community.

A *cause célèbre* in these days of diffusion of universal knowledge, like libel and scandal, is apt to attract considerable attention. It attracts two large sections of the public, those who have nothing to do, and to whom a public scandal or case of this nature is a boon inasmuch as it gives them something to think about and talk about, and that busy division to whom it is something like a great realistic novel, unravelling itself day by day. Further, it must be noted that Mr. Cudemore was a man of resources, and in a position to engage equally eminent counsel to those retained for the Crown.

Mr. Baron Bumblesham, elected to try the case, was doubtless as incorruptible and impartial as English judges invariably are, but we cannot help our proclivities. Baron Bumblesham's were aristocratic. He metaphorically sat up like a poodle on his hind legs to a Duchess, he stood literally on his head to Royalty. He delighted in presiding over a sensational trial. It enabled him to gratify his aristocratic friends with "orders," and, like a judicious theatrical manager, he usually kept "his show" running as long as it would draw. In short, there were all the elements of a sensational trial about the Bunbury mystery, and, as said before, a sensational trial is a thing loved of the people.

Fashionable London, like fashionable Rome, takes a great interest in seeing a fellow-creature hounded to his death, although the matrons of the earlier empire city enjoyed the more extended privilege of seeing them die by the dozen, while the ladies of London must be

content to see one man wrestle for his life at a time. Civilization, in spite of all our bragging, does not advance very much, and the inherent cruelty of human nature is ever seeking to gratify its taste.

Radstone was within such easy distance of London that many of that mysterious "upper ten thousand," the fragment of the great city not condemned to labour for their living, determined to attend the trial. Mr. Baron Bumblesham found himself inundated with applications from the magnates of the land for seats on the bench, and Mr. Baron Bumblesham smiled, smirked, and promised to do his best for His Grace and My Lord, and threw the cards of Jones and Smith contemptuously into the waste-paper basket. It was widely rumoured that this would be one of the most sensational trials of the age; and that the police should suddenly arrest a man for the murder whose name had never as yet been mentioned in connection with it, and in

defiance of the strong presumptive evidence there was against the missing Foxborough, seemed to warrant such belief. When Sir Horace Silverton rose to open the case for the prosecution you might have heard a pin drop in the court, so anxious were the densely-packed audience to hear the mysterious story unfolded by one of the most gifted and fluent speakers of the Bar. Quietly and smoothly did Sir Horace run through all the preliminary story of the murder with which the public was well acquainted, and those who knew him best felt that he was simply clearing the ground for the effect he felt confident of producing.

"When Silverton begins in that way he has a devil of a case in the background," remarked a leading counsel on the circuit. "I'm going into the other court, just send round for me when he wakes up. He's not going to talk like that all the time, I know. He'll be worth listening to before he sits down."

The preliminary ground cleared, Sir Horace,

as fine a judge of dramatic effect as ever appealed to a jury, paused for a moment, passed his handkerchief across his brow, and then continued his address in a totally different tone. The quiet, clear, well-modulated voice was now exchanged for the impassioned, fervid accents with which men enunciate great creeds to the world. "Gentlemen," he said, "one James Foxborough, lessee of a Music-Hall called the Syringa, has so far borne the odium of this crime. I am about to acquit that luckless person, I trust, of any concern in it. At all events I shall produce, in the first place, evidence before you to prove that James Foxborough, of the Syringa, and John Fossdyke, solicitor of Baumborough, were one and the same person. Evidence, gentlemen, past all dispute." Here the sensation in court was such that Sir Horace had to pause for a minute or two. "It is curious, it will be hard for many of his friends in Baumborough to confess that their trusted co-mate of so many

years has been a living lie all this time ; more especially, gentlemen, will it be hard," and here Sir Horace dropped his voice to that intense whisper with which all real masters of oratory are conversant, " to those two ladies who have each in their different sphere regarded themselves as his wife. I purpose to trespass upon the private history of James Foxborough, *alias* John Fossdyke, no more than is absolutely necessary. This inquiry, as I have already pointed out, must be necessarily painful to many people, and it is no wish of the prosecution to make it more so than is unavoidable. The identity of Foxborough with Fossdyke I am compelled to prove, but I desire to go no further into his dual history. We next, gentlemen, come to the accused. Evidence will be brought before you to show that this was undoubtedly the person who stopped at the Hopbine, and with whom the deceased went over to Bunbury to dine. His note of invitation, signed James Foxborough,"

