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by G. A. Henty**

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COLONEL THORNDYKE'S SECRET

By G. A. Henty.

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PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION.

“Colonel Thorndyke's Secret” is a story so far out of the ordinary that it will not be inappropriate to speak a few words regarding the tale and its unusually successful author, Mr. George Alfred Henty.

The plot of the story hinges upon the possession of a valuable bracelet, of diamonds, stolen from a Hindoo idol by a British soldier in India. This bracelet falls into the possession of Colonel Thorndyke, who, shortly afterward, is sent home to England because of his wounds. The secret concerning the bracelet is told to the Colonel's brother, a country squire, and the treasure is left to younger members of the Thorndyke family.

As is well known today, the theft of anything from a Hindoo temple is considered an extraordinary crime in India, and when this occurs it becomes a religious duty for one or more persons to hunt down the thief and bring back the property taken from the heathen god.

The members of the Thorndyke family soon learn that they are being watched. But this is at a time when highwaymen are numerous in this part of England, and they cannot determine whether the work is that of the “knights of the roads” or that of the Lascars after the famous bracelet. A mysterious death follows, and the younger members of the family are almost stunned, not knowing what will happen next. They would give the bracelet up, but do not know where it is hidden, the secret having been in the sole possession of the member now dead. In this quandary the young hero of the tale rises to the occasion and determines to join the London police force and become a detective, with the hope of ultimately clearing up the mystery. Thrilling adventures of a most unusual kind follow, and at last something of the mystery is explained. The bracelet and other jewelry are unearthed, and it is decided to take the bracelet to Amsterdam and offer it to the diamond cutters at that place. But the carrying of the bracelet is both difficult and dangerous. How the mission is brought to a conclusion, and what part the Lascars played in the final adventure, will be found in the pages that follow.

It can truthfully be said that Mr. Henty is easily the most popular of all English story tellers, his books for boys enjoying a circulation of from a hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand per year. His tales are all clean, and although some are full of exciting situations and thrilling to the last degree, they are of a high moral tone, while the English employed is of the best.

The present story is of peculiar value as giving a good insight into country and town life in England over a hundred years ago, when railways and telegraph lines were unknown and when the “knights of the road” were apt to hold up any stagecoach that happened to come along. It also gives a truthful picture of the dark and underhanded work accomplished at times by those of East Indian blood, especially when on what they consider a religious mission.

CHAPTER I.

Squire Thorndyke, of the Manor House of Crawley, was, on the 1st of September; 1782, walking up and down the little terrace in front of the quaint old house in an unusually disturbed mood. He was a man of forty three or four, stoutly and strongly built, and inclined to be portly. Save the loss of his wife four years before, there had been but little to ruffle the easy tenor of his life. A younger son, he had, at his mother's death, when he was three and twenty, come in for the small estate at Crawley, which had been her jointure.

For ten years he had led a life resembling that of most of his neighbors; he had hunted and shot, been a regular attendant at any main of cocks that was fought within fifteen miles of Crawley, had occasionally been up to London for a week or two to see the gay doings there. Of an evening he had generally gone down to the inn, where he talked over, with two or three of his own condition and a few of the better class of farmers, the news of the day, the war with the French, the troubles in Scotland, the alarming march of the Young Pretender, and his defeat at Culloden—with no very keen interest in the result, for the Southern gentry and yeomen, unlike those in the North, had no strong leanings either way. They had a dull dislike for Hanoverian George, but no great love for the exiled Stuarts, whose patron, the King of France, was an enemy of England.

More often, however, their thoughts turned upon local topics—the holding up of the coach of Sir James Harris or Squire Hamilton by highwaymen; the affray between the French smugglers and the Revenue men

near Selsea Bill or Shoreham; the delinquencies of the poaching gangs; the heaviness of the taxes, and the price of corn.

At the age of thirty-three Squire Thorndyke married the daughter of a neighboring landowner; a son was born and three years later Mrs. Thorndyke died. Since then the Squire had led a more retired life; he still went down to smoke his pipe at the inn parlor, but he gave up his visits to town; and cock fights, and even bull baiting, were no longer attractions to him. He was known as a good landlord to the three or four farmers who held land under him; was respected and liked in the village, where he was always ready to assist in cases of real distress; was of an easygoing disposition and on good terms with all his neighbors.

But today he was unusually disturbed in his mind. A messenger had ridden up two hours before with a letter from London. It was as follows:

“MY DEAR BROTHER JOHN:

“You will be surprised indeed at this letter from me, who, doubtless, you suppose to be fighting in India. I have done with fighting, and am nearly done with life. I was shot in the battle of Buxar, eighteen months ago. For a time the surgeons thought that it was going to be fatal; then I rallied, and for some months it seemed that, in spite of the ball that they were never able to find, I was going to get over it, and should be fit for service again. Then I got worse; first it was a cough, then the blood used to come up, and they said that the only chance for me was to come home. I did not believe it would be of any use, but I thought that I would rather die at home than in India, so home I came, and have now been a week in London.

“I thought at first of going down to my place at Reigate, and having you and your boy there with me; but as I have certainly not many weeks, perhaps not many days, to live, I thought I would come down to you; so the day after you receive this letter I shall be with you. I shall not bring my little girl down; I have left her in good hands, and I shall only bring with me my Hindoo servant. He will give you no trouble—a mat to sleep on, and a little rice to eat, will satisfy his wants; and he will take the trouble of me a good deal off your hands. He was a Sepoy in my regiment, and has always evinced the greatest devotion for me. More than once in battle he has saved my life, and has, for the last three years, been my servant, and has nursed me since I have been ill as tenderly as a woman could have done. As I shall have time to tell you everything when I arrive, I will say no more now.”

The news had much affected John Thorndyke. His brother George was five years his senior, and had gone out as a cadet in the company's service when John was but thirteen, and this was his first home coming. Had it not been for a portrait that had been taken of him in his uniform just before he sailed, John would have had but little remembrance of him. In that he was represented as a thin, spare youth, with an expression of quiet determination in his face. From his father John had, of course, heard much about him.

“Nothing would satisfy him but to go out to India, John. There was, of course, no occasion for it, as he would have this place after me—a fine estate and a good position: what could he want more? But he was a curious fellow. Once he formed an opinion there was no persuading him to change it. He was always getting ideas such as no one else would think of; he did not care for anything that other people cared for; never hunted nor shot. He used to puzzle me altogether with his ways, and, 'pon my word, I was not sorry when he said he would go to India, for there was no saying how he might have turned out if he had stopped here. He never could do anything like anybody else: nothing that he could have done would have surprised me.

“If he had told me that he intended to be a play actor, or a Jockey, or a private, or a book writer, I should not have been surprised. Upon my word, it was rather a relief to me when he said, 'I have made up my mind to go into the East India Service, father. I suppose you can get me a cadetship?' At least that was an honorable profession; and I knew, anyhow, that when he once said 'I have made up my mind, father,' no arguments would move him, and that if I did not get him a cadetship he was perfectly capable of running away, going up to London, and enlisting in one of their white regiments.”

John Thorndyke's own remembrances were that his brother had always been good natured to him, that he had often told him long stories about Indian adventures, and that a short time before he went away, having heard that he had been unmercifully beaten by the schoolmaster at Reigate for some trifling fault, he had gone down to the town, and had so battered the man that the school had to be closed for a fortnight. They had always kept up a correspondence. When he received the news of his father's death George had written to him, begging him to go down to Reigate, and to manage the estate for him.

“Of course,” he said, “you will draw its income as long as you are there. I mayn't be back for another twenty years; one gets rich out here fast, what with plunder and presents and one thing and another, and it is no use to have money accumulating at home, so just live on the place as if it were your own, until I come home to turn you out.”

John had declined the offer.

“I am very well where I am,” he wrote, “and the care of the estate would be a horrible worry to me; besides, I have just married, and if I ever have any children they would be brought up beyond their station. I have done what I can for you. I have seen the family lawyers, who have engaged a man who has been steward to Sir John Hieover, and looked after the estate during his son's minority. But the young blade, on coming of age, set to work to make ducks and drakes of the property, and Newman could not bear to see the estate going to the Jews, so, as luck would have it, he resigned a month ago, and has been appointed steward at Reigate. Of course, if you don't like the arrangement you must write and say so. It will be a year before I get your answer, and he has only been engaged for certain for that time; it must lie with you as to permanent arrangement.”

So Newman had taken charge of the Reigate estate, and had continued to manage it ever since, although George had written home in great displeasure at his offer being refused.

Inside the Manor the bustle of preparations was going on; the spare room, which had not been used for many years, was being turned out, and a great fire lighted to air it. John Thorndyke had sent a letter by the returning messenger to a friend in town, begging him to go at once to Leadenhall Street and send down a supply of Indian condiments for his brother's use, and had then betaken himself to the garden to think the matter over. The next day a post chaise arrived, bringing the invalid and his colored servant, whose

complexion and Indian garb struck the maids with an awe not unmingled with alarm. John Thorndyke could hardly believe that the bent and emaciated figure was that of his brother, but he remembered the voice when the latter said, holding out his hand to him:

"Well, brother John, here I am, what is left of me. Gracious, man, who would have thought that you were going to grow up such a fine tall fellow? You are more fitted to be a soldier than I am. No, don't try to help me out; Ramoo will do that—he is accustomed to my ways, and I would as soon trust myself to a rogue elephant as to you."

"I am sorry to see you looking so bad, brother George."

"What must be must. I have had my fling; and after thirty years of marching and fighting, I have no right to grumble if I am laid upon my back at last."

Leaning on Ramoo's arm, Colonel Thorndyke made his way into the house, and when the Hindoo had arranged the cushions of the sofa, took his place there in a half reclining position.

"I am not always as bad as this, John," he said; "the jolting of your confounded roads has been too much for me. If I were the King I would hang every fellow who had anything to do with them—contractors, boards of county magistrates, and the whole lot. If I had known what it was going to be like I would have hired a sedan chair, and had myself carried down. That is what I have been doing in London; but I would rather have had an Indian palkee, that one could have lain down comfortably in."

"What shall I get you first, George? I have got some lemons."

"I want something better than lemons, John. Have you any Burgundy handy?"

"Yes, plenty."

"If you give a bottle to Ramoo he will know how much water I want."

Here the servants entered with a tray with a chicken and a dish of kidneys.

"I sent up yesterday for some of the Indian things that you are accustomed to, George, but they have not come down yet."

"I brought a store down with me. This will do capitally for the present. Ramoo will do the cooking for me in future. He need not go into the kitchen to scare the maids. I could see they looked at him as if he had been his infernal majesty, as he came in. He can do it anywhere; all he wants is an iron pot with some holes in it, and some charcoal. He can squat out there on the veranda, or, if it is bad weather, any shed will do for him.

"Well, it is nice to be home again, John," he went on, after he had eaten a few mouthfuls of chicken and drunk a tumbler of Burgundy and water. "I am glad to be back, now I am here, though I dare say I should not have come home for another ten years if it had not been for this rascally bullet. Where is your boy?"

"He is away at school."

"Well, I think I will go up to bed at once, if you don't mind, John. I shall be fitter to talk in the morning."

The next day, indeed, Colonel Thorndyke was materially better. His voice was stronger and more cheery, and when he came down after breakfast he took his seat in an easy chair instead of on the sofa.

"Now, brother," he said, "we will have a cozy chat. There are several things I want done, but the chief of these is that when I am gone you should go down to Reigate, as I wanted you to do ten years ago. I want you to seem to be its master, as well as be its master, until Millicent comes of age, if not longer. Her name is Millicent Conyers Thorndyke. I wish her to be called Millicent Conyers, and to appear as your ward, and not as your niece and heiress of the property. If there is one thing in the world I have a greater horror of than another, it is of a girl being married for her money. I don't suppose that anyone knows that I have a daughter—at any rate, none beyond a few Indian chums. She was sent home with an ayah under the charge of the widow of a comrade of mine. I had been away for months, and only went back to Calcutta in time to see her mother die. So that is all right."

"I could not do such a thing as that, George. I should be living under false colors. It is not that I mind so much leaving here and looking after the child's interest at Reigate, but I could not possibly take possession of the place as its owner when I should not be so. Besides, there are other objections. Mark would grow up supposing himself to be the heir."

"Mark will be all right. I have, since I have been in London, signed a will, leaving the rest of my fortune between them. I had it drawn up by our father's solicitors, relying upon your consent to do what I asked you. I have explained the matter to them, and given them the assignment, or whatever they call it, of the Reigate estate to you, until my daughter comes of age, appointing them her guardians should you die before that. Thus, you will be placed in a proper position; and should it be known by any means that the child is my daughter, that deed will still be a proof that you are carrying out my wishes, and are absolute master of the estate until she comes of age."

"I must think it all over, George. It is a singular proposal, and I own I would rather things went on in their regular course."

"Yes, yes, I understand that, John; but you see I have altogether set my mind on this matter. I want to know that my girl is not going to be married for her money; and, at any rate, that deed makes you master of the Reigate estates for the next thirteen years; so the only thing that I really want of you is to let the girl be called your ward instead of your niece, and that she and everyone else shall be in ignorance that she is an heiress. So far from doing the girl a wrong, you will be doing her a benefit; and as I have explained the whole matter to our lawyers, no one can possibly think that the thing has been done from any motive whatever except that of affording me satisfaction."

"I will think the matter over," John repeated. "Of course, brother, it has been in your mind for some time, but it comes altogether fresh to me, and I must look at it in every light. For myself, I have no wish at all to become master of our father's estate. I have been going in one groove for the last twenty years, and don't care about changing it. You wished me to do so ten years ago, and I declined then, and the ten years have not made me more desirous of change than I was before."

"All right; think it over. Please send Ramoo in to me; I have tired myself in talking."

John Thorndyke smoked many churchwarden pipes in the little arbor in his garden that day. In the afternoon his brother was so weak and tired that the subject of the conversation was not reverted to. At eight o'clock the Colonel went off to bed. The next morning, after breakfast, he was brighter again.

"Well, John, what has come of your thinking?" he asked.

"I don't like it, George."

"You mayn't like it, John, but you will do it. I am not going to have my girl run after by ruined spendthrifts who want her money to repair their fortunes; and I tell you frankly, if you refuse I shall go up to town tomorrow, and I shall make a new will, leaving all my property to your son, subject to a life annuity of 200 pounds a year to the child, and ordering that, in the event of his dying before he comes of age, or of refusing to accept the provisions of the will, or handing any of the property or money over to my daughter, the whole estate, money, jewels, and all, shall go to the London hospitals, subject, as before, to the annuity.

"Don't be an ass, brother John. Do you think that I don't know what I am doing? I have seen enough of the evils of marrying for money out in India. Every ship that comes out brings so many girls sent out to some relation to be put on the marriage market, and marrying men old enough to be pretty nearly their grandfathers, with the natural consequence that there is the devil to pay before they have been married a year or two. Come, you know you will do it; why not give in at once, and have done with it? It is not a bad thing for you, it will be a good thing for your boy, it will save my girl from fortune hunters, and enable me to die quietly and comfortably."

"All right, George, I will do it. Mind, I don't do it willingly, but I do it for your sake."

"That is right," Colonel Thorndyke said, holding out his thin bronzed hand to his brother; "that is off my mind. Now, there is only one other thing—those confounded jewels. But I won't talk about them now."

It was not indeed till three or four days later that the Colonel again spoke to his brother on any than ordinary matters. He had indeed been very weak and ailing. After breakfast, when, as usual, he was a little stronger and brighter than later in the day, he said to his brother suddenly:—

"I suppose there are no hiding places in this room?"

"Hiding places! What do you mean, George?"

"Places where a fellow could hide up and hear what we are talking about."

"No, I don't think so," the Squire replied, looking round vaguely. "Such an idea never occurred to me. Why do you ask?"

"Because, John, if there is such a thing as a hiding place, someone will be sure to be hiding there. Where does that door lead to?"

"It doesn't lead anywhere; it used to lead into the next room, but it was closed up before my time, and turned into a cupboard, and this door is permanently closed."

"Do you mind stepping round into the next room and seeing if anyone is in the cupboard?"

Thinking that his brother was a little light headed, John Thorndyke went into the next room, and returned, saying gravely that no one was there.

"Will you look behind the curtains, John, and under this sofa, and everywhere else where even a cat could be hidden? That seems all right," the Colonel went on, as his brother continued the search. "You know there is a saying that walls have ears, and I am not sure that it is not so. I have been haunted with the feeling that everything I did was watched, and that everything I said was listened to for years; and I can tell you it is a devilishly unpleasant thought. Draw your chair quite close to me. It is about my jewels, John. I always had a fancy for jewels—not to wear them, but to own them. In my time I have had good opportunities in that way, both in the Madras Presidency and in the Carnatic. In the first place, I have never cared for taking presents in money, but I have never refused jewels; and what with Rajahs and Nabobs and Ministers that one had helped or done a good turn to somehow, a good deal came to me that way.

"Then I always made a point of carrying money with me, and after a defeat of the enemy or a successful siege, there was always lots of loot, and the soldiers were glad enough to sell anything in the way of jewels for a tithe of their value in gold. I should say if I put the value of the jewels at 50,000 pounds I am not much wide of the mark. That is all right, there is no bother about them; the trouble came from a diamond bracelet that I got from a soldier. We were in camp near Tanjore. I was officer of the day. I had made my rounds, and was coming back to my quarters, when I saw a soldier coming out of a tent thirty or forty yards away. It was a moonlight night, and the tent was one belonging to a white Madras regiment. Suddenly, I saw another figure, that had been lying down outside the tent, rise. I saw the flash of the moonlight on steel; then there was a blow, and the soldier fell. I drew my sword and rushed forward.

"The native—for I could see that it was a native—was bending over the man he had stabbed. His back was towards me, and on the sandy soil he did not hear my footsteps until I was close to him; then he sprang up with a cry of fury, and leaped on me like a tiger. I was so taken by surprise that before I could use my sword the fellow had given me a nasty stab on the shoulder; but before he could strike again I had run him through. By this time several other, men ran out of the tent, uttering exclamations of rage at seeing their fallen comrade.

"What is it, sir?' they asked me.

"This scoundrel, here, has stabbed your comrade,' I said. 'He did not see me coming, and I ran up just as he was, I think, rifling him for booty. He came at me like a wild cat, and has given me a nasty stab. However, I have put an end to his game. Is your comrade dead?'

"No, sir, he is breathing still; but I fancy there is little chance for him.'

"You had better carry him to the hospital tent at once; I will send a surgeon there.'

"I called the regimental surgeon up, and went with him to the hospital tent, telling him what had happened. He shook his head after examining the man's wound, which was fairly between the shoulders.

"He may live a few hours, but there is no chance of his getting better.'

"'Now,' I said, 'you may as well have a look at my wound, for the villain stabbed me too.'

"'You have had a pretty narrow escape of it,' he said, as he examined it. 'If he had struck an inch or two nearer the shoulder the knife would have gone right into you; but you see I expect he was springing as he struck, and the blow fell nearly perpendicularly, and it glanced down over your ribs, and made a gash six inches long. There is no danger. I will bandage it now, and tomorrow morning I will sew the edges together, and make a proper job of it.'

"In the morning one of the hospital attendants came to me and said the soldier who had been wounded wanted to speak to me. The doctor said he would not live long. I went across to him. He was on a bed some little distance from any of the others, for it was the healthy season, and there were only three or four others in the tent.

"'I hear, Major Thorndyke,' he said in a low voice, 'that you killed that fellow who gave me this wound, and that you yourself were stabbed.'

"'Mine is not a serious business, my man,' I said. 'I wish you had got off as easily.'

"'I have been expecting it, sir,' he said; 'and how I came to be fool enough to go outside the tent by myself I cannot think. I was uneasy, and could not sleep; I felt hot and feverish, and came out for a breath of fresh air. I will tell you what caused it, sir. About two years ago a cousin of mine, in one of the King's regiments, who was dying, they said, of fever (but I know the doctors thought he had been poisoned), said to me, "Here are some things that will make your fortune if ever you get to England; but I tell you beforehand, they are dangerous things to keep about you. I fancy that they have something to do with my being like this now. A year ago I went with some others into one of their great temples on a feast day. Well, the god had got on all his trinkets, and among them was a bracelet with the biggest diamonds I ever saw. I did not think so much of it at the time, but I kept on thinking of them afterwards, and it happened that some months after our visit we took the place by storm. I made straight for the temple, and I got the jewels. It don't matter how I got them—I got them. Well, since that I have never had any peace; pretty near every night one or other of our tents was turned topsy turvy, all the kits turned out, and even the ground dug up with knives. You know how silently Indian thieves can work. However, nothing was ever stolen, and as for the diamonds, at the end of every day's march I always went out as soon as it was quite dark, and buried the bracelet between the tent pegs; it did not take a minute to do. When we moved, of course, I took it up again. At last I gave that up, for however early I turned out in the morning there was sure to be a native about. I took then to dropping it down the barrel of my gun; that way I beat them. Still, I have always somehow felt myself watched, and my tent has been disturbed a great deal oftener than any of the others. I have had half a mind to throw the things away many a time, but I could not bring myself to do it."

"'Well, sir, I have carried the bracelet ever since. I have done as he did, and always had it in my musket barrel—When we had fighting to do I would drop it out into my hand and slip it into my ammunition pouch; but I know that I have always been followed, just as Bill was. I suppose they found out that I went to see him before he died. Anyhow, my tent has been rummaged again and again. I have no doubt that fellow whom you killed last night had been watching me all the time, and thought that I had come out to hide the things. However, there they are, sir. One of my mates brought my musket here a quarter of an hour ago, and emptied the barrel out for me. Now, sir, you did your best to save my life last night, and you killed that fellow who did for me, and you pretty nearly got killed yourself. I have got no one else I could give the things to, and if I were to give them to one of my mates in the regiment they would probably cost him his life, as they have cost me mine. But you will know what to do with the things; they are worth a lot of money if you can get them home. Mind, sir, you have got to be careful. I have heard tales of how those priests will follow up a temple jewel that has been lost for years, and never give it up until they get it back again.'

"'I ought to give it up,' I said.

"'You don't know where it came from, sir,' he replied. 'I was one of a party of convalescents who were sent up just before that fight, and my own regiment was not there: it might have been here, and it might have been in the Carnatic. Bill never told me, and I have no more idea than a babe unborn.'

"The gems were certainly magnificent; and though I knew well enough that these untiring Brahmins would not be long in guessing that the things had come into my possession, I took the bracelet. I thought, anyhow, that I might have a few hours' start; the fellow I had killed might, of course, have one or two others with him, but I had to risk that. I got leave an hour later, and went down to Madras, and got them put into a place of safety. That I was watched all the time I was in India afterwards I have no doubt, but no attempts were made to assassinate me. They would have known that I went straight away, but whether I had buried them somewhere on the road, or had given them to someone's care at Madras they could not know, and there was, therefore, nothing for them to do but to wait till I made a move.

"I have no doubt whatever that they came over in the same ship with me. Two or three times during the week I was in London I saw colored men in the street outside the hotel. Once it was a Lascar seaman, another time a dark looking sailor in European clothes: he might pass for a Spaniard. Several times as I was going about in a sedan chair I looked out suddenly, and each time there was a dark face somewhere in the street behind. I had a letter this morning from the lawyer, and he mentioned that two days ago his offices had been broken into, and every strong box and drawer forced open, but that, curiously enough, they could not find that anything had been stolen, though in the cashier's box there were 30 pounds in gold. Of course it was my friends. I have no doubt that one or two of them have followed me down here; and for anything I know they may be lurking somewhere in your garden at the present moment—that is, if they are not standing beside us in this room."

John Thorndyke looked round with an uncomfortable feeling.

"How do you mean, George?"

"I mean some of those Indian fellows can do all sorts of wonderful conjuring tricks. I have seen them go up into the air on a rope and never come down again, and for aught I know they may be able to render themselves invisible. Seriously, I think that it is likely as not."

"Well, and where are the things to be found now, George?"

"That I won't tell you, John. Before I go I will whisper it in your ear, and give you the means of finding them, but not till then. No, I will write it down on a piece of paper, and slip it into your hand. As soon as you get out of the room you glance at it, and then put the piece of paper into your mouth, chew it up and swallow it. I tell you I dare not even whisper it; but whatever you do, take no steps in the matter until your son comes of age."

"There can surely be no danger in another twelve years, George; they will have given up the search long before that."

"Not they," the Colonel said emphatically. "If they die others will take their places: it is a sacred business with them. My advice to you is, either sell them directly you get them into your hands, or go straight to Amsterdam and sell them there to one of the diamond cutters, who will turn them out so that they will be altered beyond all recognition. Don't sell more than two stones at most to any one man; then they will never come out as a bracelet again, and the hunt will be over."

"I would almost rather leave them alone altogether, George."

"Well, they are worth 50,000 pounds if they are worth a penny, and a great deal more I should say; but you cannot leave them alone without leaving everything alone, for all my gems are with them, and 52,000 pounds in gold. Of course, if you like you can, when you get the box, pick those diamonds out and chuck them away, but if you do you must do it openly, so that anyone watching you may see you do it, otherwise the search will go on."

Two days later, as Ramoo was helping the Colonel to the sofa, the latter was seized with a violent fit of coughing, then a rush of blood poured from his lips. His brother and Ramoo laid him on the sofa almost insensible.

"Run and get some water, Ramoo," John Thorndyke said.

As Ramoo left the room the Colonel feebly placed his snuffbox in his brother's hand with a significant glance; then he made several desperate efforts to speak, and tried to struggle up into a sitting position; another gush of blood poured from him, and as it ceased he fell back dead.

John Thorndyke was bitterly grieved at the death of his brother, and it was not until he went up to his room that night that he thought of the snuffbox that he had dropped into his pocket as his brother handed it to him. He had no doubt that it contained the instructions as to the treasure. It was of Indian manufacture. He emptied the snuff from it, but it contained nothing else. He was convinced that the secret must be hidden there, and after in vain endeavoring to find a spring, he took a poker and hammered it, and as it bent a spring gave way, and showed a very shallow false bottom.

In this was a thin gold coin, evidently of considerable antiquity, and a small piece of paper, on which was written the word "Masulipatam." John Thorndyke looked at it in bewilderment; that it was connected with the secret he felt certain, but alone it was absolutely useless. Doubtless his brother had intended to give him the key of the riddle, when he had so desperately striven to speak. After in vain thinking the matter over he said:

"Well, thank goodness; there is nothing to be done about the matter for another thirteen or fourteen years; it is of no use worrying about it now." He went to an old fashioned cabinet, and placed the coin and piece of paper in a very cunningly devised secret drawer. The next morning he went out into the garden and dropped the battered snuffbox into the well, and then dismissed the subject from his mind.

CHAPTER II

Standing some two miles out of Reigate is the village of Crowswood, a quiet place and fairly well to do, thanks in no small degree to Squire Thorndyke, who owned the whole of the parish, and by whom and his tenants the greater portion of the village were employed. Greatly had the closing of the Manor House, after the death of old Squire Thorndyke, been felt. There were no more jellies, soups, and other comforts to be looked for in time of sickness, no abatement of rent when the breadwinner was sick or disabled, no check to the drunkards, whom the knowledge that they would be turned out of their cottage at a week's notice kept in some sort of order. When, therefore, after ten years of absence of all government, John Thorndyke, after the death of his brother, the Colonel, came down and took possession, he found the place sadly changed from what it had been when he had left it twenty years before. His first act was to dismiss Newman; who, completely unchecked, had, he found, been sadly mismanaging affairs. It was not long, however, before his hand made itself felt. Two out of the three public houses were shut up in six months, a score of their habitual frequenters had, weeks before, been turned out of their houses, an order had been issued that unless a cottage was kept in good order and the garden bright and blooming with flowers in the summer a fresh tenant would be found for it. Every child must be sent to the village school; the Squire was ready to do what there was to be done in the way of thatching and whitewashing, repairing palings and painting doors and windows, but, as he told the people, the village had to be kept clean and decent, and anyone who would not conform to the rules was at liberty to leave without a day's notice.

Many of the villagers grumbled under their breath, but public opinion was, on the whole, favorable. There was someone to look after them now, someone who would see that the greater portion of the wages was not spent at the alehouse, who would take an interest in the people, and would lend a helping hand in bad times. There was a feeling of regret that the Squire was a widower, but the post of visitor and almoner was well supplied by the lady who acted as companion and governess to the Squire's little ward and regulated the affairs of his household.

John Thorndyke had never had much occasion for the display of energy before, but he had an abundance of it, although hitherto latent. He had come into this business against his will, but he took it up with a determination to do well in it. The income was legally his until his niece came of age, but he was determined he would take nothing out of the estate beyond the necessary expenses of the position, and that all surplus

should be expended in improving it in every way possible, so that he could hand it over to her in the most perfect condition. Therefore, when he came into possession he made a close inspection of the farms, with their houses, barns, and other tenements. Where he saw that the men were doing their best, that the hedges and fields were in good order, he did everything that was necessary without a word; but where there were slovenly farming and signs of neglect and carelessness, he spoke out his mind sharply.

"This has all got to be amended," he said. "What must be done I will do, but unless I see things well kept up, the fences in good order, the hedges cut, the cattle in good condition, and everything going on as it ought to be, out you go next Christmas. The estate at present is a disgrace to the county, but it shall not be so any longer if I can help it. I shall do my share, and anyone who is not prepared to do the same had better look out for another holding at once."

No one rejoiced more at the coming home of the Squire than Mr. Bastow, the Rector. He had had a pleasant time of it during the life of the old Squire. He was always a welcome guest at the house; Mr. Thorndyke had been ever ready to put his hand into his pocket for any repairs needed for the church, and bore on his shoulders almost the entire expense of the village school. In the latter respect there had been no falling off, he having given explicit instructions to his solicitors to pay his usual annual subscriptions to the school until his son's return from India. But with the death of the Squire the Rector had gradually lost all authority in the village.

For a time force of habit had had its effect, but as this wore out and the people recognized that he had no real authority things went from bad to worse. Drunken men would shout jeeringly as they passed the Rectory on their way home from the alehouse; women no longer feared reproof for the untidiness of their houses and children; the school was half emptied and the church almost wholly so.

For seven or eight years Mr. Bastow had a hard time of it. It was, then, both with pleasure as an old friend, and with renewed hopefulness for the village, that he visited John Thorndyke on his return. The change in the state of affairs was almost instantaneous. As soon as it became known that the Rector was backed, heart and soul, by the Squire's authority, and that a complaint from him was followed the next day by a notice to quit at the end of a week, his own authority was established as firmly as it had been in the old Squire's time, and in a couple of years Crowswood became quite a model village. Every garden blossomed with flowers; roses and eglantine clustered over the cottages, neatness and order prevailed everywhere.

The children were tidily dressed and respectful in manner, the women bright and cheerful, and the solitary alehouse remaining had but few customers, and those few were never allowed to transgress the bounds of moderation. The Squire had a talk with the landlord a fortnight after his arrival.

"I am not going to turn you out, Peters," he said. "I hear that you make some efforts to keep your house decently; the other two I shall send packing directly their terms are up. Whether you remain permanently must depend upon yourself. I will do up your house for you, and build a bar parlor alongside, where quiet men can sit and smoke their pipes and talk and take their beer in comfort, and have liberty to enjoy themselves as long as their enjoyment does not cause annoyance to other people or keep their wives and children in rags. I will do anything for you if I find the place well conducted; but I warn you that I will have no drunkenness. A man who, to my knowledge, gets drunk twice, will not get drunk a third time in this parish, and if you let men get drunk here it is your fault as much as theirs. Now we understand each other."

Things once placed on a satisfactory footing, the Squire had but little more trouble, and it soon came to be understood that he was not to be trifled with, and that Crowswood was no longer a place for the idle or shiftless. Two or three of the farmers left at the termination of their year, but better men took their places, and John Thorndyke, having settled matters to his satisfaction, now began to attend more to other affairs. He had been, when he first came back, welcomed with great heartiness by all the gentry of the neighborhood; his father had been a popular man, and young Thorndyke had been regarded as a pleasant young fellow, and would in any case have been welcomed, if only because Crowswood had become a nuisance to the whole district. It was, indeed, a sort of rendezvous for poachers and bad characters, it was more than suspected that gangs of thieves and burglars made it their headquarters, and that even highwaymen found it a convenient and quiet resort.

Thus, then, the transformation effected within a few months of Mr. Thorndyke's return caused general and lively satisfaction, and a year later he was put on the Commission of the Peace, and became one of the most regular attendants at the Bench of Magistrates. Reluctantly as he had taken up his present position, he found it, as time went on, a pleasant one. He had not been conscious before that time hung somewhat heavily on his hands, but here he had duties to perform and ample employment. His nature was naturally somewhat a masterful one, and both as a magistrate and a landlord he had scope and power of action. Occasionally he went up to London, always driving his gig, with a pair of fast trotting horses, and was known to the frequenters of the coffee houses chiefly patronized by country gentlemen. Altogether, John Thorndyke became quite a notable person in the district, and men were inclined to congratulate themselves upon the fact that he, and not the Indian officer, his brother, had come into the estate.

The idea of an old Indian officer in those days was that he was almost of necessity an invalid, and an irritable one, with a liver hopelessly deranged, a yellow complexion, and a hatred of the English climate. The fact that, instead of leaving the army and coming home at his father's death, George Thorndyke had chosen to remain abroad and leave the estate to the management of agents, had specially prejudiced him in the eyes of the people of that part, and had heightened the warmth with which they had received his brother. John Thorndyke had upon the occasion, of his first visit to the family solicitors spoken his mind with much freedom as to the manner in which Newman had been allowed a free hand.

"Another ten years," he said, "and there would not have been a cottage habitable on the estate, nor a farm worth cultivating. He did absolutely nothing beyond collecting the rents. He let the whole place go to rack and ruin. The first day I arrived I sent him out of the house, with a talking to that he won't forget as long as he lives."

"We never heard any complaints about him, Mr. Thorndyke, except that I think we did once hear from the Rector of the place that his conduct was not satisfactory. I remember that we wrote to him about it, and he

said that the Rector was a malignant fellow, on bad terms with all his parishioners."

"If I had the scoundrel here," John Thorndyke said with indignation, "I would let him have a taste of the lash of my dog whip. You should not have taken the fellow's word; you should have sent down someone to find out the true state of things. Why, the place has been an eyesore to the whole neighborhood, the resort of poaching, thieving rascals; by gad, if my brother George had gone down there I don't know what would have happened! It will cost a couple of years' rent to get things put straight."

When the Squire was at home there was scarce an evening when the Rector did not come up to smoke a pipe and take his glass of old Jamaica or Hollands with him.

"Look here, Bastow," the latter said, some three years after his return, "what are you going to do with that boy of yours? I hear bad reports of him from everyone; he gets into broils at the alehouse, and I hear that he consorts with a bad lot of fellows down at Reigate. One of my tenants—I won't mention names—complained to me that he had persecuted his daughter with his attentions. They say, he was recognized among that poaching gang that had an affray with Sir James Hartrop's keepers. The thing is becoming a gross scandal."

"I don't know what to do about him, Squire; the boy has always been a trouble to me. You see, before you came home, he got into bad hands in the village here. Of course they have all gone, but several of them only moved as far as Reigate, and he kept up their acquaintance. I thrashed him again and again, but he has got beyond that now, you see; he is nearly eighteen, and openly scoffs at my authority. Upon my word, I don't know what to do in the matter."

"He is growing up a thorough young ruffian," the Squire said indignantly, "and one of these mornings I expect to see him brought up before us charged with some serious offense. We had to fine him last week for being drunk and making a disturbance down at Reigate. Why do you let him have money? You may have no authority over him; but at least you should refuse to open your purse to him. Don't you see that this sort of thing is not only a disgrace to him, but very prejudicial to the village? What authority can you have for speaking against vice and drunkenness, when your son is constantly intoxicated?"