—and here Sir Horace paused as the prisoner, hitherto immovable, could not refrain from a slight start—"happens by a curious accident to have been preserved, and I need scarcely say we shall have no difficulty in identifying the handwriting to your entire satisfaction. What it was that the defendant sought to extort from the deceased we don't pretend to know, but there can be little doubt that at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre he surprised James Foxborough's secret, became aware of his dual existence, and that he took advantage of this knowledge to attempt the levying of black-mail in some form or other. You will, of course, have observed, gentlemen, that in addition to the charge of murder we have included the minor plea of manslaughter against the prisoner, and I am happy to inform you,"—and here Sir Horace became confidential to the jury, and apparently confined his address entirely to them with a total disregard of the judge and general public—"that

the theory of the prosecution and the evidence we shall adduce in support of it is more in accordance with the secondary charge. My learned friends on the other side will doubtless be able to put forward many most legitimate reasons in favour of that view of the case, and it is very possible may argue that the deceased committed suicide; but that James Foxborough did not die with his own hand I feel sure of demonstrating to your entire satisfaction," and here Sir Horace sat down amidst a subdued buzz of applause, and left the examining of the witnesses for the present to Mr. Trail his junior.

To recapitulate all the evidence we have had about the Bunbury murder would be simply wearisome both to myself and my readers, but for the proper understanding of the story we must just briefly glance at the salient points in the case.

The first witness called was Miss Lightcomb, the actress, who looked very pretty and

flustered, making a most attractive and interesting witness with which to commence a sensational trial. Her testimony was brief, and simply associated with the fact that she was acquainted with Mr. Cudemore, and had met him behind the scenes at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre. The counsel for the defence declined to cross-examine her, and it was of course transparent at once to Sir Horace Silverton and Mr. Trail that their opponents meant to put forward the theory that John Fossdyke met his death at his own hands. This was only what they expected, and it rather amused them to think of the terrible trump card they held in the background.

The next witness was our old friend, Mr. Totterdell; the supreme moment of his life had at length arrived, and it is no hyperbole to say that he swelled, so to speak, in the box like a turkey-cock with his plumes *en evidence*. Mr. Totterdell was the man who could speak

to the identity of the prisoner at the bar. Mr. Totterdell was the man who had formed his theory concerning the great Bunbury murder, and Mr. Totterdell was about to explain to a listening impatient world how Cudemore, the paid agent of the old villain Foxborough, had compassed the death of John Fossdyke. But, sad to say, the coroner, in his arbitrary curtness, was as nothing to Mr. Trail, the examining barrister for the Crown. Some half-dozen questions amply sufficed to establish the identity of the prisoner at the bar with the stranger who sat next to Mr. Totterdell at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre; and, then, not only did Mr. Trail intimate that he had nothing further to ask, but the counsel for the defence equally seemed no more desirous of Mr. Totterdell's views or knowledge on the subject. When Mr. Totterdell, clutching frantically at his fast diminishing opportunity, commenced, *apropos* to nothing, to say, "And it's my opinion, my lord," he was sternly

informed that his opinion was not required, and when he faltered forth that he "wished to explain," he was sharply told that if he did not hold his tongue and immediately leave the witness-box he would be committed for contempt of court. Mr. Winkle, after giving his evidence in the famous case of Bardell *versus* Pickwick was not more hopelessly crushed than was Mr. Totterdell as he retired from the arena in which he had contemplated immortalizing himself. He was like a man stunned, and could hardly realize his opportunity had been and was lost.

The next witnesses were the people of the Hopbine. Old Joe Marlinson, in a mingled state of trepidation, exasperation, and rather too much liquor, was a comic witness whom Mr. Trail handled tenderly. He was simply, of course, called upon to identify the prisoner with the gentleman who had taken No. 11 bed-room last September, and with whom Mr. Fossdyke had dined. A little erratic and

irrelevant in his testimony no doubt, as was William Gibbons, the boots, who followed him, but both quite clear as to Mr. Cudemore's personality. But when Eliza Salter, the chambermaid, entered the box, and Sir Horace Silverton himself took her in hand, a stir ran through the court, and without knowing why, people began to feel that one of the great sensations of what was rumoured would be a great sensational trial was about to commence. Her recognition of the prisoner as No. 11, afterwards known as James Foxborough, of course created little interest; but when Sir Horace skilfully drew from her the discovery of the note in the empty fire-grate the court was positively breathless with excitement.