"I see that, Squire—none better; and I have thought of resigning my cure."

"Stuff and nonsense, Parson! If the young fellow persists in his present course he must leave the village, that is clear enough; but that is no reason why you should. The question is what is to be done with him? The best thing he could do would be to enlist. He might be of some service to his country, in India or the American Colonies, but so far as I can see he is only qualifying himself for a jail here."

"I have told him as much, Squire," Mr. Bastow said, in a depressed voice, "and he has simply laughed in my face, and said that he was very comfortable where he was, and had no idea whatever of moving."

"What time does he go out in the morning?" John Thorndyke asked abruptly.

"He never gets up till twelve o'clock, and has his breakfast when I take my dinner."

"Well, I will come in tomorrow morning and have a talk with him myself."

The next day the Squire rode up to the door of the Rectory soon after one o'clock. Mr. Bastow had just finished his meal; his son, a young fellow of between seventeen and eighteen, was lolling in an easy chair.

"I have come in principally to speak to you, young sir," John Thorndyke said quietly. "I have been asking your father what you intend to do with yourself. He says he does not know."

The young fellow looked up with an air of insolent effrontery.

"I don't know that it is any business of yours, Mr. Thorndyke, what I do with myself."

"Oh, yes, it is," the Squire replied. "This village and the people in it are mine. You are disturbing the village with your blackguard conduct; you are annoying some of the girls on the estate, and altogether you are making yourself a nuisance. I stopped at the alehouse as I came here, and have ordered the landlord to draw no more liquor for you, and unless you amend your conduct, and that quickly, I will have you out of the village altogether."

"I fancy, Mr. Thorndyke, that, even as a justice of the peace, you have not the power to dictate to my father who shall be the occupant of this house."

"What you say is perfectly true; but as you make your father's life a burden to him, and he is desirous of your absence, I can and will order the village constable to remove you from his house by force, if necessary."

The young fellow cast an evil glance at his father. "He has not been complaining, has he?" he said, with a sneer.

"He has not, sir," John Thorndyke said indignantly. "It is I who have been complaining to him, and he admits that you are altogether beyond his authority. I have pointed out to him that he is in no way obliged to support you at your age in idleness and dissipation, and that it were best for him and all concerned that he should close his doors to you. I don't want to have to send the son of my old friend to prison, but I can see well enough that that is what it will come to if you don't give up your evil courses. I should think you know by this time that I am a man of my word. I have taken some pains to purge this village of all bad characters, and I do not intend to have an exception made of the son of the clergyman, who, in his family as well as in his own person, is bound to set an example."

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, I utterly decline to obey your orders or to be guided by your advice."

"Very well, sir," the magistrate said sternly. "Mr. Bastow, do I understand that you desire that your son shall no longer remain an inmate of your house?"

"I do," the clergyman said firmly; "and if he does so I have no other course before me but to resign my living; my position here has become absolutely unbearable."

"Very well, sir, then you will please lock your doors tonight, and if he attempts to enter, I, as a magistrate, should know how to deal with him. Now, young sir, you understand your position; you may not take my advice, nevertheless, I shall give it you. The best thing you can do is to take your place for town on the outside of the coach that comes through Reigate this afternoon, and tomorrow morning proceed either to the recruiting officer for His Majesty's service, or to that for the East India Company's. You have health and strength, you will get rid at once of your bad associates, and will start afresh in a life in which you may

redeem your past and be useful to your king and country.”

Young Bastow smiled.

“Thanks,” he said sarcastically. “I have my own plans, and shall follow them.”

“I would think, Mr. Bastow,” the Squire said quietly, “it would just be as well for you to come home with me. I don't think that the leave taking is likely to be an affectionate one.”

The Rector rose at once.

“I will come with you, Squire. I may tell you now, what I have not told you before, that my son has more than once raised his hand against me, and that I do not care to be left alone with him.”

“I judged him capable even of that, Mr. Bastow.”

“Goodby, Arthur,” his father said. “My heart is ready to break that it has come to this; but for both our sakes it is better so. Goodby, my son, and may Heaven lead you to better ways! If ever you come to me and say, 'Father, I have turned over a new leaf, and heartily repent the trouble I have caused you,' you will receive a hearty welcome from me, and no words of reproach for the past.”

The young man paid no attention to the offered hand, but laughed scornfully.

“You have not got rid of me yet,” he said. “As for you, Squire Thorndyke, I shall not forget your meddling interference, and some day, maybe, you will be sorry for it.”

“I think not,” John Thorndyke said gravely. “I am doing my duty to the village, and still more I am doing my duty to an old friend, and I am not likely ever to feel any regret that I have so acted. Now, Parson, let's be off.”

After leaving the house with the clergyman, the Squire stopped at the house of Knapp, the village constable; and said a few words to him, then, leading his horse, walked home with Mr. Bastow.

“Don't be cast down, old friend,” he said. “It is a terrible trial to you; but it is one sharp wrench, and then it will be over. Anything is better than what you must have been suffering for some time.”

“I quite feel that, Squire; my life has indeed been intolerable of late. I had a painful time before, but always looked forward with hope to your brother coming home. Since you returned, and matters in the parish have been put straight, this trouble has come in to take the place of the other, and I have felt that I would rather resign and beg for charity than see my son going from bad to worse, a scandal to the parish, and a hindrance to all good work.”

“It is a bad business, Bastow, and it seems to me that two or three years in prison would be the best thing for him, as he will not take up the only trade open to him. At any rate, it would separate him from his evil associates, and give you peace while he is behind the bars. Where does he get his money?”

“That I know not, Squire. He takes some from me—it used to be done secretly, now it is done with threats, and, as I told you, with violence—but that would not account for his always having money. He must get it somewhere else, for when I have paid my bills, as I always do the hour that I receive money, there is but little over for him to take. He is often away all night, sometimes for two or three days together, and I dare not think what he does with himself; but certainly he gets money somehow, and I am afraid that I cannot hope it is honestly obtained.”

“I do not well see how it can be,” the Squire agreed.

“If I had before known as much as you tell me now, I would have taken some steps to have him watched, and to nip the matter before it went too far. Do you think that he will take your notice, and come no more to the house?”

Mr. Bastow shook his head.

“I fear that the only effect will be to make him worse, even when he was quite a small boy punishment only had that effect with him. He will come back tonight probably half drunk, and certainly furious at my having ventured to lay the case before you.”

“You must lock the doors and bar the windows.”

“I did that when he first took to being out at night, but he always managed to get in somehow.”

“Well, it must be all put a stop to, Bastow; and I will come back with you this evening, and if this young rascal breaks into the house I will have him down at Reigate tomorrow on the charge of house breaking; or, at any rate, I will threaten to do so if he does not give a promise that he will in future keep away from you altogether.”

“I shall be glad, at any rate, if you will come down, Squire, for, to say the truth, I feel uneasy as to the steps he may take in his fury at our conversation just now.”

John Thorndyke took down from a wall a heavy hunting whip, as he went out with the parson at nine o'clock. He had in vain endeavored to cheer his old friend as they sat over their steaming glasses of Jamaica. The parson had never been a strong man; he was of a kindly disposition, and an unwearied worker when there was an opportunity for work, but he had always shrunk from unpleasantness, and was ready to yield rather than bring about trouble. He had for a long time suffered in silence, and had not the Squire himself approached the subject of his son's delinquencies, he would have never opened his mouth about it. Now, however, that he had done so, and the Squire had taken the matter in hand, and had laid down what was to be done, though he trembled at the prospect, he did not even think of opposing his plan, and indeed could think of no alternative for it.

“I have told John Knapp to be here,” the Squire said, as they reached the house. “It is just as well that he should be present if your son comes back again. He is a quiet, trustworthy fellow, and will keep his mouth shut if I tell him.”

Mr. Bastow made no reply. It was terrible to him that there should be another witness to his son's conduct, but he saw that the Squire was right. An old woman opened the door.

“Are all the shutters closed and barred?” John Thorndyke asked her.

“Yes, sir; I always sees to that as soon as it gets dark.”

"Very well; you can go to bed now, Elisa," her master said. "Is John Knapp here?"

"Yes, he came an hour ago, and is sitting in the kitchen."

"I will call him in myself when I want to speak to him."

As soon as the old servant had gone upstairs the Squire went into the kitchen, Mr. Bastow having gone to the cellar to fetch up a bottle of old brandy that was part of a two dozen case given to him by the old Squire fifteen years before.

"Do you go round the house, John, and see that everything is properly fastened up. I see that you have got a jug of beer there. You had better get a couple of hours' sleep on that settle. I shall keep watch, till I am sleepy, and then I will call you. Let me know if you find any of the doors or windows unbarred."

Five minutes later the constable knocked at the door of the parlor. "The door opening into the stable yard was unbarred, Squire."

"I thought it likely that it would be so, Knapp. You have made it fast now, I suppose? That is right. Now lie down and get an hour or two of sleep; it is scarce likely that he will be back until late."

"That was the old woman, of course," he went on to his companion, when the door closed behind the constable. "I thought it likely enough that he might tell her to leave a way for him to come in. You told me that she had been with you a good many years. I dare say she has left that door unbarred for him many a time. I should advise you to get a man to sleep in the house regularly; there are plenty of fellows who will be glad to do it for a shilling or two a week, and I do not think that it is safe for you to be here alone."

An hour later he said to the Rector: "Now, Bastow, you had best go to bed. I have taken the matter into my own hands, and will carry it through. However, I won't have him taken away without your being present, and will call you when we want you. Of course, if he will give a solemn promise not to molest you, and, even if he won't enlist, to leave this part of the country altogether, I shall let him off."

"There is one thing, Mr. Thorndyke, that I have not told you," the Rector said hesitatingly. "Sometimes, when he comes home late, he brings someone with him; I have heard voices downstairs. I have never seen who it was—for what could I have done if I went down?—but I have heard horses brought round to the stable yard, and heard them ride away:"

"It is just as well you told me," the Squire said dryly. "If you had told me this evening at the house, I would have dropped a brace of pistols into my pocket. However, this hunting crop is a good weapon; but I don't suppose they will show fight, even if anyone is with him. Besides, Knapp has a stout oaken cudgel with him—I noticed it standing against his chair as I went in—and as he is a strong active fellow, and we shall have the advantage of a surprise, I fancy we should be a match even for three or four of them."

At one o'clock the Squire roused John Knapp. "It is one o'clock, John; now take off your boots. I don't want him to know that there is anyone in the house till we get hold of him. I am going to lie down on the sofa in the parlor. The moment you hear footsteps you come and wake me."

The clock in the kitchen had just struck two when the constable shook John Thorndyke. "There are two horses just coming into the yard."

"All right. I opened a window in the room looking down into the yard before I lay down. I will go up and see what they are going to do. If they try to break in anywhere down here, do you come at once quietly up to me."

The Squire had taken off his boots before he lay down, and, holding his heavy hunting crop in his hand, he went quietly upstairs. As he went to the window he heard Arthur Bastow say angrily:

"Confound the old woman! she has locked the door; she has never played me that trick before. There is a ladder in the stable, and I will get in at that window up there and open it for you. Or you may as well come up that way, too, and then you can stow the things away in my room at once, and have done with it."

The Squire went hastily down.

"Come upstairs, Knapp," he whispered to the constable. "There are three of them, and I fancy the two mounted men are highwaymen. Let them all get in, keeping yourself well back from the window. The moon is round on the other side of the house, but it will be light enough for us to see them as they get in. I will take the last fellow, and I will warrant that he will give no trouble; then I will fall upon the second, and do you spring on young Bastow. The two highwaymen are sure to have pistols, and he may have some also. Give him a clip with that cudgel of yours first, then spring on him, and hold his arms tightly by his side. If I call you give him a back heel and throw him smartly, and then come to my aid. I don't think I shall want it, but it is as well to prepare for everything."

They went upstairs and took their places, one on each side of the window, standing three or four feet back. Just as they took up their positions the top of the stable ladder appeared above the sill of the window. Half a minute later young Bastow's head appeared, and he threw up the sash still higher, and stepped into the room; then he turned and helped two men in, one after the other.

"Follow me," he said, "then you won't tumble over the furniture."

As they turned, the heavy handle of John's Thorndyke's whip fell with tremendous force on the head of the last man.

"What the devil is that?" the other exclaimed, snatching out a pistol and turning round, as the falling body struck him, but he got no further. Again the heavy whip descended, this time on his right arm; it dropped useless by his side, and the pistol fell from his hand. Then John Thorndyke fell upon him and bore him to the ground, snatched the other pistol from his belt, and held it to his head.

"Now, my man," he said quietly, "if you don't surrender I will blow out your brains."

"I surrender," the man moaned. "I believe that you have broken my arm. Curse you, whoever you are."

The struggle between John Knapp and young Bastow was soon over. The young fellow was lithe and sinewy, but he was no match for the constable, who, indeed, had almost overpowered him before he was aware what had happened.

"Has he got pistols, Knapp?" the Squire asked.

"Yes, sir, a brace of them; I have got them both safely in my pocket. There," he went on, as a sharp click was heard, "I have got the darbys on him. Now shall I help you, sir?"

"You had better run downstairs first and light a couple of candles at the kitchen fire: you will find a pair standing on the parlor table. Don't be long about it; the first fellow I hit was stunned, and he may come round any moment."

"I will make sure of him before I go, Squire. I have got another pair of darbys in my pocket."

As soon as he had fastened these upon the wrists of the insensible man he ran downstairs, and in a minute returned with the candles.

"I am glad that you are back," the Squire said. "I was afraid that young rascal would try to escape."

"I took good care of that, Squire; you see I put one of his arms round the bedpost before I slipped the darbys on, and he cannot get away unless he takes the whole bed with him; and as I don't think he would get it out either by the window or the door, he is as safe here as he would be in Newgate. What is the next thing to do, Squire?"

"You had better tie this fellow's legs. I will leave you a candle here, and you can keep guard over them while I go and wake Mr. Bastow."

The Rector needed no waking; he was walking up and down his room in great distress. He had not undressed, but had thrown himself upon his bed.

"What has happened, Thorndyke?" he asked as the Squire entered. "I heard two heavy falls, and I felt that something terrible had taken place."

"Well, it has been a serious matter—very serious. That unfortunate son of yours is not hurt, but I don't know but that the best thing that could have happened would have been for him to have got a bullet through his head. He brought home with him two men who are, I have little doubt, highwaymen; anyhow, they each had a brace of pistols in their belt, and from what he said I think they have been stopping a coach. At any rate, they have something with them that they were going to hide here, and I fancy it is not the first time that it has been done. I don't expect your son had anything to do with the robbery, though he was carrying a brace of pistols, too; however, we have got them all three.

"Now, you see, Bastow, this takes the affair altogether out of our hands. I had hoped that when we caught your son in the act of breaking into your house after you had ordered him from it, we should be able to frighten him into enlisting, or, at any rate, into promising to disturb you no more, for even if we had taken him before the bench, nothing could have been done to him, for under such circumstances his re-entering the house could not be looked upon as an act of burglary. As it is, the affair is altogether changed. Even if I wished to do so, as a magistrate I could not release those two highwaymen; they must appear as prisoners in court. I shall hear down in the town tomorrow morning what coach has been stopped, and I have no doubt that they have on them the proceeds of the robbery. Your son was consorting with and aiding them, and acting as a receiver of stolen goods, and as you have heard horses here before it is probable that when his room is thoroughly searched we shall come upon a number of articles of the same sort. I am sorry that I ever meddled in the matter; but it is too late for that now. You had better come downstairs with me, and we will take a turn in the garden, and try to see what had best be done."

CHAPTER III.

John Thorndyke opened the shutters of the parlor window, and stepped out into the garden alone, for the Rector was too unnerved and shattered to go out with him, but threw himself on the sofa, completely prostrated. Half an hour later the Squire re-entered the room. The morning was just beginning to break. Mr. Bastow raised his head and looked sadly at him.

"I can see no way out of it, old friend. Were it not that he is in charge of the constable, I should have said that your only course was to aid your son to escape; but Knapp is a shrewd fellow as well as an honest one. You cannot possibly get your son away without his assistance, for he is handcuffed to the bed, and Knapp, in so serious a matter as this, would not, I am sure, lend himself to an escape. I have no doubt that with my influence with the other magistrates, and, indeed, on the circumstances of the case, they will commit him on a minor charge only, as the passengers of the coach will, I hope, give evidence that it was stopped by mounted men alone. I think, therefore, that he would only be charged with consorting with and aiding the highwaymen after the event, and of aiding them to conceal stolen goods—that is, if any are found in his room.

"That much stolen property has been hidden there, there is little reason to doubt, but it may have been removed shortly afterwards. It was, of course, very convenient for them to have some place where they could take things at once, and then ride on quietly to London the next day, for, if arrested; nothing would be found upon them, and it would be impossible to connect them with the robbery. Later on they might come back again and get them from him. Of course, if nothing is found in his room, we get rid of the charge of receiving altogether, and there would be nothing but harboring, aiding, and abetting—a much less serious business. Look here, old friend, I will strain a point. I will go out into the garden again and walk about for an hour, and while I am out, if you should take advantage of my absence to creep up to your son's room and to search it thoroughly, examining every board of the floor to see if it is loose, and should you find anything concealed, to take it and hide it, of course I cannot help it. The things, if there are any, might secretly be packed up by you in a box and sent up to Bow Street, with a line inside, saying that they are proceeds of robbery, and that you hope the owners will be traced and their property restored to them. Not, of course, in your own hand, and without a signature. There might be some little trouble in managing it, but it could, no doubt, be done."

John Thorndyke went out into the garden without another word. The hour was nearly up when Mr. Bastow came out; he looked ten years older than he had done on the previous day. He wrung his friend's hand.

"Thank God I have been up there," he said. "I do not think they will find anything."

"Say nothing about it, Bastow; I don't want to know whether you found anything. Now I am going to fetch two or three of the men from the village, to get them to aid the constable in keeping guard, and another to go up to the house at once and order a groom to saddle one of my horses and bring it here."

As it was now past five o'clock, and the Squire found most of the men getting up, he sent one off to the house with the message, and returned with two others to the Rectory. He told them briefly that two highwaymen had been arrested during the night, and that as young Mr. Bastow was in their company at the time, it had been necessary as a matter of form to arrest him also. He went upstairs with them.

"I have brought up two men to sit with you, Knapp, until the Reigate constables come up. You can take those handcuffs off Mr. Bastow, but see that he does not leave the room, and do you yourself sit in a chair against the door, and place one of these men at the window. How about others?"

"The man you hit first, Squire, did not move until a quarter of an hour ago; he has been muttering to himself since, but I don't think he is sensible. The other one has been quiet enough, but there is no doubt that his arm is broken."

"I am going to ride down to Reigate at once, and will bring back a surgeon with me."

"You will repent this night's business, Thorndyke!" Arthur Bastow said threateningly.

"I fancy that you will repent it more than I shall, Bastow; it is likely that you will have plenty of time to do so."

It was not long before the groom with the horse arrived. John Thorndyke rode at a gallop down to Reigate, and first called on the head constable.

"Dawney," he said, as the man came down, partially dressed, at his summons, "has anything taken place during the night?"

"Yes, Squire, the up coach was stopped a mile before it got here, and the passengers robbed. It was due here at one, and did not come in till half an hour later. Of course I was sent for. The guard was shot. There were two of the fellows. He let fly with his blunderbuss, but he does not seem to have hit either of them, and one rode up and shot him dead; then they robbed all the passengers. They got six gold watches, some rings, and, adding up the amounts taken from all the passengers, about a hundred and fifty pounds in money."

"Well, I fancy I have got your two highwaymen safe, *Dawney*."

"You have, sir?" the constable said in astonishment.

"Yes. I happened to be at the Rectory. Mr. Bastow had had a quarrel with his son, and had forbidden him the house."

The constable shook his head. "I am afraid he is a very bad one, that young chap."

"I am afraid he is, *Dawney*. However, his father was afraid that he might come in during the night and make a scene, so I said I would stop with him, and I took our village constable with me. At two o'clock this morning the young fellow came with two mounted men, who, I have no doubt, were highwaymen. We had locked up down below. Bastow took a ladder, and the three got in at a bedroom window on the first floor. Knapp and I were waiting for them there, and, taking them by surprise, succeeded in capturing them before the highwaymen could use their pistols. The constable and two men are looking after them, but as one has not got over a knock I gave him on the head, and the other has a broken arm, there is little fear of their making their escape. You had better go up with two of your men, and take a light cart with you with some straw in the bottom, and bring them all down here. I will ride round myself to Mr. Chetwynde, Sir Charles Harris, and Mr. Merchison, and we will sit at twelve o'clock. You can send round a constable with the usual letters to the others, but those three will be quite enough for the preliminary examination."

"Well, Squire, that is good news indeed. We have had the coach held up so often within five miles of this place during the past three months, that we have been getting quite a bad name. And to think that young Bastow was in it! I have heard some queer stories about him, and fancied before long I should have to put my hand upon his shoulder; but I didn't expect this."

"There is not a shadow of proof that he had anything to do with the robbery, *Dawney*, but he will have difficulty in proving that he did not afterwards abet them. It is serious enough as it is, and I am terribly grieved for his father's sake."

"Yes, sir; I have always heard him spoken of as a kind gentleman, and one who took a lot of trouble whenever anyone was sick. Well, sir, I will be off in twenty minutes. I will run round at once and send Dr. Hewett up to the Rectory, and a man shall start on horseback at seven o'clock with the summons to the other magistrates."

John Thorndyke rode round to his three fellow magistrates, who, living nearest to the town, were most regular in their attendance at the meetings. They all listened in surprise to his narrative, and expressed great pleasure at hearing that the men who had been such a pest to the neighborhood, and had caused them all personally a great deal of trouble, had been captured. All had heard tales, too, of Arthur Bastow's disadvantage, and expressed great commiseration for his father. They agreed to meet at the court half an hour before business began, to talk the matter over together.

"It is out of the question that we can release him on bail," the gentleman who was chairman of the bench said. "Quite so," John Thorndyke agreed. "In the first place, the matter is too serious; and in the next, he certainly would not be able to find bail; and lastly, for his father's sake, it is unadvisable that he should be let out. At the same time, it appears to me that there is a broad distinction between his case and the others. I fear that there can be no question that he had prior acquaintance with these men, and that he was cognizant of the whole business; something I heard him say, and which, to my regret, I shall have to repeat in court, almost proves that he was so. Still, let us hope none of the stolen property will be found upon him; whether they had intended to pass it over to his care or not is immaterial. If they had not done so, I doubt whether he could be charged with receiving stolen goods, and we might make the charge simply one of aiding these two criminals, and of being so far an accessory after the crime."

"If we could soften it down still further I should, for his father's sake, be glad; but as far as he himself is concerned, I would do nothing to lighten his punishment. He is about as bad a specimen of human nature as I ever came across. His father is in bodily fear of him. I saw the young fellow yesterday, and urged him to enlist, in order to break himself loose from the bad companionship he had fallen into. His reply was insolent and defiant in the highest degree, and it was then that in his father's name I forbade him the house, and as his father was present he confirmed what I said, and told him that he would not have anything more to do with him. This affair may do him good, and save his neck from a noose. A few years at the hulks or a passage to Botany Bay will do him no harm; and, at any rate, his father will have rest and peace, which he never would have if he remained here."

A somewhat similar conversation took place at each house. John Thorndyke breakfasted at Sir Charles Harris', the last of the three upon whom he called, and then mounting rode back to Reigate.

"We have found the plunder on them," the head constable said, coming out of the lockup as he drew rein before it, "and, fortunately for young Bastow, nothing was found upon him."

"How are the two men?"

"The fellow you hit first is conscious now, sir, but very weak. The doctor says that if he hadn't had a thick hat on, your blow would have killed him to a certainty. The other man's arm is set and bandaged, and he is all right otherwise. We shall be able to have them both in court at twelve o'clock."

The Squire rode up to his house. He was met at the door by his son, in a state of great excitement.

"Is it all true, father? The news has come from the village that you have killed two men, and that they and Arthur Bastow have all been taken away in a cart, guarded by constables."

"As usual, Mark, rumor has exaggerated matters. There are no dead men; one certainly got a crack on the head that rendered him insensible for some time, and another's arm is broken."

"And are they highwaymen, father? They say that two horses were fastened behind the cart."

"That is what we are going to try, Mark. Until their guilt is proved, no one knows whether they are highwaymen or not."

"And why is Arthur Bastow taken, father?"

"Simply because he was in company with the others. Now, you need not ask any more questions, but if you like to get your pony saddled and ride down with me to Reigate at eleven o'clock, I will get you into the courthouse, and then you will hear all about it."

At greater length the Squire went into the matter with Mrs. Cunningham, his lady housekeeper, and his ward's governess.

"It is a bad business, Mr. Thorndyke," she said, "and must be terrible for poor Mr. Bastow."

"Yes, it is a bad business altogether, except that it will rid him of this young rascal. If I were in his place I should be ready to suffer a good deal to obtain such a riddance."

"I suppose that you won't sit upon the bench today?"

"No; at least I shall take no part in the deliberations. I shall, of course, give evidence. The affair is not likely to last very long; my story will take the longest to tell. Knapp's will be confirmatory of mine, and the Reigate constable will depose to finding the watches, rings, and money upon them; then, of course, the case will be adjourned for the attendance of the coachman and some of the passengers. I don't suppose they will be able to swear to their identity, for no doubt they were masked. But that is immaterial; the discovery of the stolen property upon them will be sufficient to hang them. No doubt we shall have some Bow Streets runners down from town tomorrow or next day, and they will most likely be able to say who the fellows are."

"Will Mr. Bastow have to give evidence against his son?"

"Not before us, I think; but I imagine he will have to appear at the trial."

"It will be terrible for him."

"Yes, terrible. I sincerely hope that they will not summon him, but I am afraid that there is very little doubt about it; they are sure to want to know about his son's general conduct, though possibly the testimony on that point of the constable at Reigate will be sufficient. My own hope is that he will get a long sentence; at any rate, one long enough to insure his not coming back during his father's lifetime. If you had seen his manner when we were talking to him yesterday, you would believe that he is capable of anything. I have had a good many bad characters before me during the year and a half that I have sat upon the bench, but I am bound to say that I never saw one who was to my eyes so thoroughly evil as this young fellow. I don't think," he added with a smile, "that I should feel quite comfortable myself if he were acquitted; it will be a long time before I shall forget the expression of his face when he said to me this morning, 'You will repent this night's work, Thorndyke.'"

"You don't mean that you think he would do you any harm, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"Well, I should not care to meet him in a lonely place if he was armed and I was not. But you need not be nervous, Mrs. Cunningham, there is not the smallest chance of his being out for years; and by that time his blood will have had time to cool down, and he will have learnt, at any rate, that crimes cannot be committed in this country with impunity."

"It is all very shocking," the lady said. "What will poor Mr. Bastow do? I should think that he would not like to remain as clergyman here, where everyone knows about it."

"That must be for him to decide," the Squire said; "but if he wishes to resign I certainly shall not press him to continue to hold the living. He is a very old friend of mine. My father presented the living to him when I was nine or ten years old, and I may say I saw him daily up to the time when I went down into Sussex. If he resigns I should urge him to take up his residence here and to act as Mark's tutor; and he might also relieve you of some of Millicent's lessons. You have plenty to do in looking after the management of things in general. However, that is for the future."

At eleven o'clock the Squire drove down to Reigate, taking Mark with him, as it would save all trouble

about putting up the horse and pony. On arriving he handed Mark over to the head constable, and asked him to pass him into a seat in the courthouse, before the public were let in.

Reigate was in a state of unusual excitement. That the coach should have been stopped and robbed was too common an event to excite much interest, but that two highwaymen should have been captured, and, as was rumored, a young gentleman brought in on a charge of being in connection with them, caused a thrill of excitement. Quite a small crowd was assembled before the courthouse, and the name of Squire Thorndyke passed from mouth to mouth.

"There is some talk of his being mixed up with it in some way or other," one said. "I saw him myself ride in here, about half past five, and I wondered he was about so early. Some do say as he caught the two highwaymen single handed; but that don't stand to reason. Besides, what could he have been doing out at such an hour as that? He is a good landlord, and they say that Crowswood has been quite a different place since he came to be master. He is a tight hand as a magistrate, and cleared out half the village the first two or three months he was there; but he spent a mint of money on the place, and the people there say that they could not have a better master. Ah, here is Squire Chetwynd. He was sure to be here. There is Sir Charles' gig turning the corner. I expect most of them will be on the bench; they don't get such a case as this every day."

"It may be there will be nothing for us to hear when the court opens," another said. "I hear both the fellows have been shot or knocked about so bad that they cannot be brought up. Of course the court cannot sit if they aint before it."

"That is not so, Master Jones. I spoke to one of the constables half an hour ago—he lives next door to me—and he said that they would be well enough to appear. Neither of them have been shot, though they have been hurt pretty bad."

All this added to the desire of those around to get into the court, and there was quite a rush when the doors were opened two minutes before twelve, and it was at once crammed, the constable having some difficulty in getting the doors shut, and in persuading those who could not get in that there was not standing room for another person. There was a buzz of talk in court until the door opened and six magistrates came in. It was observed that John Thorndyke did not seat himself with the others, but moved his chair a little apart from them, thus confirming the report that he was in some way connected with the matter, and did not intend to take any part in the decision. Then another door opened, and the three prisoners were brought in. The two first were pale and evidently weak; one had his head wrapped in bandages, the other had the right sleeve of his coat cut off, and his arm bandaged and supported by a sling. Both made a resolute effort to preserve a careless demeanor. The third, who was some years younger than the others, looked round with a smile on his lips, bowed to the magistrates with an air of insolent bravado when he was placed in the dock, and then leaned easily in the corner, as if indifferent to the whole business. A chair was placed between his comrades for the use of the man whose head was bandaged. Many among those present knew Arthur Bastow by sight, and his name passed from mouth to mouth; but the usher called loudly for silence, and then the magistrates' clerk rose.

"William Smith and John Brown—at least, these are the names given—are charged with stopping the South Coast coach last night, killing the guard, and robbing the passengers; and Arthur Bastow is charged with aiding and abetting the other two prisoners, and with guilty knowledge of their crime."

It was noticed by those who could see the prisoners' faces that, in spite of Bastow's air of indifference, there was an expression of anxiety on his face as the charge was read, and he undoubtedly felt relief as that against himself was mentioned. The first witness was John Knapp, and the constable stepped into the witness box.

"What do you know of this business, Knapp?" the chairman asked. "Just tell it your own way."

"I am constable of Crowswood, your honor, and yesterday Squire Thorndyke said to me—"

"No, you must not tell it like that, Knapp; you must not repeat what another person said to you. You can say that from information received you did so and so."

"Yes, your honor. From information received I went to the Rev. Mr. Bastow's house, at a quarter to nine last night. At nine o'clock Squire Thorndyke and the Parson came in together. They sent the servant up to bed, and then the Squire sent me round to examine the fastenings of the doors. I found that one back door had been left unfastened, and locked and bolted it. The Squire told me to lie down until one o'clock, and he would watch, and Mr. Bastow went up to bed."

"Do you know of your own knowledge why these precautions were taken?"

"Only from what I was told, your honor. At one o'clock the Squire woke me, and he lay down in the parlor, telling me to call him if I heard any movement outside. About two o'clock I heard two horses come into the Parson's yard. I called Squire Thorndyke, who went upstairs to an open window; presently someone came and tried the back door. I heard voices outside, but could not hear what was said. The Squire came down and called me upstairs. I went up and took my place at one side of the window, and the Squire took his on the other. I had this cudgel in my hand, and the Squire his riding whip. A ladder was put up against the window, and then someone came up, lifted the sash up high and got in. There was light enough for me to see it was young Mr. Bastow. Then the two other prisoners came up. When the third had got into the room Mr. Bastow said, 'Follow me, and then you won't tumble over the furniture.'"

"How was it that they did not see you and Mr. Thorndyke?" the chairman asked.

"We were standing well back, your honor. The moon was on the other side of the house. There was light enough for us to see them as they got in at the window, but where we were standing it was quite dark, especially to chaps who had just come in from the moonlight. As they moved, the Squire hit the last of them a clout on the head with his hunting crop, and down he went, as if shot. The man next to him turned, but I did not see what took place, for, as the Squire had ordered me, I made a rush at Mr. Bastow and got my arms round him pretty tight, so as to prevent him using his pistols, if he had any. He struggled hard, but without saying a word, till I got my heel behind his and threw him on his back. I came down on the top of him; then I

got the pistols out of his belt and threw them on the bed slipped the handcuffs onto one wrist, lifted him up a bit, and then shoved him up against the bedpost, and got the handcuff onto his other wrist, so that he could not shift away, having the post in between his arms.

"Then I went to see if the Squire wanted any help, but he didn't. I first handcuffed the man whose head he had broken, and tied the legs of the other, and then kept guard over them till morning. When the constables came up from town we searched the prisoners, and on two of them found the watches, money, and rings. We found nothing on Mr. Bastow. I went with the head constable to Mr. Bastow's room and searched it thoroughly, but found nothing whatever there."

The evidence created a great sensation in court. John Thorndyke had first intended to ask Knapp not to make any mention of the fact that Arthur Bastow was carrying pistols unless the question was directly put to him. But the more he had thought over the matter, the more convinced was he that the heavier the sentence the better it would be for the Rector; and when he had heard from the latter that there was nothing left in his son's room that could be brought against him, and that he could not be charged with the capital crime of being a receiver, he thought it best to let matters take their course.

The head constable was the next witness. He deposed to the finding of the articles produced upon the two elder prisoners and the unsuccessful search of the younger prisoner's room.

"You did not search the house further?" the chairman inquired.

"No, sir; I wanted to get the prisoners down here as fast as I could, seeing that two of them were seriously hurt."

The chairman nodded.

"You will, of course, make a careful search of the whole house, constable."

"Yes, sir; I left one of my men up there with instructions to allow no one to go upstairs until I returned."

"Quite right."

John Thorndyke was the next witness, and his evidence cleared up what had hitherto been a mystery to the general body of the public, as to how he and the constable happened to be in the house on watch when the highwaymen arrived. The most important part of his evidence was the repetition of the words young Bastow had used as he mounted the ladder, as they showed that it was arranged between the prisoners that the stolen goods should be hidden in the house. The Squire was only asked one or two questions.

"I suppose, Mr. Thorndyke, that you had no idea whatever that the younger prisoner would be accompanied by anyone else when he returned home?"

"Not the slightest," the Squire replied. "I was there simply to prevent this unfortunate lad from entering the house, when perhaps he might have used violence towards his father. My intention was to seize him if he did so, and to give him the choice of enlisting, as I had urged him to do, or of being brought before this bench for breaking into his father's house. I felt that anything was better than his continuing in the evil courses on which he seemed bent."

"Thank you, Mr. Thorndyke. I must compliment you in the name of my brother magistrates, and I may say of the public, for the manner in which you, at considerable risk to yourself, have effected the capture of the two elder prisoners."

After consulting with the others the head constable was recalled.

"Do you know anything about the character of the youngest prisoner?"

"Yes, sir. We have had our eye upon him for some time. He was brought before your honors a week ago charged with being drunk and disorderly in this town, and was fined 5 pounds. He is constantly drinking with some of the worst characters in the place, and is strongly suspected of having been concerned in the fray between the poachers and Sir Charles Harris' gamekeepers. Two of the latter said that they recognized him amongst the poachers, but as they both declined to swear to him we did not arrest him."

John Knapp was then recalled, and testified to Bastow's drinking habits, and that the landlord of the alehouse at Crowswood had been ordered by the Squire not to draw any liquor for him in future on pain of having the renewal of his license refused.

"Have you any more witnesses to call?" the chairman asked the head constable.