"Yes, she remembered the little old gentleman, whom she now knew to be Sergeant Usher, the famous detective, ordering the fire in that room. She recollected his suddenly stopping her as she was about to throw

the waste papers she had taken out of the empty fireplace on the fire she had just lit. Remembered perfectly his keeping one of them; was scolded by her master for having allowed him to do so; did not know in the least what the paper was Mr. Usher preserved; it seemed to be a small note of some kind, but she could say nothing more positive than that."

Close observers noticed that for the first time the prisoner looked uneasy at the turn things were taking, and that Mr. Royston, the counsel for the defence, manifested marked attention.

Further examined, Eliza Salter said she could swear to the key of Mr. Fossdyke's room being in the door when he occupied it. The door was locked, and had to be broke open on the afternoon his death was discovered, which was not till five or six hours after the prisoner had left the Hopbine. Did not know what became of the key which

was missing, and she had never seen it since till three days ago."

Great sensation in court.

"It was shown her then by Sergeant Usher. She believed the key shown her to be the identical key of the bed-room in which John Fossdyke was discovered dead. Had seen it tried, and it undoubtedly fitted the lock as if made for it. It was, of course, difficult to swear to a key of that description, but she was of opinion that was the missing key."

For the first time Mr. Royston indulged in sharp cross-examination, but upon the two points to which he directed his endeavours, he failed utterly. Eliza Salter professed to know nothing whatever about the scrap of a note, which she had raked out of the empty grate, and which Sergeant Usher had impounded, but that he had so seized upon a piece of paper and kept it, she was very firm and decided about. That the key of John Foss-

dyke's room was in the door the night he dined at the Hopbine, she was equally clear about; that it was missing next day and she had never seen it since, till Mr. Usher produced what she believed to be it, she was equally positive about, and when she left the box there was a growing impression that things were not going altogether well for the prisoner.

And now came a point in the trial which not a little discomposed Sergeant Usher. That eminent detective always prided himself upon handing a case over so complete that the attorneys had nothing to do but put it on paper for counsel's information. It had never struck Mr. Usher, keen, shrewd judge as he was of evidence, that there could be the slightest difficulty in proving John Fossdyke and James Foxborough to be the same man, but that was now just what came to pass. The whole thing became a question of photographs, and wonderful as these sun

likenesses are at times, still it is within the knowledge of every one that now and again, and by no means unfrequently, comes the carte that we fail to recognize. There were plenty of people who knew John Fossdyke, there was no lack of folks who could speak to the identity of James Foxborough, but to lay hold of any one who had known the two men, or rather the one man under the two aspects, unless it was the prisoner in the dock, was curiously enough unattainable.

Mr. Usher was troubled considerably at this point. Mr. Morant testified, as did some other witnesses, to their belief that the photograph of John Fossdyke represented James Foxborough, and there were numerous people, including the photographer himself, to swear that it was that of the Town Clerk of Baumborough. Mr. Royston saw his opportunity, and on cross-examination so shook this evidence as to leave it open to question whether Foxborough, lessee of the Syringa, was not an

entity after all, despite the theory of the prosecution; but the great eminent lawyer who had rescued many a graceless neck from the gallows was no way blind to the fact that though he might establish a mythical Foxborough in the background, there was no getting away from Cudemore, his client, having been the entertainer of the dead man at the Hopbine. That John Fossdyke committed suicide was of course the defence he intended to set up. So far the prosecution could advance no theory of black-mailing on the part of his client. The key alone threatened to be an awkward incident, and knowing his friend Sir Horace as well as he did, and having the experience he had of Sergeant Usher, Mr. Royston felt sure that key and that note were the two awkward features in the case as far as his client was concerned.

The next evidence produced for the prosecution was that apparently innocent invitation to

dinner which had lured the dead man to his doom; curious, like most of the minor links in a great crime, on account of its prosaic simplicity, and horribly suggestive of how little separates our every-day, humdrum life from that lurid melodrama we read of in the newspapers.

Both Morant and Mr. Sturton swore clearly to this being the handwriting of the prisoner at the bar. The former clearly and staunchly, the second in that nervous, hysterical manner which, though apt to be terribly disconcerted by cross-examination, carries irresistible conviction to the hearts of a jury. Such a witness may be bullied and frightened by the fierce battery of questioning to which he finds himself subjected, but his hearers still feel he is telling them the truth to the very utmost of his ability.