"Not at present, your honor. We have sent up to town, and on the next occasion the coachman will be called to testify to the shooting of the guard, and we hope to have some of the passengers there to identify the articles stolen from them."

"It will be necessary that the Rev. Mr. Bastow should be here. He need not be called to give evidence unless we think it to be of importance, but he had better be in attendance. The prisoners are remanded until this day week."

An hour later the three prisoners, handcuffed, were driven under an escort of three armed constables to Croydon Jail. When again brought up in court the passengers on the coach identified the articles taken from them; the coachman gave evidence of the stopping of the coach, and of the shooting of the guard. The head constable testified that he had searched the Rectory from top to bottom, and found nothing whatever of a suspicious nature. None of the passengers were able to testify to the two elder prisoners as the men who had robbed them, as these had been masked, but the height and dress corresponded to those of the prisoners; and the two Bow Street runners then came forward, and gave evidence that the two elder prisoners were well known to them. They had long been suspected of being highwaymen, and had several times been arrested when riding towards London on occasions when a coach had been stopped the night before, but no stolen goods had ever been found upon them, and in no case had the passengers been able to swear to their identity. One was known among his associates as "Gallop Bill," the other as the "Downy One." At the conclusion of the evidence the three prisoners were formally committed for trial, the magistrates having retired in consultation for some time upon the question of whether the charge of receiving stolen goods ought to be made against Arthur Bastow.

"I think, gentlemen," the chairman said, after a good deal had been urged on both sides of the question, "in

this case we can afford to take a merciful view. In the first place, no stolen goods were discovered upon him or in the house. There is strong presumptive evidence of his intention, but intention is not a crime, and even were the evidence stronger than it is, I should be inclined to take a merciful view. There can be no doubt that the young fellow is thoroughly bad, and the bravado he has exhibited throughout the hearing is at once unbecoming and disgraceful; but we must remember that he is not yet eighteen, and that, in the second place, he is the son of a much respected clergyman, who is our neighbor. The matter is serious enough for him as it stands, and he is certain to have a very heavy sentence.

"Mr. Thorndyke, who takes no part in our deliberations, is most anxious that the prisoner's father should be spared the agony of his son being placed on trial on a capital charge, though I do not think that there would be the smallest chance of his being executed, for the judges would be certain to take his youth into consideration. Had there been prima facie evidence of concealment, we must have done our duty and sent him to trial on that charge; but as there is no such evidence, I think that it will be in all respects better to send him on a charge on which the evidence is as clear as noonday. Moreover, I think that Mr. Thorndyke's wishes should have some weight with us, seeing that it is entirely due to him that the important capture of these highwaymen, who have long been a scourge to this neighborhood, has been effected."

Mr. Bastow had not been called as a witness. John Thorndyke had brought him down to Reigate in a closed carriage, and he had waited in the justices' room while the examination went on; but the magistrates agreed that the evidence given was amply sufficient for them to commit upon without given him the pain of appearing. John Thorndyke had taken him to another room while the magistrates were consulting together, and when he heard the result drove him back again.

"I have fully made up my mind to resign my living, Thorndyke. I could not stand up and preach to the villagers of their duties when I myself have failed so signally in training my own son; nor visit their houses and presume to lecture them on their shortcomings when my son is a convicted criminal."

"I quite see that, old friend," the Squire said. "And I had no doubt but that you would decide on this course. I will try not to persuade you to change your decision, for I feel that your power of usefulness is at an end as far as the village is concerned. May I ask what you propose to do? I can hardly suppose that your savings have been large."

"Two years ago I had some hundreds laid by, but they have dwindled away to nothing; you can understand how. For a time it was given freely, then reluctantly; then I declared I would give no more, but he took it all the same—he knew well enough that I could never prosecute him for forgery."

"As bad as that, eh?" Thorndyke said sternly. "Well, we won't talk further of him now; what I propose is that you should take up your abode at the Hall. I am not satisfied with the school where Mark has been for the last two years, and I have been hesitating whether to get a private tutor for him or to send him to one of the public schools. I know that that would be best, but I could not bring myself to do so. I have some troubles of my own that but two or three people know of, and now, that everything is going on smoothly on the estate and in the village, I often feel dull, and the boy's companionship does me much good; and as he knows many lads of his own age in the neighborhood now, I think that he would do just as well at home.

"He will be taking to shooting and hunting before long, and if he is to have a tutor, there is no one I should like to have better than yourself. You know all the people, and we could talk comfortably together of an evening when the house is quiet. Altogether, it will be an excellent arrangement for me. You would have your own room, and if I have company you need not join us unless you like. The house would not seem like itself without you, for you have been associated with it as long as I can remember. As to your going out into the world at the age of sixty, it would be little short of madness. There—you need not give me an answer now," he went on, seeing that the Rector was too broken down to speak; "but I am sure that when you think it over you will come to the same conclusion as I do, that it will be the best plan possible for us both."

CHAPTER IV.

The trial of the two highwaymen and Arthur Bastow came off in due course. The evidence given was similar to that offered at Reigate, the only addition being that Mr. Bastow was himself put into the box. The counsel for the prosecution said: "I am sorry to have to call you, Mr. Bastow. We all feel most deeply for you, and I will ask you only two or three questions. Was your son frequently out at night?"

"He was."

"Did you often hear him return?"

"Yes; I seldom went to sleep until he came back."

"Had you any reason to suppose that others returned with him?"

"I never saw any others."

"But you might have heard them without seeing them. Please tell us if you ever heard voices."

"Yes, I have heard men's voices," the clergyman said reluctantly, in a low voice.

"One more question, and I have done. Have you on some occasions heard the sound of horses' hoofs in your yard at about the time that your son came in?"

Mr. Bastow said in a low voice: "I have."

"Had you any suspicion whatever of the character of your son's visitors?"

"None whatever. I supposed that those with him were companions with whom he had been spending the evening."

Mr. Bastow had to be assisted from the witness box, so overcome was he with the ordeal. He had not

glanced at his son while giving his evidence. The latter and his two fellow prisoners maintained throughout the trial their expression of indifference. The two highwaymen nodded to acquaintances they saw in the body of the court, smiled at various points in the evidence, and so conducted themselves that there were murmured exclamations of approval of their gameness on the part of the lower class of the public. The jury, without a moment's hesitation, found them all guilty of the offenses with which they were charged. Bastow was first sentenced.

"Young man," the judge said, "young as you are, there can be no doubt whatever in the minds of anyone who has heard the evidence that you have been an associate with these men who have been found guilty of highway robbery accompanied by murder. I consider that a merciful view was taken of your case by the magistrates who committed you for trial, for the evidence of your heartbroken father, on whose gray hairs your conduct has brought trouble and disgrace, leaves no doubt that you have for some time been in league with highwaymen, although not actually participating in their crime. The words overheard by Mr. Thorndyke show that you were prepared to hide their booty for them, and it is well for you that you were captured before this was done, and that no proceeds of other robberies were found in the house. The evidence of the Bow Street officers show that it had for some time been suspected that these men had an accomplice somewhere in the neighborhood of Reigate, for although arrested several times under circumstances forming a strong assumption of their guilt, nothing was ever found upon them. There can now be little, doubt who their accomplice was. Had you been an older man I should have sentenced you to transportation for life, but in consideration of your youth, I shall take the milder course of sentencing you to fifteen years' transportation."

The capital sentence was then passed in much fewer words upon the two highwaymen. As they were leaving the dock Bastow turned, and in a clear voice said to John Thorndyke, who had been accommodated with a seat in the well of the court:

"I have to thank you, Thorndyke, for this. I will pay off my debt some day, you make take your oath."

"A sad case, Mr. Thorndyke—a sad case," the judge, who had greatly complimented the Squire on his conduct, said to him as he was disrobing afterwards. "I don't know that in all my experience I ever saw such a hardened young villain. With highwaymen it is a point of honor to assume a gayety of demeanor on such occasions; but to see a boy of eighteen, never before convicted, exhibiting such coolness and effrontery is quite beyond my experience. I suppose his record is altogether bad?"

"Altogether," the Squire said. "His father has, during the last two years, been quite broken by it; he owned to me that he was in bodily fear of the lad, who had on several occasions assaulted him, had robbed him of his savings by means of forgery, and was so hopelessly bad that he himself thought with me that the only possible hope for him was to get him to enlist. I myself recommended the East India Company's service, thinking that he would have less opportunity for crime out there, and that there would be a strong chance that either fever or a bullet would carry him off, for I own that I have not the slightest hope of reformation in such a character."

"I would have given him transportation for life if I had known all this," the judge said. "However, it is not likely that he will ever come back again—very few of them do; the hulks are not the most healthy places in the world, and they have a pretty rough way with men who give them trouble, as this young fellow is likely to do."

Mr. Bastow, as soon as he had given his evidence, had taken a hackney coach to the inn where he and the Squire had put up on their arrival in town the evening before, and here, on his return, John Thorndyke found him. He was lying on his bed in a state of prostration.

"Cheer up, Bastow," he said, putting his hand upon the Rector's shoulder. "The sentence is fifteen years, which was the very amount I hoped that he would get. The more one sees of him the more hopeless it is to expect that any change will ever take place in him; and it is infinitely better that he should be across the sea where his conduct, when his term is over, can affect no one. The disgrace, such as it is, to his friends, is no greater in a long term than in a short one. Had he got off with four or five years' imprisonment, he would have been a perpetual trouble and a source of uneasiness, not to say alarm; and even had he left you alone we should always have been in a state of dread as to his next offense. Better that he should be out in the colonies than be hung at Tyburn."

"How did he take the sentence?"

"With the same bravado he had shown all through, and as he went out of the dock addressed a threat to me, that, under the circumstances, I can very well afford to despise. Now, if you will take my advice, you will drink a couple of glasses of good port, and then go to bed. I will see to your being awakened at seven o'clock, which will give us time to breakfast comfortably, and to make a start at nine."

"I would rather not have the wine," the Rector said feebly.

"Yes, but you must take what is good for you. I have ordered up a bottle of the landlord's best, and must insist upon your drinking a couple of glasses with me. I want it almost as much as you do, for the atmosphere of that court was enough to poison a dog. I have got the taste of it in my mouth still."

With much reluctance the Rector accompanied him to the private sitting room that the Squire had engaged. He sat down almost mechanically in an easy chair. The Squire poured out the wine, and handed him a glass. Mr. Bastow at first put it to his lips without glancing at it, but he was a connoisseur in wine, and the bouquet of the port appealing to his latent senses, he took a sip, and then another, appreciatingly.

"The landlord said it was first rate, and he is not far wrong," John Thorndyke remarked, as he set down his own glass.

"Yes, it is a fine vintage, and in perfect condition," Mr. Bastow agreed. "I have drunk nothing better for years, though you have some fine bins."

"I would take a biscuit, if I were you, before I took another glass," the Squire said, helping himself from a plate on the table. "You have had nothing to eat today, and you want something badly. I have a dish of kidneys coming up in half an hour; they cook them well here."

The Rector ate a biscuit, mechanically sipped another glass of wine, and was even able to eat a kidney

when they were brought up. Although September was not yet out, the Squire had a fire lighted in the room, and after the meal was over, and two steaming tumblers of punch were placed upon the table, he took a long pipe from the mantel, filled and lighted it, then filled another, and handed it to the Rector, at the same time holding out a light to him.

"Life has its consolations," he said. "You have had a lot of troubles one way and another, Bastow, but we may hope that they are all over now, and that life will go more smoothly and easily with you. We had better leave the past alone for the present. I call this snug: a good fire, a clean pipe, a comfortable chair, and a steaming bowl at one's elbow."

The Rector smiled faintly.

"It seems unnatural—" he began.

"Not at all, not at all," the Squire broke in. "You have had a tremendous load on your mind, and now it is lifted off; the thundercloud has burst, and though damage has been done, one is thankful that it is no worse. Now I can talk to you of a matter that has been on my mind for the last three weeks. What steps do you think that I ought to take to find a successor for you? It is most important to have a man who will be a real help in the parish, as you have been, would pull with one comfortably, and be a pleasant associate. I don't want too young a fellow, and I don't want too old a one. I have no more idea how to set about it than a child. Of course, I could ask the Bishop to appoint, but I don't know that he would appoint at all the sort of man I want. The living is only worth 200 pounds a year and the house—no very great catch; but there is many a man that would be glad to have it."

"I have been thinking it over, too, Thorndyke, when I could bring my mind to consider anything but my own affairs. How would Greg do? He has been taking duty for me since I could not do it myself. I know that he is a hard working fellow, and he has a wife and a couple of children; his curacy is only 70 pounds a year, and it would be a perfect godsend, for he has no interest in the Church, and he might be years without preferment."

"I should think he would do very well, Bastow. Yes, he reads well, which I own I care for that a good deal more than for the preaching; not that I have anything to say against that. He gives sound and practical sermons, and they have the advantage of being short, which is a great thing. In the first place, it is good in itself, and in the second, specially important in a village congregation, where you know very well every woman present is fidgeting to get home to see that the pot is not boiling over, and the meat in the oven is not burnt. Yes, I will go down tomorrow afternoon and ask him if he would like the living. You were talking of selling the furniture; how much do you suppose it is worth?"

"I don't suppose it will fetch above seventy or eighty pounds; it is solid and good, but as I have had it in use nearly forty years, it would not go for much."

"Well, let us say a hundred pounds," the Squire said. "I will give you a check for it. I dare say Greg will find it difficult to furnish, and he might have to borrow the money, and the debt would be a millstone round his neck, perhaps, for years, so I will hand it over with the Rectory to him."

So they talked for an hour or two on village matters, and the Squire was well pleased, when his old friend went up to bed, that he had succeeded in diverting his thoughts for a time from the painful subject that had engrossed them for weeks.

"You have slept well," he said, when they met at breakfast, "I can see by your face."

"Yes, I have not slept so soundly for months. I went to sleep as soon as my head touched the pillow, and did not awake until the chambermaid knocked at the door."

"That second glass of punch did it, Bastow. It is a fine morning; we shall have a brisk drive back. I am very glad that I changed my mind and brought the gig instead of the close carriage."

In the afternoon the Squire drove into Reigate. He found the curate at home, and astonished and delighted him by asking him if he would like the living of Crowswood. It came altogether as a surprise to him, for the Rector's intentions to resign had not been made public, and it was supposed in the village that he was only staying at the Squire's until this sad affair should be over. Greg was a man of seven or eight and twenty, had graduated with distinction at Cambridge, but, having no influence, had no prospects of promotion, and the offer almost bewildered him.

"I should be grateful indeed, Mr. Thorndyke," he said. "It would be a boon to us. Will you excuse me for a moment?"

And opening a door, he called for his wife, who was trying to keep the two children quiet there, having retired with them hastily when Mr. Thorndyke was announced.

"What do you think, Emma?" her husband said excitedly, as she came into the room. "Mr. Thorndyke has been good enough to offer me the living of Crowswood."

Then he recovered himself. "I beg your pardon, sir, for my unmannerliness in not first introducing my wife to you."

"It was natural that you should think of telling her the news first of all," the Squire said courteously. "Madam, I am your obedient servant, and I hope that soon we shall get to know each other well. I consider it of great importance that the Squire of a parish and the Rector should work well together, and see a great deal of each other. I don't know whether you are aware, Mr. Greg, that the living is worth 200 pounds a year, besides which there is a paddock of about ten acres, which is sufficient for the keep of a horse and cow. The Rectory is a comfortable one, and I have arranged with Mr. Bastow that he shall leave his furniture for the benefit of his successor. It will include linen, so that you will be put to no expense whatever in moving in. I have known these first expenses to seriously cripple the usefulness of a clergyman when appointed to a living."

"That is good of you indeed, Mr. Thorndyke," the curate said. "We have been living in these lodgings since we first came here, and it will indeed make matters easy to have the question of furniture so kindly settled for us."

"Will your Rector be able to release you shortly?"

"I have no doubt that he will do that at once. His son has just left Oxford and taken deacon's orders; and the Rector told me the other day that he should be glad if I would look out for another curacy, as he wanted to have his son here with him. He spoke very kindly, and said that he should make no change until I could hear of a place to suit me. His son has been assisting him for the last month, since I took the services at Crowswood, and I am sure he would release me at once."

"Then I should be glad if you will move up as soon as possible to the Rectory. I know nothing about the necessary forms, but I suppose that Mr. Bastow will send in his resignation to the Bishop, and I shall write and tell him that I have appointed you, and you can continue to officiate as you have done lately until you can be formally inducted as the Rector. Perhaps you would not mind going round to your Rector at once and telling him of the offer you have had. I have one or two matters to do in the town, and will call again in three quarters of an hour. I shall be glad to tell Mr. Bastow that you will come into residence at once."

On returning at the appointed time he found that the curate had returned.

"Mr. Pilkington was very kind, and evidently very pleased; he congratulated me most warmly, and I can come up at once. We don't know how to thank you enough, Mr. Thorndyke."

"I don't want any thanks, I can assure you, Mr. Greg. Tomorrow I will send a couple of women in from the village to get the place in order, and no doubt Mr. Bastow will want to take away a few things. He is going to remain with me as tutor to my son. I am sure you and I will get on very well together, and I only hope that your sermons will be no longer when you are Rector than they have been while you have been assisting us. Long sermons may do for a town congregation, but in my opinion they are a very serious mistake in the case of a village one. By the way, I think it would be as well for you to get a servant here, and that before you go up. Mr. Bastow's servant was an old woman, and in a case like this I always think it is better not to take one's predecessor's servant. She generally resents any change, and is always quoting how her last master had things. I mention this before you go, because she is sure to ask to stay on, and it is much easier to say that you are bringing a servant with you than to have to tell her she is too old or too fat. Don't you think so, Mrs. Greg?"

"Yes, I think it will be much better, Mr. Thorndyke. Even if I cannot hear of one likely to suit us permanently, I will take someone as a stop gap. One can easily change afterwards."

"The old woman will do very well," the Squire said. "She has two married daughters in the village, and with a shilling or two from the parish she will manage comfortably. At any rate we shall look after her, and I have no doubt Mr. Bastow will make her an allowance."