And then stepped into the witness-box Sergeant Usher, and everybody knew that the great sensational scene of the tragedy was on

at last. A quiet, trained, practical witness this, who was neither to be flurried nor disconcerted, who understood exactly how much reply to give to the questions addressed to him, and volunteered no uninvited matter. The Court was so still you might have heard a pin drop, as the saying goes, while the famous detective clearly and audibly trickled forth his discovery of that famous note in the empty grate of the room occupied by the dead man. Judge, jury, and the public listened in that entranced way they yield to the great effect of a skilled dramatist, when he has what is technically termed "caught his audience," and when Sir Horace went on to draw forth the story of Cudemore's arrest, and the finding of the key, the excitement of the hearers found vent in such a murmur of applause that the judge threatened to clear the court if it was not instantly suppressed. And then came that tinge of bitterness for Mr. Usher which the Roman poet tells us lurked at the bottom of

all fountains of perennial bliss, that *surgit amari aliquid*, as Sir Horace endeavoured to draw from him his theory of John Fossdyke and James Foxborough being one and the same person. Nobody knew better than the accomplished counsel the risk of endeavouring to prove too much; nobody could be more morally convinced that this story was true than he was, and also of the great difficulty of demonstrating it legally; but the fact had been introduced into the case, and was not now to be passed over. Now, like everybody else in the case on this point, Sergeant Usher was a worthless witness. He had never seen John Fossdyke till he saw him lying dead in the Hopbine at Bunbury, while he had never seen James Foxborough at all. He tried to insinuate some of the evidence he had collected on this point, but it was not likely that an old hand like Mr. Royston would allow that, and after Mr. Usher had left the box that eminent counsel felt quite assured the identity of the

two men would never be established legally in that trial. That it was so in reality he had no more doubt than his opponents, but it was most decidedly against his client's interest to admit it.

Ellen Maitland followed, and again gave evidence as to the dagger having been the property of her master Mr. Foxborough; had missed it, but could scarcely say how long before the inquest at Bunbury. Knew Mr. Cudemore as a friend of her master's. He might certainly have had the opportunity of taking the dagger in question, but could not say for one moment that he did so.

And then came the medical testimony. An admirable witness was Dr. Ingleby, clear and terse, but strongly of opinion that the wound which caused John Fossdyke's death was not self-inflicted. His colleague wobbled, and eventually may be said to have gone all to pieces in the hands of Mr. Trail.

Sir Horace Silverton addressed the court

with all that practised fluency that had done so much to make his reputation. Glossing over the double identity business as a thing which, though admitting of no moral doubt, he confessed to the prosecution having failed legally to establish, he pointed out how little the guilt of the prisoner depended on that. Did Cudemore write that note? Was Cudemore the man at the Hopbine who entertained John Fossdyke? And was the key found in the drawer of Cudemore's dressing-table, the key of the room in which John Fossdyke died? Surely on these three points the jury could have no doubt. The theory of the defence was the dead man committed suicide, but the story of the key negatived that. He would simply submit this case to them: Did not the prisoner induce the late John Fossdyke to dine with him under a false pretence for some hidden purposes of his own? Did not Fossdyke meet with his death on that occasion, and did not the prisoner Cudemore never come

forward about the affair till brought before them by the police. They had listened to the evidence of Sergeant Usher, and if after that they did not feel it their duty to return a verdict of "Wilful Murder" against the prisoner, he should feel more surprised and pleased than he ever felt in his whole professional career.

And then, after a two hours' speech, Sir Horace resumed his seat.

The summing up of the Judge was both lucid and exhaustive, but it was too close a repetition of Sir Horace Silverton's argument to admit of introduction into these pages, and when the jury withdrew it was felt that the sole chance for the prisoner was that they might possibly arrive at the conclusion the dead man died by his own hand, and yet in the face of that evidence concerning the key it seemed a decision hard to come to.

Ten, twenty, forty minutes passed; it was close upon the hour when the jury once more

trooped into their box, and the Foreman in low tones delivered a verdict of "Wilful Murder" against the prisoner.

Brief and solemn was the Judge's address, but it concluded with his assumption of the black cap, and that short, terribly plain announcement concluding with "God Almighty have mercy upon your soul," which nobody that has once heard it can ever forget.

CHAPTER XVI.

CUDEMORE'S CONFESSION.

IT has occurred to many of us to carry our lives in our hands at times. In the savage surges of the Mid-Atlantic. In the fierce tempestuous storms that rage round either of the famous Capes—those southern extremities of Africa and America, where winds and waves seem never at rest. In the treacherous shoals of the James and Mary, where the Hoogley and the Ganges join hands, and combine in the sinking of ships. In the petty skirmishes of Alma, of Inkerman, Balaclava, and the storming of Lucknow which preceded that terrible twenty-five days' campaign in Egypt, culminating in that awful twenty-five minutes' action

at Tel-el-Kebir. If it is given to statues to smile, and after the late wearisome trial who shall say that "artistic grace" is denied them, "the Iron Duke's" effigy at Hyde Park Corner must have been a study that day when the Egyptian heroes strode past him and he recalled the memories of Talavera, Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajos, and Waterloo.

But to be told you are to die a dog's death in the grim grey of the morning, that you are to suffer that excessively brutal extinction peculiar only to the fierce Anglo-Saxon race, who, under the pseudonym of justice, put their fellow-creatures to death in the most degrading fashion it is possible for human beings to compass; well, that is ugly to think upon. Cudemore was no coward, but it is easy to imagine a shudder running through a strong man's veins at the prospect of terminating his existence in such miserable fashion. The crucifixion of the Romans might be more cruel, but it was infinitely less debasing.

With all our brag about civilization, who can say that the Greeks, with a bowl of hemlock, were not infinitely before us in this respect.

Still Ralph Cudemore is condemned to die, and though the public have great doubts about that sentence being carried out in its integrity, and even the prisoner himself has received a hint that from what transpired on the trial the making of a clean breast of it would probably tend very much to his advantage, yet he has so far not spoken. Mr. Royston, indeed, has exerted himself on all sides to obtain commutation of the sentence, and risky though it may be, he believes if Cudemore could only be induced to speak there will be no chance of the extreme penalty being resorted to. Sir Horace Silverton and the counsel for the Crown are of the like way of thinking; in short, the motive for the deliberate murder is palpably wanting, whilst it is so easy to show cause why it should never have come to pass.

And the sole man with a faint dim perception of the truth is Mr. Sturton. Very vague indeed even is his theory concerning it, but it has mistily crossed his brain that the money-lender's love for Foxborough's (now pretty conclusively proved to be Fossdyke's) daughter might have had a good deal to say to it, while in the seclusion of his cell Ralph Cudemore occasionally smiled triumphantly as he thought of that afternoon at Tapton Cottage when he had caught Nid Foxborough in his arms and snatched half a score of kisses from her lips in the frenzy of his lustful love. He would muse over this till it maddened him and seemed utterly regardless of the position in which he stood; the nearer approach of that grim grey morning which was to give his throat to the rope, and his last gasp to this world, troubled him no iota; that he could not possibly take Nid with him no doubt did. He could not have expressed it, but he felt like the savage hero of Swinburne's *Les Noyades*.

"For never a man being mean like me,
Shall die like me till the whole world dies.
I shall drown with her laughing for love, and she
Mix with me, touching me lips and eyes."

Like the rude peasant who met this doom on the Loire bound hand and foot to the dainty aristocrat idol of his distant idolatry, when savage Carrier daily published the banns for what he termed "Republican marriages," Cudemore could have died with a laugh on his lips, providing Nid Foxborough was locked in his arms. It was well for Nid that he was laid by the heels in prison, for when a man contracts such fierce love for a woman he is capable of almost any crime to gratify his passion. He sullenly rejected all consolation from the chaplain, saying with a bitter sneer that if a man didn't know how to die without priestly teaching, he was either fool or coward. But one morning he suddenly expressed a wish to see the Governor and Sergeant Usher, "the man who," as he said, "had tracked him to the grave." If

the expression was not exactly correct the authorities quite understood what he meant; the great detective had brought a good many men in his time to that leap into eternity which few face in the grey of the morning without a shiver.

The Governor of the gaol arrived, bringing Mr. Usher with him, and commenced explaining that he, Cudemore, must build no hopes of a remission of his sentence on whatever he might be about to confess.