Never were a pair more delighted than Parson Greg and his wife when two days later they took possession of their new home. Half a dozen women had been at work the day before, and everything was in perfect order. To Mrs. Greg's relief she found that the old servant had already gone, the Squire having himself informed her that Mrs. Greg would bring her own maid with her. Mr. Bastow said that he would allow her half a crown a week as long as she lived, and the Squire added as much more, and as the woman had saved a good deal during her twenty years' service with the Rector, she was perfectly satisfied.

"It is a good thing that she should be content," the Squire said to Mr. Bastow. "She has a lot of connections in the village, and if she had gone away with a sense of grievance she might have created a good deal of ill feeling against your successor, and I am very anxious that he should begin well. I like the young fellow, and I like his wife."

"We are fortunate, indeed, Ernest," Mrs. Greg said the following morning, as with the children, two and three years old, they went out into the garden; where the trees were laden with apples, pears, and plums. "What a change from our little rooms in Reigate. I should think that anyone ought to be happy indeed here."

"They ought to be, Emma, but you see Mr. Bastow had trouble enough; and it should be a lesson to us, dear, to look very closely after the boys now they are young, and see that they don't make bad acquaintances."

"From what we hear of the village, there is little fear of that; the mischief must have begun before Mr. Thorndyke came down, when by all accounts things had altogether gone to the bad here, and of course young Bastow must have had an exceptionally evil disposition, Ernest."

"Yes, no doubt; but his father could not have looked after him properly. I believe, from what I hear, that Bastow was so dispirited at his powerlessness to put a stop to the state of things here, that, except to perform service, he seldom left the house, and the boy no doubt grew up altogether wild. You know that I was in court on the second day of the examination, and the young fellow's insolence and bearing astonished and shocked me. Happily, we have the Squire here now to back us up, the village has been completely cleared of all bad characters, and is by all accounts quite a model place, and we must do our best to keep it so."

The news of the change at the Rectory naturally occasioned a great deal of talk. At first there was a general feeling of regret that Mr. Bastow had gone, and yet it was felt that he could not have been expected to stay; the month's experience that they had had of the new parson had cleared the way for him. He and his wife soon made themselves familiar with the villagers, and being bright young people, speedily made themselves liked. The Squire and Mrs. Cunningham called the first afternoon after their arrival.

"You must always send up if anything is wanted, Mr. Greg; whenever there is any illness in the village we always keep a stock of soups and jellies, and Mrs. Cunningham is almoner in general. Is there anything that we can do for you? If so, let me know without hesitation."

"Indeed, there is nothing, Mr. Thorndyke. It is marvelous to us coming in here and finding everything that we can possibly want."

"You will want a boy for your garden; and you cannot do better than take young Bill Summers. He was with me for a bit last year, when the boy I have now was laid up with mumps or something of that sort, and he was very favorably reported on as being handy in the garden, able to milk a cow, and so on. By the way, Mrs. Greg, I have taken the liberty of sending down a cow in milk. I expect she is in your meadow now. I have seven or eight of them, and if you will send her back when her milk fails I will send down another."

"You are too kind altogether, Mr. Thorndyke!" Mrs. Greg exclaimed.

"Not at all. I want to see things comfortable here, and you will find it difficult to get on without a cow. I keep two or three for the special use of the village. I make them pay for it, halfpenny a pint; it is better to do that than to give it. It is invaluable for the children; and I don't think in all England you see rosier and healthier youngsters than those in our schools. You will sometimes find milk useful for puddings and that sort of thing for the sick; and they will appreciate it all the more than if they had to look solely to us for their supply."

"How is Mr. Bastow, sir?"

"He is better than could be expected. He himself proposed this morning that my boy Mark should begin his studies at once; and, indeed, now that the worst is over and he has got rid of the load of care on his shoulders, I hope that we shall have him bright and cheerful again before long."

Such was indeed the case. For some little time Mr. Bastow avoided the village, but John Thorndyke got him to go down with him to call upon Mr. Greg, and afterwards to walk through it with him. At first he went timidly and shrinkingly, but the kindly greetings of the women he met, and the children stopping to pull a forelock or bob a courtesy as of old, gradually cheered him up, and he soon got accustomed to the change, and would of an afternoon go down to the village and chat with the women, after he had ascertained that his successor had no objection whatever, and was, indeed, pleased that he still took an interest in his former parishioners. Mark was at first disappointed at the arrangement, for he had looked forward to going to a public school. His father, however, had no great trouble in reconciling him to it.

"Of course, Mark," he said, "there are advantages in a public school. I was never at one myself, but I believe that, though the discipline is pretty strict, there is a great deal of fun and sport, and you may make desirable acquaintances. Upon the other hand, there are drawbacks. In the first place, the majority of the boys are sons of richer men than I am. I don't know that that would matter much, but it would give you expensive habits, and perhaps make you fonder of London life than I should care about. In the next place, you see, you would be at school when the shooting begins, and you are looking forward to carrying a gun next year. The same with hunting. You know I promised that this year you should go to the meets on your pony, and see as much of them as you can, and of course when you were at school you would only be able to indulge in these matters during your holidays; and if a hard frost set in, as is the case three times out of four, just as you came home, you would be out of it altogether.

"I must say I should like you to have a real love of field sports and to be a good shot and a good rider. A man, however wide his acres may be, is thought but little of in the country if he is not a good sportsman; and, moreover, there is nothing better for developing health and muscles than riding, and tramping over the fields with a gun on your shoulder; and, lastly, you must not forget, Mark, that one of my objects in making this arrangement is to keep Mr. Bastow with us. I am sure that unless he thought that he was making himself useful he would not be content to remain here; and at his age, you know, it would be hard for him to obtain clerical employment."

"All right, father. I see that the present plan is the best, and that I should have but little sport if I went away to school. Besides, I like Mr. Bastow very much, and I am quite sure that I shan't get so many whackings from him as I used to do from old Holbrook."

"I fancy not, Mark," his father said with a smile. "I am not against wholesome discipline, but I think it can be carried too far; at any rate, I hope you will be just as obedient to Mr. Bastow as if he always had a cane on the table beside him."

Mark, therefore, went to work in a cheerful spirit, and soon found that he made more progress in a week under Mr. Bastow's gentle tuition than he had done in a month under the vigorous discipline of his former master. Mr. and Mrs. Greg dined regularly at the Squire's once a week.

"Have you had that Indian servant of yours long, Mr. Thorndyke?" Mrs. Greg asked one day. "He is a strange looking creature. Of course, in the daytime, when one sees him about in ordinary clothes, one does not notice him so much; but of an evening, in that Eastern costume of his, he looks very strange."

"He was the servant of the Colonel, my brother," the Squire replied. "He brought him over from India with him. The man had been some years in his service, and was very attached to him, and had saved his life more than once, he told me. On one occasion he caught a cobra by the neck as it was about to strike my brother's hand as he sat at table; he carried it out into the compound, as George called it, but which means, he told me, garden, and there let it escape. Another time he caught a Thug, which means a sort of robber who kills his victims by strangling before robbing them. They are a sort of sect who regard strangling as a religious action, greatly favored by the bloodthirsty goddess they worship. He was in the act of fastening the twisted handkerchief, used for the purpose, round my brother's neck, when Ramoo cut him down. The closest shave, though, was when George, coming down the country, was pounced upon by a tiger and carried off. Ramoo seized a couple of muskets from the men, and rushed into the jungle after him, and coming up with the brute killed him at the first shot. George escaped with a broken arm and his back laid open by a scratch of the tiger's claws as it first seized him.

"So at George's death I took Ramoo on, and have found him a most useful fellow. Of course, I was some little time before I became accustomed to his noiseless way of going about, and it used to make me jump when I happened to look round, and saw him standing quietly behind me when I thought I was quite alone. However, as soon as I became accustomed to him, I got over all that, and now I would not lose him for anything; he seems to know instinctively what I want. He is excellent as a waiter and valet; I should feel almost lost without him now; and the clumping about of an English man servant would annoy me as much as his noiseless way of going about did at first. He has come to speak English very fairly. Of course, my brother always talked to him in his own tongue; still, he had picked up enough English for me to get on with; now he speaks it quite fluently. When I have nothing whatever for him to do he devotes himself to my little ward. She is very fond of him, and it is quite pretty to see them together in the garden. Altogether, I would not part with him for anything."

For some years life passed uneventfully at Crowswood. It was seldom indeed that the Squire's authority was needed to set matters right in the village. The substitution of good farmers for shiftless ones in some of

the farms, and the better cultivation generally, had given more employment; and as John Thorndyke preferred keeping two or three cottages shut up rather than have them occupied by men for whom no work could be found, it was rare indeed that there were any complaints of scarcity of work, except, indeed, on the part of the Rector, who declared that, what with the healthiness of the village and the absence of want, his occupation, save for the Sunday duty, was a sinecure. Mr. Bastow was more happy and much brighter than he had been for many years. The occupation of teaching suited him, and he was able to make the work pleasant to his pupil as well as to himself; indeed, it occupied but a small portion of the day, the amount of learning considered necessary at the time not being extensive. A knowledge of Greek was thought quite superfluous for a country gentleman. Science was in its infancy, mathematics a subject only to be taken up by those who wanted to obtain a college fellowship. Latin, however, was considered an essential, and a knack of apt quotation from the Latin poets an accomplishment that every man who was a member of society or aspired to enter Parliament was expected to possess. Thus Mark Thorndyke's lessons lasted but two or three hours a day, and the school term was a movable period, according to the season of the year and the engagements of the Squire and Mark. In winter the evening was the time, so that the boy shot with his father, or rode to the hounds, or, as he got older, joined in shooting parties at the houses of neighbors.

In summer the work was done in the morning, but was not unfrequently broken. Mark went off at a very early hour to drive perhaps some twenty miles with his great chum, Dick Chetwynd, for a long day's fishing, or to see a main of cocks fought or a fight between the champions of two neighboring villages, or perhaps some more important battle.

When Millicent Conyers was ten years old she came regularly into the study, sitting curled up in a deep chair, getting up her lessons while Mark did his, and then changing seats with him while he learned his Horace or Ovid by heart. At this time she looked up greatly to him, and was his companion whenever he would allow her to be, fetched and carried for him, and stood almost on a level with his dogs in his estimation. Five years later, when Mark was eighteen, these relations changed somewhat. He now liked to have her with him, not only when about the house and garden, but when he took short rides she cantered along on her pony by his side. She was a bright faced girl, full of life and fun, and rejoicing in a far greater amount of freedom than most girls of her age and time.

"It is really time that she should learn to comport herself more staidly, instead of running about like a wild thing," Mrs. Cunningham said, one day, as she and the Squire stood after breakfast looking out of the open window at Mark and Millicent.

"Time enough, my dear lady, time enough. Let her enjoy life while she can. I am not in favor of making a young kitten behave like an old tabby; every creature in nature is joyful and frolicsome while it is young. She is as tall and as straight as any of her friends of the same age, and looks more healthy; she will tame down in time, and I dare say walk and look as prim and demure as they do. I was watching them the other day when there was a party of them up here, and I thought the difference was all to her advantage. She looked a natural, healthy girl; they looked like a set of overdressed dolls, afraid to move or to talk loud, or to stretch their mouths when they smile; very ladylike and nice, no doubt, but you will see Millicent will throw them into the shade when she is once past the tomboy age. Leave her alone, Mrs. Cunningham; a girl is not like a fruit tree, that wants pruning and training from its first year; it will be quite time to get her into shape when she has done growing."

John Thorndyke had occasionally made inquiries of Mr. Bastow as to the whereabouts of his son. At the time the sentence was passed transportation to the American colonies was being discontinued, and until other arrangements could be made hulks were established as places of confinement and punishment; but a few months later Arthur Bastow was one of the first batch of convicts sent out to the penal settlement formed on the east coast of Australia. This was intended to be fixed at Botany Bay, but it having been found that this bay was open and unsheltered, it was established at Sydney, although for many years the settlement retained in England the name of the original site. As the condition of the prisoners kept in the hulks was deplorable, the Squire had, through the influence of Sir Charles Harris, obtained the inclusion of Bastow's name among the first batch of those who were to sail for Australia. Mr. Bastow obtained permission to see his son before sailing, but returned home much depressed, for he had been assailed with such revolting and blasphemous language by him that he had been forced to retire in horror at the end of a few minutes.

"We have done well in getting him sent off," the Squire said, when he heard the result of the interview. "In the first place, the demoralizing effect of these hulks is quite evident, and it may be hoped that in a new country, where there can be no occasion for the convicts to be pent up together, things may be better; for although escapes from the hulks are not frequent, they occasionally take place, and had he gained his liberty we should have had an anxious time of it until he was re-arrested, whereas out there there is nowhere to go to, no possibility of committing a crime. It is not there as it was in the American colony. Settlements may grow up in time, but at present there are no white men whatever settled in the district; and the natives are, they say, hostile, and were a convict to escape he would almost certainly be killed, and possibly eaten. No doubt by the time your son has served his sentence colonies will be established out there, and he may then be disposed to settle there, either on a piece of land of which he could no doubt take up or in the service of one of the colonists."

CHAPTER V.

The scene in the convict yard at Sydney, five years after its foundation as a penal settlement, was not a pleasant one to the lover of humanity. Warders armed to the teeth were arranging gangs that were to go out to labor on the roads. Many of the convicts had leg irons, but so fastened as to be but slight hindrance to their working powers, but the majority were unironed. These were the better behaved convicts; not that this

would be judged from their faces, for the brutalizing nature of the system and the close association of criminals had placed its mark on all, and it would have been difficult for the most discriminating to have made any choice between the most hardened criminals and those who had been sent out for what would now be considered comparatively trivial offenses. The voyage on board ship had done much to efface distinctions, the convict life had done more, and the chief difference between the chained and unchained prisoners was that the latter were men of more timid disposition than many of their companions, and therefore less disposed to give trouble that would entail heavy punishment. But it was only the comparatively well conducted men who were placed upon road work; the rest were retained for work inside the jail, or were caged in solitary confinement. Each morning a number, varying from half a dozen to a dozen, were fastened up and flogged, in some cases with merciless severity, but it was seldom that a cry was uttered by these, the most brutal ruffians of the convict herd. This spectacle was just over: it was conducted in public for the edification of the rest, but, judging from the low laughs and brutal jests, uttered below the breath, it signally failed in producing the desired impression. Two of those who had suffered the severest punishment were now putting on their coarse woolen garments over their bloodstained shoulders; both were comparatively young men.

"I shall not stand this much longer," one muttered. "I will brain a warder, and get hung for it. One can but die once, while one can get flogged once a week."

"So would I," the other said bitterly; "but I have some scores to settle in England, and I am not going to put my head in a noose until I have wiped them out. The sooner we make arrangements to get back there the better."

"Yes, we have talked of this before," the other said, "and I quite agreed with you that if we all had the pluck of men we ought to be able to overpower the warders, in spite of their firearms. Of course some of us would get killed, but no one would mind that if there was but the remotest chance of getting away. The question is what we should do with ourselves when we were once outside the prison. Of course I know that there are two or three hundred settlers, but there would not be much to be got out of them, and life among those black fellows, even if they were civil to us, which I don't suppose they would be, would not be worth having."

"We might not have to stay there long; ships with stores or settlers arrive occasionally, and if a lot of us got away we might seize one by force, turn pirates for a bit, and when we are tired of that sail to some South American port, sell our capture, and make our way home to England. If we were not strong enough to take her, we could hide up on board her; we should be sure to find some fellow who for a pound or two would be willing to help us. The thing can be done if we make up our minds to do it, and I for one have made up my mind to try. I haven't chalked out a plan yet, but I am convinced that it is to be done."

"I am with you, whatever it is," the other said; "and I think there are twenty or thirty we could rely on. I don't say there are more than that, because there are a lot of white livered cusses among them who would inform against us at once, so as to get their own freedom as a reward for doing so. Well, we will both think it over, mate, and the sooner the better."

The two men who were thus talking together were both by birth above the common herd of convicts, and had gained a considerable ascendancy over the others because of their reckless indifference to punishment and their defiance of authority. Few of the men knew each other's real names; by the officials they were simply known by numbers, while among themselves each had a slang name generally gained on board ship.

Separation there had, of course, been impossible, and when fastened down below each had told his story with such embellishments as he chose to give it, and being but little interfered with by their guards, save to insure the impossibility of a mutiny, there had been fights of a desperate kind. Four or five dead bodies had been found and thrown overboard, but as none would testify as to who had been the assailants none were punished for it; and so the strongest and most desperate had enforced their authority over the others, as wild beasts might do, and by the time they had reached their destination all were steeped much deeper in wickedness and brutality than when they set sail.

The two men who were speaking together had speedily become chums, and, though much younger than the majority of the prisoners, had by their recklessness and ferocity established an ascendancy among the others. This ascendancy had been maintained after their arrival by their constant acts of insubordination, and by their apparent indifference to the punishment awarded them. At night the convicts were lodged in wooden buildings, where, so long as they were not riotous, they were allowed to talk and converse freely, as indeed was the case when their work for the day was done.

As to any attempt at escape, the authorities had but small anxiety, for until the arrival of the first settlers, three years after that of the convicts, there was nowhere a fugitive could go to, no food to be obtained, no shelter save among the blacks, who were always ready for a reward of tobacco and spirits to hand them over at once to the authorities. The case had but slightly changed since the settlement began to grow. It was true that by stealing sheep or driving off a few head of cattle a fugitive might maintain himself for a time, but even if not shot down by the settlers or patrols, he would be sure before long to be brought in by the blacks.

The experiment had already been tried of farming our better conducted convicts to the settlers, and indeed it was the prospect of obtaining such cheap labor that had been the main inducement to many of the colonists to establish themselves so far from home, instead of going to America. As a whole the system worked satisfactorily; the men were as much prisoners as were the inmates of the jail, for they knew well enough that were they to leave the farmers and take to the bush they would remain free but a short time, being either killed or handed over by the blacks, and in the latter case they would be severely punished and set to prison work in irons, with labor very much more severe than that they were called upon to do on the farms.