"Hopes," rejoined the prisoner ironically; "no, if I had any hope left I shouldn't come whining to you for my life, and it's not for that. I've sent for you to tell you how the whole thing came about. The Sergeant there is the first man that's bested me since I was twenty. He's the only man in England, I believe, that could ever have solved my riddle. He's not done it quite, but he's got so near that I am going to tell him the true story. I thought you might like to

write it down, you know, and so asked you to hear it too. How he"—and here by a gesture Cudemore indicated the Sergeant—"got the clue to Fossdyke and Foxborough being the same man of course I don't know. I believed it a thing known only to myself, and as he rightly conjectured, it only came to my knowledge by the sheerest of accidents at the opening of the Baumborough Theatre. Now don't ask questions, Mr. Usher, because I'm going to tell you all you want to know. What took me to Baumborough? A combination of business and bad luck, for which I am about to pay the penalty. Pooh! a bad night at baccarât has put men quite as much out of their world as a bad night's luck is about to put me. I came down to Bunbury to look after James Foxborough. He had borrowed, as you know, six thousand pounds of me and my friends, and I was mighty curious to know what the speculation was that he meant to put it into.

"Yes, Mr. Usher, you're quite right," said the money-lender, in reply to the detective's inquiring look, "I undoubtedly meant to force my finger into the pie if I could and thought it worth my while. And a new theatre was an affair I was sure to look at, and without a thought of James Foxborough I ran over for the evening to see it. With what results you know. It killed him, and is about to kill me.

"Now I didn't even know Foxborough's whereabouts. It was a mere accident—life's a succession of them—which led me to look for him down in these parts. But when I discovered the secret I knew exactly I thought the price it would cost him to silence my tongue, and but for his terrible irritation and dismay at my discovery, I still think things might have gone right. He lost his temper, a stupid thing to do, and both our lives, as it turned out. Am I penitent?" Cudemore continued, turning sharply to the

Governor, "not a bit; if I'd to play the cards over again I don't think I'd change my lead."

"You haven't mentioned the stakes," observed Mr. Usher, sententiously.

"No, you'll perhaps hardly understand quite how high they were," rejoined Cudemore, slowly. "I wanted to marry his daughter."

"Good lord!" exclaimed the Sergeant; "what, that pretty girl mixed up in the game? Well, I'm cornered this time. If her sweet face was in it I'm surprised at nothing you've got to say."

"Was in it?" retorted the prisoner, fiercely. "Is in it? you may ask at this moment. If I didn't know I'd irretrievably lost her, I'd fight for my life this minute. You, of course, don't understand such things," continued Cudemore, with a contemptuous wave of his hand to the Governor; "but you do, Sergeant. In the course of your experience

you've met men who could sell their soul for a woman's love, or the possession of the woman they do love. To have called Nid Foxborough my wife I think there's mighty little in this world I'd have flinched at. Murder! I'd have walked over six men's graves providing they led her and me to the altar. Foxborough and I had quarrelled about this very subject before. I could have taken care of the girl as a lady, and was good enough mate for her, I thought, but he wouldn't give her to me. Can you be surprised that when I found I held all the trumps I put the screw on? My note! I forgive Sturton, poor weak fool; once you'd got the clue, which you did through that young brute Morant, there were clouds of witnesses to identify my handwriting. Of course, I told Foxborough I knew the secret of his life. Foxborough knew perfectly well that when I asked him to dinner it was simply to arrange at what price my tongue

could be stilled. I named it, and again we had angry words on the subject. But we stood on a different footing this time. It was for me to dictate, for him to submit, and he had the wit to see it could not be my interest to expose him. Of course it was not. I could make nothing out of showing him up to the public, but a dead hold over a man is always worth having, eh, Mr. Usher? let him be the poorest pauper that ever crawled. You can use a poverty-stricken wretch, if you've got him in irons in this fashion, at times to advantage. Well, as I said, we quarrelled and parted over it. He wouldn't give me Nid, and I would take nothing less. He went off to his room furious but frightened. Though he knew it could not be in my interest to expose him, he lacked the sense to stand by that knowledge. He wouldn't give in, but he was so obviously upset by the discovery of his secret that I thought I could carry

my point, and that my best chance was before he could pull himself together. I went to his chamber after we had parted in the sitting-room and recommenced the argument. We had drunk a good bit of wine and he got furious, and at last, saying he would kick a scoundrel like me out of the house, advanced in most threatening manner towards me. No, Mr. Usher, I'm not particular, and I'm no coward, but I do know when I've the worst of the weights, and I'm not keen about being kicked; for the matter of that never knew but one low class attorney that was; but when Foxborough or Fossdyke 'went for me' I had to meet a bigger man than myself. That cursed dagger lay on the table. He had put it in his bag, no doubt, as a paper knife; I snatched it up instinctively to defend myself, and when that brief two minutes' struggle was over John Fossdyke lay dead at my feet. Whether he ran on the dagger—I think and hope he did—or whether I struck at him

with it I can't say, but it don't matter much now to either of us. He's dead, and I soon shall be. That, Mr. Usher, is the true solution of the riddle you have spent such time and patience over, and solved near enough to hang a man."

"Most folks," remarked Mr. Usher gravely, as Cudemore paused, "think a man with the grave gaping ready for him can't lie. I know better, but I ain't, take it all round, a bad judge of truth when I hear it, and it's truth, sir, he's telling us now;" and as he spoke the Sergeant glanced sharply towards the Governor, who was rapidly committing the prisoner's confession to paper previous to reading it over to him.

"Shake hands," cried the prisoner warmly, "you've tracked me to the gallows, but you recognize that I'm a man, Usher. You see that I'm no more afraid to die for mad love of a woman than scores of others have been before me. Once more I say, Foxborough

met his death at my hands as I tell you, and by accident, though I would have killed him, or half a dozen more, if I had thought it would get me Nid for a wife. To lock the door, return to town according to my original intention, and rely upon my assumed name to avoid detection, was so obviously what appeared to be my game, that I should accept it can surprise no one. If it hadn't been for the fluke of you're finding that scrap of paper, Mr. Usher, I should be at large this moment, and you would be still hunting for James Foxborough. If either of you know the game of poker you will understand what it is to have four aces in your hand, and be beat by a flush sequence. That's my case, the aces would be good enough to back for fifty years, but there is just that one off chance, they may be rolled over. There, I've said my say, and open my mouth no more; ask the Governor there next month whether I died with my heart in my mouth,

or as a man who dared to play dice with the devil for a woman and lost should."

"You'd die game enough," whispered the detective, as he gripped Cudemore's hand, "but it isn't likely to come to that. I'd to run you down, mind, as a matter of business; but I'm just as sorry, now it's over, as any of the swells down Melton way are at the death of a stout fox." And with that comforting assurance Mr. Usher followed the Governor out of the cell.

* * * * *

The play is over, the curtain and the lights are down, and the audience are seeking cabs and carriages, omnibuses and overcoats, and it is perhaps well for him that the author cannot respond to "a call." We have all heard of Artemus Ward's artist that painted *the* famous picture of his show. How the New York public couldn't rest till they saw him, and how when they did, *they hove chairs at him*," and that fate awaits author, artist,

and dramatist at times, though they may give the best that is in them. If hard it is righteous; we gamble for public approbation, and it is childish to whimper because one casts "the dog's throw" occasionally.

What more am I to tell you? that Cudemore's confession, under Mr. Royston's skilful manipulation, resulted in the extreme penalty being commuted to some seven years' penal servitude you have already settled for yourselves; that Morant, under steady Phil Soames's guidance, became a prosperous brewer in Baumborough you can also easily imagine; while that the steeple chimes of the old church rung out blithely for a double wedding some few months after Cudemore's trial is superfluous to mention. That Baumborough should be much divided over which was the prettiest of those two brides is a question Baumborough will probably wrangle over till sweet Bessie Hyde and coquettish little Nid are laid—and long may

it be hence—in their graves. You may think these people don't exist, ladies and gentlemen. I can only say for the last six months they have been terribly alive to me, very much more so than they will probably ever be to you. How Mr. Totterdell became an "Ancient Mariner," whose crooked forefinger was dreaded as that of him who slew the albatross, can be also easily conjectured. He was the terror of Baumborough for some few years, although his particular views of the famous trial were never exactly ascertained.

Two women there were to whom this was an infinitely sad and sorrowful story, and these were the two wives of the dead duplicate man. To keep the truth from either of them was impossible, but from the day she learnt it, to her death, the name of her husband never passed Mrs. Fossdyke's lips. She knew, poor thing, that she had never been his wife, and that to a woman means much. With proud Mrs. Foxborough it was

different; there was no doubt about her wedding-ring nor marriage certificate. She managed the Syringa for many a year after Nid had left Tapton Cottage, and successfully, too. Like most histrionic stars, she had no wish to retire. She visited her daughters at Baumborough now and again, and was made much of by each, but she and—well—Mrs. Fossdyke never were allowed to meet.

THE END.

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