Some little time after the conversation between the two convicts the prison authorities were congratulating themselves upon the fact that a distinct change had taken or was taking place in the demeanor of many of the men who had hitherto been the most troublesome, and they put it down to the unusually severe floggings that had been inflicted on the two most refractory prisoners in the establishment. When in the prison yard or at work they were more silent than before, and did their tasks doggedly and sullenly; there was no open defiance to the authorities, and, above all, a marked cessation of drunkenness from the spirits smuggled into

the place.

Only the two originators were aware of the extent of the plot; for they had agreed that only by keeping every man in ignorance as to who had joined it could they hope to escape treachery. In the first place, they had taken into their confidence a dozen men on whom they could absolutely rely. Beyond this they had approached the others singly, beginning by hinting that there was a plot for escape, and that a good many were concerned, and telling them that these had bound themselves together by a solemn oath to kill any traitor, even if hanged for it.

"No one is to know who is in it and who is not," the leaders said to each recruit. "Every new man will be closely watched by the rest, and if he has any communication privately with a warder or any other official he will be found strangled the next morning; no one will know who did it. Even if he succeeded in eluding the vigilance of his comrades at the time, it would soon be known; for if indulgence of any kind was shown towards one man, or he was relieved from his ordinary work, or even freed altogether and suddenly, he would be a dead man in twenty-four hours, for we have friends outside among the ticket of leave men who have bound themselves to kill at once any man set free."

To the question, "What do you intend to do when we get off?" the answer was, "We shall go straight to the bush, so as to avoid a fight with the soldiers, in the first place; then we shall join that night, and drive off all the cattle and sheep from the settlements, take possession of every firearm found in the houses, then move off a couple of hundred miles or so into the bush, and establish a settlement of our own.

"Of course, we shall take horses and clothes and any spirits and food we may find. If the soldiers pursue us, we will fight them; but as there are only three or four companies of them, and we shall be eight hundred strong, we shall very soon show them that they had better leave us alone.

"Oh, yes, no doubt they will send more soldiers out from England, but it will be over a year before they can get here; and we propose after we have done with the fellows here to break up into parties of twenty and thirty, dividing the sheep and cattle among us, and each party going where it will. The place is of tremendous size, as big as a dozen Englands, they say, and each party will fix a place it fancies, where there is good water and a river with fish and so on, and we may live all our lives comfortably, with just enough work to raise potatoes and corn, and to watch our stock increasing. Anyhow, we might calculate on having some years of peace and freedom, and even if in the end they searched us all out, which would be very unlikely, they could but bring us back, hang a few, and set the rest to work again; but we think that they would most likely leave us alone altogether, quite satisfied with having got rid of us."

"Those who liked it could, no doubt, take wives among the blacks. The convict women who are out on service with the settlers would, you may be sure, join us at once, and an enterprising chap who preferred a white woman to a black could always make his way down here and persuade one to go off with him to his farm. That is the general plan; if many get tired of the life they have only to come down to Sydney, hide up near the place on some dark night, and go down to the port, seize a ship, and make off in her, compelling the officers and sailors to take them and land them at any port they fancy, either in Chili, Peru, or Mexico, or, if they like, sail west and make for Rio or Buenos Ayres or one of the West Indian islands. As to when it is going to be done, or how it is going to be done, no one will be told till it is ready to be carried out. We have not settled that ourselves, and thus one who was fool enough to risk certain death could tell the Governor no more than that there was a plot on hand, and that the man who had sworn him in was concerned in it."

So one by one every man in the prison was sworn by a terrible oath to secrecy, to watch his companions, and to report anything that looked suspicious. Many joined willingly, the prospect of relief, even should it only be temporary, being too fascinating to be resisted. Some joined against their will, fearing that a refusal to do so would be punished by death; and the fact that two or three men were found strangled in bed had a very great effect in inducing others to join in the plot.

These deaths caused some uneasiness to the authorities. Their utmost endeavors failed to discover who were the perpetrators of these murders; and even when everyone in the same hut was flogged to obtain information, not one opened his lips.

One night the word was passed round that the time had come. One only in each hut was familiar with the details, and he gave instructions to each man individually as to what he was to do. The date had been determined by the fact that the time which they had been sentenced to wear irons had terminated the day before, and their unusually subdued and quiet demeanor having carried them through the interval without, as usual, fresh punishments being awarded them before the termination of the former one.

In the morning the whole of the convicts were drawn up to witness the flogging of the inmates of one of the huts, where a man had been found strangled the morning before. The first prisoner was taken to the triangle, stripped to the waist, and tied up. There was a dead silence in the ranks of the convicts, but as the first blow fell upon his shoulders there was a loud yell, and simultaneously the whole ranks broke up, and a number of men sprang upon each of the warders, wrested their muskets from them, and threw them to the ground. Then there was a rush towards the Governor and officers, who were assembled in front of the stone house that faced the open end of the square. Firing their pistols, these at once took refuge in the house, three or four falling under the scattered fire that was opened as soon as the muskets of the warders fell into the hands of the convicts.

Directly the doors were closed the officers appeared at the windows, and opened a rifle fire upon the convicts, as did the guards near the gate. As comparatively few of the convicts had muskets, they began to waver at once. But, headed by the two ringleaders, the armed party rushed at the guard, shot them down, and threw open the gate.

Then an unexpected thing occurred. The soldiers from the barracks happened to be marching down to do target practice on the shore, and were passing the convict prison when the firing broke out. They were at once halted, and ordered to load, and as the convicts, with exultant shouts, poured through the gate they saw a long line of soldiers, with leveled muskets, facing them.

"At them!" one of the leaders shouted. "It is too late to draw back now. We have got to break through them."

Many of the convicts ran back into the yard; but those armed with muskets, the more desperate of the party, followed their leaders. A moment later a heavy volley rang out, and numbers of the convicts fell. Their two leaders, however, and some twenty of their followers, keeping in a close body, rushed at the line of soldiers with clubbed muskets, and with the suddenness and fury of the rush burst their way through the line, and then scattering, fled across the country, pursued by a dropping fire of musketry.

The officers in command, seeing that but a fraction had escaped, ordered one company to pursue, and marched the rest into the prison yard. It was already deserted; the convicts had scattered to their huts, those who had arms throwing them away. Dotted here and there over the square were the bodies of eight or ten convicts and as many warders, whose skulls had been smashed in by their infuriated assailants as soon as they had obtained possession of their muskets. Close to the gate lay the six soldiers who had furnished the guard; these were all dead or mortally wounded.

The Governor and the officials issued from the house as soon as the soldiers entered the yard. The first step to do was to turn all the convicts out of the huts and to iron them. No resistance was attempted, the sight of the soldiers completely cowing the mutineers. When the bodies of the convicts that had fallen were counted and the roll of the prisoners called over, it was found that eighteen were missing, and of these six were during the course of the next hour or two brought in by the soldiers who had gone in pursuit of them. The rest had escaped.

The convicts were all questioned separately, and the tales they told agreed so closely that the Governor could not doubt that they were speaking the truth. All had been sworn in by one of two men, and knew nothing whatever of what was intended to be done that day, until after they were locked up on the evening previous. Each of those in the huts had received his instructions the night before from the one man.

There were eighteen huts, each containing fifteen convicts. Of the men who had given instructions six had fallen outside the gate, together with sixteen others; five had been overtaken and brought in; altogether, twelve were still at large. Among these were the two leaders. The next day six of the prisoners were tried and executed. The rest were punished only by a reduction in their rations; sentence of death was at the same time passed upon the twelve still at large, so as to save the trouble of a succession of trials as they were caught and brought in.

The two leaders had kept together after they had broken through the line of soldiers.

"Things have gone off well," one said as they ran through. "Those soldiers nearly spoilt it all."

"Yes, that was unlucky," the other agreed; "but so far as we are concerned, which is all we care about, I think things have turned out for the best."

Nothing more was said until they had far outstripped their pursuers, hampered as these were by their uniforms and belts.

"You mean that it is not such a bad thing that they have not all got away?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. It is all very well to tell them about driving off the sheep and cattle and horses, and going to start a colony on our own account, but the soldiers would have been up to us before we had gone a day's journey. Most of the fellows would have bolted directly they saw them. As it is, I fancy only about a dozen have got away, perhaps not as many as that, and they are all men that one can rely upon. One can feed a dozen without difficulty—a sheep a day would do it—and by giving a turn to each of the settlers, the animals won't be missed. Besides, we shall want money if we are ever to get out of this cursed country. It would not be difficult to get enough for you and me, but when it comes to a large number the sack of the whole settlement would not go very far.

"My own idea is that we had best join the others tonight, kill a few sheep, and go two or three days' march into the bush, until the heat of the pursuit is over. We are all armed, the blacks would not venture to attack us, and the soldiers would not be likely to pursue us very far. In a week or so, when we can assume that matters have cooled down a bit, we can come down again. We know all the shepherds, and even if they were not disposed to help us they would not dare to betray us, or report a sheep or two being missing. Of course, we shall have to be very careful to shift our quarters frequently. Those black trackers are sure to be sent out pretty often."

"As long as we are hanging about the settlements there won't be much fear of our being bothered by the blacks. Of course, we shall have to decide later on whether it will be best for us to try and seize a ship, all of us acting together, or for us to get quietly on board one and keep under hatches until she is well away. That is the plan I fancy most."

"So do I. In the first place the chances are that in the next two or three months at least half the fellows will be picked up. To begin with, several of them are sure to get hold of liquor and make attacks upon the settlers, in which case some of them, anyhow, are sure to get killed. In the next place, most of them were brought up as thieves in the slums of London, and will have no more idea of roughing it in a country like this than of behaving themselves if they were transported to a London drawing room. Therefore, I am pretty sure that at the end of three months we shall not be able to reckon on half of them. Well, six men are not enough to capture a ship, or, if they do capture it, to keep the crew under. One must sleep sometimes, and with only three or four men on deck we could not hope to keep a whole ship's crew at bay."

"Then there is another reason. You and I, when we have got a decent rig out, could pass anywhere without exciting observation; while if we had half a dozen of the others, whatever their good qualities, they would be noticed at once by their villainous faces, and if questions were to be asked we should be likely to find ourselves in limbo again in a very short time. So I am all for working on our own account, even if the whole of the others were ready to back us; but, of course, we must keep on good terms with them all, and breathe no word that we think that each man had better shift for himself. Some of those fellows, if they thought we had any idea of leaving them, would go straight into Sydney and denounce us, although they would know that they themselves would be likely to swing at the same time."

As none of the convicts were acquainted with the bush, they had been obliged to select as their rendezvous a hut two miles out of the town, where the convict gangs that worked on the road were in the habit of leaving

their tools. On the way there the two men killed a couple of sheep from a flock whose position they had noticed before it became dark. These they skinned, cut off the heads, and left them behind, carrying the sheep on their shoulders to the meeting.

"Is that you, Captain Wild?" a voice said as they approached.

"Yes; Gentleman Dick is with me."

"That is a good job. We had begun to think that the soldiers had caught you."

"They would not have caught us alive, you may take your oath. How many are there of us here?"

"Ten of us, Captain. I think that that is all there are."

"That is enough for our purpose. Has anyone got anything to eat?"

There was a deep growl in the negative.

"Well, we have brought a couple of sheep with us, and as we have carried them something like a mile, you had better handle them by turns. We will strike off into the bush and put another three or four miles between us and the jail, and then light a fire and have a meal."

Two of the men came forward and took the sheep. Then they turned off from the road, and taking their direction from a star, followed it for an hour.

"I think we have got far enough now," the man called Captain Wild said. "You had better cut down the bushes, and we will make a fire."

"But how are we to light it?" one of them exclaimed in a tone of consternation. "I don't suppose we have got flint and steel or tinder box among us."

"Oh, we can manage that!" the Captain said. "Get a heap of dried leaves here first, then some wood, and we will soon have a blaze."

His orders were obeyed. Some of the men had carried off the warders' swords as well as their muskets, and now used them for chopping wood. As soon as a small pile of dried leaves was gathered the Captain broke a cartridge and sprinkled half its contents among them, and then dropped the remainder into his musket. He flashed this off among the leaves, and a bright flame at once shot up, and in five minutes a fire was burning.

One of the sheep was soon cut up, the meat hacked in slices from the bones, a ramrod was thrust through the pieces, and, supported by four sticks, was laid across the fire. Three other similarly laden spits were soon placed beside it, and in a short time the meat was ready for eating. Until a hearty meal had been made there was but little talking.

"That is first rate," one of the men said, as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Now one only wants a pipe and bacca and a glass of grog, to feel comfortable."

"Well, Captain, are you satisfied with the day's work?"

"It would have been a grand day had it not been for the soldiers passing just at the time. As it is, Gentleman Dick and I have been agreeing that as far as we are all concerned it has not turned out so badly. There would have been a lot of difficulty in finding food if we had all got away, and some of those mealy mouthed fellows would have been sure to go back and peach on us at the first opportunity. A dozen is better than a hundred for the sort of life we are likely to lead for some time. We are strong enough to beat off any attack from the black fellows, and also to break into any of these settlers' houses.

"We can, when we have a mind to, take a stray sheep now and then, or even a bullock would scarcely be missed, especially if our pals in the settlement will lend us a helping hand, which you may be sure they will do; in fact, they would know better than to refuse. Then a large party could be traced by those black trackers at a run, while a small one would not; especially if, as we certainly will do, we break up into twos and threes for a time. First of all, though, we must go well into the bush; at daybreak tomorrow morning we will drive off twenty sheep, and go right away a hundred miles, and wait there till matters have settled down. They will never take the troops out that distance after us. Then we can come back again, and hang about the settlement and take what we want. The wild blacks don't come near there, and we shall be safer in pairs than we should be if we kept together; and of course we could meet once a week or so to talk over our plans. We must borrow some whisky, flour, tea, tobacco, and a few other items from the settlers, but we had better do without them for this trip. I don't want to turn the settlers against us, for they have all got horses, and might combine with the troops to give chase, so it would be best to leave them alone, at any rate till we get back again. Another reason for treating them gently is that even if they did not join the troops they might get into a funk, and drive their sheep and horses down into Sydney, and then we should mighty soon get short of food. It will be quite time enough to draw upon them heavily when we make up our minds to get hold of a ship and sail away. Money would be of no use to us here, but we shall want it when we get to a port, wherever that port may be."

"That sounds right enough, Captain," one of the convicts said, "and just at present nothing would suit me better than to get so far away from this place that I can lay on my back and take it easy for a spell."

There was a general chorus of assent, and there being neither tobacco nor spirits, the party very soon stretched themselves off to sleep round the fire.

In the morning they were up before daylight, and half an hour later arrived at one of the farms farthest from Sydney. Here they found a flock of a hundred sheep. The shepherd came to the door of his hut on hearing a noise.

"You had best lie down and go to sleep for the next hour," the leader of the convicts said sharply. "We don't want to do an old pal any harm, and when you wake up in the morning and find the flock some twenty short, of course you won't have any idea what has come of them."

The man nodded and went back into the hut and shut the door, and the convicts started for the interior, driving twenty sheep before them.

During the first day's journey they went fast, keeping the sheep at a trot before them, and continuing their journey through the heat of the day.

"I tell you what, Captain," one of the men said when they halted at sunset, "if we don't get to a water hole we shall have to give up this idea of going and camping in the bush. My mouth has been like an oven all day, and it is no use getting away from jail to die of thirst out here."

There had been similar remarks during the day, and the two leaders agreed together that it would be madness to push further, and that, whatever the risk, they would have to return to the settlements unless they could strike water. As they were sitting moodily round the fire they were startled by a dozen natives coming forward into the circle of light. These held out their hands to say that their intentions were peaceful.

"Don't touch your muskets!" Captain Wild exclaimed sharply, as some of the men were on the point of jumping to their feet. "The men are friendly, and we may be able to get them to guide us to water."

The natives, as they came up, grinned and rubbed their stomachs, to show that they were hungry.

"I understand," the Captain said; "you want a sheep, we want water;" and he held up his hand to his mouth and lifted his elbow as if in the act of drinking.

In two or three minutes the natives understood what he wanted, and beckoned to the men to follow. The tired sheep were got onto their legs again, and half a mile away the party arrived at a pool in what in wet weather was the bed of a river. A sheep was at once handed over to the natives, and when the men had satisfied their thirst another sheep was killed for their own use.

After a great deal of trouble the natives were made to understand that the white men wanted one of their party to go with them as a guide, and to take them always to water holes, and a boy of fifteen was handed over to them in exchange for two more sheep, and at daybreak the next morning they started again for the interior, feeling much exhilarated by the piece of luck that had befallen them. They traveled for four days more, and then, considering that the soldiers had ceased their pursuit long ago, they encamped for ten days, enjoying to the utmost their recovered freedom and their immunity from work of any kind. Then they returned to the neighborhood of the settlements, and broke up, as their leader proposed, into pairs.

They had been there but a short time before the depredations committed roused the settlers to band themselves together. Every horse that could be spared was lent to the military, who formed a mounted patrol of forty men, while parties of infantry, guided by native trackers, were constantly on the scent for the convicts.

"This is just what I expected," Captain Wild said to his lieutenant. "It was the choice of two evils, and I am not sure that the plan we chose was not the worst. We might have been quite sure that these fellows would not be able, even for a time, to give up their old ways. If they had confined themselves, as we have done, to taking a sheep when they wanted it, and behaving civilly when they went to one of the houses and begged for a few pounds of flour or tea, the settlers would have made no great complaint of us; they know what a hard time we have had, and you can see that some of the women were really sorry for us, and gave us more than we actually asked for. But it has not been so with the others. They had been breaking into houses, stealing every thing they could lay their hands upon, and in three or four cases shooting down men on the slightest provocation.

"The money and watches were no good to them, but the brutes could not help stealing them; so here we are, and the settlement is like a swarm of angry bees, and this plan of handing over most of their horses to the military will end in all of us being hunted down if we stay here. Two were shot yesterday, and in another week we shall all either be killed or caught. There is nothing for it but to clear out. I am against violence, not on principle, but because in this case it sets people's backs up; but it cannot be helped now. We must get a couple of horses to ride, and a spare one to carry our swag. We must have half a sack of flour and a sheep—it is no use taking more than one, because the meat won't keep—and a good stock of tea and sugar. We must get a good supply of powder, if we can, some bullets and shot. We shall have to get our meat by shooting.

"There is no time to be lost, and tonight we had better go to that settler's place nearest the town. He has got two of the best horses out here—at least so Redgrave, that shepherd I was talking to today, told me—and a well filled store of provisions. If he will let us have them without rumpus, all well and good; if not, it will be the worse for him. My idea is that we should ride two or three hundred miles along the coast until we get to a river, follow it up till we find a tidy place for a camp, and stop there for three or four months, then come back again and keep ourselves quiet until we find out that a ship is going to sail; then we will do a night among the farmhouses, and clean them out of their watches and money, manage to get on board, and hide till we are well out to sea. We must get a fresh fit out before we go on board; these clothes are neither handsome nor becoming. We must put on our best manners, and tell them that we are men who have served our full time, and want to get back, and that we were obliged to hide because we had not enough to pay our full passage money, but that we have enough to pay the cost of our grub, and are ready to pull at a rope and make ourselves useful in any way. If we are lucky we ought to get enough before we start to buy horses and set ourselves up well in business at home."

"I think that is a very good plan," the other agreed, "and I am quite sure the sooner we make ourselves scarce here the better."

CHAPTER VI.

While arranging for young Bastow being sent out with the first batch of convicts John Thorndyke had been introduced to several of the officials of the Department, and called upon them at intervals to obtain news of the penal colony. Three years after its establishment a Crown colony had been opened for settlement in its vicinity. As the climate was said to be very fine and the country fertile, and land could be taken up without payment, the number who went out was considerable, there being the additional attraction that convicts of good character would be allotted to settlers as servants and farm hands.

Six years after Arthur Bastow sailed the Squire learned that there had been a revolt among the convicts; several had been killed, and the mutiny suppressed, but about a dozen had succeeded in getting away. These had committed several robberies and some murders among the settlers, and a military force and a party of warders from the prison were scouring the country for them.

"Of course, Mr. Thorndyke," the official said, "the Governor in his report does not give us the names of any of those concerned in the matter; he simply says that although the mutiny was general, it was wholly the work of a small number of the worse class of prisoners. By worse class he means the most troublesome and refractory out there. The prisoners are not classified according to their original crimes. A poacher who has killed a game keeper, or a smuggler who has killed a revenue officer, may in other respects be a quiet and well conducted man, while men sentenced for comparatively minor offenses may give an immense deal of trouble. I will, however, get a letter written to the Governor, asking him if Arthur Bastow was among those who took part in the revolt, and if so what has become of him."

It was more than a year before the reply came, and then the Governor reported that Arthur Bastow, who was believed to have been the leading spirit of the mutiny, was among those who had escaped, and had not yet been recaptured. It was generally believed that he had been killed by the blacks, but of this there was no actual proof.

Mr. Bastow was much disturbed when he heard the news. "Suppose he comes back here, Mr. Thorndyke."

"I won't suppose anything of the sort," the Squire replied. "I don't say that it would be altogether impossible, because now that vessels go from time to time to Sydney, he might, of course, be able to hide up in one of them, and not come on deck until she was well on her way, when, in all probability, he would be allowed to work his passage, and might be put ashore without any information being given to the authorities. I have no doubt that among the sailors there would be a good deal of sympathy felt for the convicts. No doubt they have a hard time of it, and we know that the gangs working on the roads are always ironed. Still, this is very unlikely, and the chances are all in favor of his being in hiding in the bush.

"The shepherds and other hands on the farms are chiefly convicts, and would probably give him aid if he required it, and there would be no difficulty in getting a sheep, now and then, for, as all reports say, one of the chief troubles out there are the wild dogs, or dingoes, as they are called; any loss in that way would readily be put down to them. As to money, he would have no occasion for it; if he wanted it he would get it by robbing the settlers, he would know that if he came back here he would run the risk of being seized at once on landing or of being speedily hunted down as an escaped convict. I don't think that there is the slightest occasion for us to trouble ourselves about him."

But though the Squire spoke so confidently, he felt by no means sure that Arthur Bastow would not turn up again, for his reckless audacity had made a great impression upon him. The proceeds of the robberies in the colony, in which he had no doubt played a part, would have furnished him with money with which he could bribe a sailor to hide him away and, if necessary, pay his passage money to England, when discovered on board, and perhaps maintain him when he got home until he could replenish his purse by some unlawful means. Lastly, the Squire argued that the fellow's vindictive nature and longing for revenge would act as an incentive to bring him back to London. He talked the matter over with Mark, who was now a powerful young fellow of twenty, who, of course, remembered the incidents attending Bastow's capture and trial.

"I cannot help fancying that the fellow will come back, Mark."

"Well, if he does, father, we must make it our business to lay him by the heels again. You managed it last time, and if he should turn up you may be sure I will help you to do it again."

"Yes, but we may not hear of his having returned until he strikes a blow. At any rate, see that your pistols are loaded and close at hand at night."

"They always are, father. There is no saying when a house like this, standing alone, and containing a good deal of plate and valuables, may be broken into."

"Well, you might as well carry them always when you go out after dark. I shall speak to Knapp, and request him to let me know if he hears of a suspicious looking character—any stranger, in fact—being noticed in or about the village, and I shall have a talk with Simeox, the head constable at Reigate, and ask him to do the same. He is not the same man who was head at the time Bastow was up before us, but he was in the force then, and, as one of the constables who came up to take the prisoners down to Reigate, he will have all the facts in his mind. He is a sharp fellow, and though Bastow has no doubt changed a good deal since then, he would hardly fail to recognize him if his eye fell upon him. Of course we may be alarming ourselves unnecessarily, but there are several reasons why I should object strongly to be shot just at the present time."

"Or at any other time, I should say, father," the young man said with a laugh.

"I shall know him, Squire, safe enough," the head constable replied when John Thorndyke went down to see him on the following day; "but I should think that if he does come back to England he will hardly be fool enough to come down here. He was pretty well known in town before that affair, and everyone who was in the courthouse would be sure to have his face strongly impressed upon their minds. You may forget a man you have seen casually, but you don't forget one you have watched closely when he is in the dock with two others charged with murder. Five out of my six men were constables at that time, and would know him again the minute they saw him; but anyhow, I will tell them to keep a sharp lookout in the tramps' quarters, and especially over the two or three men still here that Bastow used to consort with. I should say that Reigate is the last place in the world where he would show his face."

"I hope so," the Squire said. "He has caused trouble enough down here as it is; his father is getting an old man now, and is by no means strong, and fresh troubles of that kind would undoubtedly kill him."

A month later the Reigate coach was stopped when a short distance out of the town by two highwaymen, and a considerable prize obtained by the robbers. Soon afterwards came news of private carriages being stopped on various commons in the South of London, and of several burglaries taking place among the houses round Clapham, Wandsworth, and Putney. Such events were by no means uncommon, but following each other in such quick succession they created a strong feeling of alarm among the inhabitants of the

neighborhood. John Thorndyke, going up to town shortly afterwards, went to the headquarters of the Bow Street runners, and had a talk with their chief in reference especially to the stoppage of the Reigate coach. Mr. Chetwynd had lately died, and John Thorndyke had been unanimously elected by his fellow magistrates as chairman of the bench.

"No, Mr. Thorndyke, we have no clew whatever. Our men have been keeping the sharpest watch over the fellows suspected of having a hand in such matters, but they all seem keeping pretty quiet at present, and none of them seem to be particularly flush with money. It is the same with these burglaries in the South of London. We are at our wits' end about them. We are flooded with letters of complaint from residents; but though the patrols on the common have been doubled and every effort made, we are as far off as ever. As far as the burglaries are concerned, we have every reason to think that they are the work of two or three new hands. The jobs are not neatly done, and certainly not with tools usually used by burglars. They seem to rely upon daring rather than skill. Anyhow, we don't know where to look for them, and are altogether at sea.

"Of course it is as annoying to us as it is to anyone else; more so, because the Justices of the Peace are sending complaints to the Home Secretary, and he in turn drops on us and wants to know what we are doing. I have a sort of fancy myself the fellows who are stopping the coaches are the same as those concerned in the burglaries. I could not give you my reasons for saying so, except that on no occasion has a coach been stopped and a house broken into on the same night. I fancy that at present we shan't hear much more of them. They have created such alarm that the coaches carry with them two men armed with blunderbusses, in addition to the guards, and I should fancy that every householder sleeps with pistols within reach, and has got arms for his servants. At many of the large houses I know a watchman has been engaged to sit in the hall all night, to ring the alarm bell and wake the inmates directly he hears any suspicious sounds. Perhaps the fellows may be quiet for a time, for they must, during the last month, have got a wonderful amount of spoil. Maybe they will go west—the Bath road is always a favorite one with these fellows—maybe they will work the northern side of the town. I hope we shall lay hands upon them one day, but so far I may say frankly we have not the slightest clew."

"But they must put their horses up somewhere?"

"Yes, but unfortunately there are so many small wayside inns, that it is next to impossible to trace them. A number of these fellows are in alliance with the highwaymen. Some of them, too, have small farms in addition to their public house businesses, and the horses may be snugly put up there, while we are searching the inn stables in vain. Again, there are rogues even among the farmers themselves; little men, perhaps, who do not farm more than thirty or forty acres, either working them themselves, or by the aid of a hired man who lives perhaps at a village a mile away. To a man of this kind, the offer of a couple of guineas a week to keep two horses in an empty cowshed, and to ask no questions, is a heavy temptation.

"We have got two clever fellows going about the country inquiring at all the villages whether two mounted men have lately been heard going through there late at night, or early in the morning, so as to narrow down the area to be searched, but nothing has come of it, although I am pretty sure that they must have three or four places they use in various directions. My men have picked up stories of horsemen being heard occasionally, but they come from various directions, and nowhere have they been noticed with any regularity. Besides, there are other knights of the road about, so we are no nearer than we were on that line of inquiry."

A month later John Thorndyke had occasion to go up again to town. This time Mark accompanied him. Both carried pistols, as did the groom, sitting behind them. The Squire himself was but a poor shot, but Mark had practiced a great deal.

"'Tis a good thing to be able to shoot straight, Mark," his father had said to him three years before. "I abhor dueling, but there is so much of it at present that any gentlemen might find himself in a position when he must either go out or submit to be considered a coward. Then, too, the roads are infested by highwaymen. For that reason alone it would be well that a man should be able to shoot straight. You should also practice sometimes at night, setting up some object at a distance so that you can just make out its outline, and taking a dozen shots at it. I know it is very difficult when you cannot see your own pistol, but you can soon learn to trust to your arm to come up to the right height and in the right direction. Of course you must wait until morning to find out where your bullet has gone."

Two days after they had reached town the Squire received a letter from Mrs. Cunningham.

"DEAR MR. THORNDYKE:

"Knapp has been up this morning to tell me that a stranger dismounted yesterday at the alehouse, and while his horse was being fed he asked a few questions. Among others, he wished to be told if you were at home, saying that he had known you some fifteen years ago, when you lived near Hastings, and should like to have a talk with you again. In fact, he had turned off from the main road for the purpose. He seemed disappointed when he heard that you had gone up to town, and hearing that you might not be back for three or four days, said he should be coming back through Reigate in a week or ten days, and he dared say he should be able to find time to call again. Knapp did not hear about it until this morning; he asked the landlord about the man, and the landlord said he was about thirty, dark, and sparely built. He did not notice his horse particularly, seeing that it was such as a small squire or farmer might ride. He carried a brace of pistols in his holsters. The landlord was not prepossessed with his appearance, and it was that that made him speak to Knapp about him. I have told the men to unfasten the dogs every night, and I have asked Knapp to send up two trustworthy men to keep watch."

"It may mean something, and it may not," the Squire said, as he handed the letter to Mark. "It is a suspicious looking circumstance; if the fellow had been honest he would surely have said something about himself. There is no doubt these housebreakers generally find out what chance there is of resistance, and, hearing that we were both away, may have decided on making an attempt. I have pretty well finished our business and ordered nearly all the provisions that Mrs. Cunningham requires. But I have to call at my lawyer's, and that is generally a longish business. It is half past two o'clock now; if we start from here at five we shall be down soon after eight, which will be quite soon enough. We shall have a couple of hours' drive in the dark, but that won't matter, we have got the lamps."

"I am quite ready to start, father. I am engaged to sup with Reginald Ascot, but I will go over this afternoon and make my excuses."

At five o'clock they started. "You have got your pistols in order, Mark?" the Squire asked, as they drove over London Bridge.

"I have them handy, father, one in each pocket."

"James, are your pistols charged?"

"Yes, sir."

At six o'clock it was beginning to get dusk, and they stopped while the groom got down and lit the lamps; then they resumed their journey. They were within five miles of Reigate when suddenly two horsemen rode out from a side road with a shout of "Stand and deliver!"

The Squire lashed the horses, and a moment later a pistol was fired, and the ball went through his hat. By the light of the lamps Mark saw the other man raise his hand, and, leveling his pistol, fired on the instant; then, as there was no reply to his shot, he discharged the second barrel at the first who had fired, and who had at once drawn another pistol. The two reports rang out almost at the same moment, but Mark's was a little the first. There was a sharp exclamation of pain from the highwayman, who wrenched round his horse and galloped down the lane from which he had issued, the groom sending two bullets after him.

"Where is the other man?" Mark exclaimed, as his father reined in the horses.

"Somewhere on the ground there, Mark; I saw him fall from his saddle as we passed him."

"Is it any use pursuing the other, father? I am pretty sure I hit him."

"I am quite sure you did, but it is no good our following; the side roads are so cut up by ruts that we should break a spring before we had gone a hundred yards. No, we will stop and look at this fellow who is unhorsed, Mark."

The groom got down, and, taking one of the carriage lamps, proceeded to a spot where the highwayman's horse was standing. The man was already dead, the bullet having hit him a few inches above the heart.

"He is dead, father."

"I think you had better lift him up on the foot board behind; James can ride his horse. We will hand the body over to the constable at Reigate. He may know who he is, or find something upon him that may afford a clew that will lead to the capture of his companion."

"No, I don't know him, Squire," the constable said as they stopped before his house and told him what had happened. "However, he certainly is dead, and I will get one of the men to help me carry him into the shed behind the courthouse. So you say that you think that the other is wounded?"

"I am pretty sure he is. I heard him give an exclamation as my son fired."

"That is good shooting, Mr. Mark," the constable said. "If every passenger could use his arms as you do there would soon be an end to stopping coaches. I will see what he has got about him, and will come up and let you know, Squire, the first thing in the morning."

"I will send Knapp down," John Thorndyke said, as they drove homewards. "I am rather curious to know if this fellow is the same Mrs. Cunningham wrote about. I will tell him to take Peters along with him."

"I hardly see that there can be any connection between the two. Highwaymen don't go in for house breaking. I think they consider that to be a lower branch of the profession."

"Generally they do, no doubt, Mark; but you know I told you that the chief at Bow Street said that he had a suspicion that the highway robbers and the house breakers who have been creating so much alarm are the same men."

"It is curious that they should have happened to light on us, father, if they were intending to break into our house."

John Thorndyke made no reply, and in a few minutes drove up to the house. Their return, a couple of days before they were expected, caused great satisfaction to Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent. The former, however, had wisely kept from the girl the matter on which she had written to the Squire, and the suspicion she had herself entertained.

"It is very dull without you both," Millicent said. "I was telling Mrs. Cunningham that I thought it would be a good thing, when you got back, for us two to take a run up to town for a week, just to let you see how dull the place is when two of us are away. You are looking quite serious, uncle. Is anything the matter?"

"Happily nothing is the matter with us, dear, but we have had an adventure, and not a very pleasant one."

"What was it?" the girl asked.

"If you examine my hat closely, Millicent, it will tell you."

The girl took up the hat from a chair on which he had put it, and brought it to the light. "There are two holes in it," she said. "Oh, Guardy, have you been shot at?"

"It looks like it, dear. Two gentlemen highwaymen—at least, that is what I believe they call themselves—asked us pressingly to stop, and as we would not comply with their request, one fired at me, and, as you see, it was an uncommonly good shot. The other was about to fire when Mark's pistol put a stop to him, and his second barrel stopped the fellow who had fired first; he was hit, for we heard him give an exclamation of pain, but before any more shooting could be done he turned and rode off down a narrow lane where we could not follow."

"And what became of the first?" Millicent asked with open eyes.

"He was dead before we could get down to examine him; he will not disturb the King's peace again. It happened about four miles from home, so we brought him in and gave him and his horse into the charge of the constable at Reigate."

"And you have really killed a man?" Millicent said, looking up with an awestruck expression to Mark.

"Well, as the man would have killed us if I hadn't, I cannot say, Millicent, that his death weighs in any way

heavily on my mind. If he were as good a shot as the other, my father's life would not have been worth much, for as we were driving fast, he was not above half as far away as the other had been when he fired. Just the same, I suppose, as it would be in a battle; a man is going to shoot you, and you shoot him first, and I don't suppose it ever troubles you afterwards."

"Of course I don't mean that I blame you, Mark; but it does seem shocking."

"I don't suppose you would think that, Millicent, if a burglar, who had taken one shot at you and was about to finish you with another, was cut short in the operation by a shot from my pistol. I believe that your relief and thankfulness would be so great that the idea that it was a shocking thing for me to do would not as much as enter your head."

"I wish you had shot the other man as well as the one you did, Mark," the Squire said, as he walked with his son down to Reigate to attend the inquest the next morning on the man he had brought in. Mark looked at his father in surprise.

"There is no doubt I hit him, father," he said; "but I should not think that he will be likely to trouble us again."

"I wish I felt quite sure of that. Do you know that I have a strong suspicion that it was Arthur Bastow?"

Mark had, of course, heard of Bastow's escape, but had attached no great importance to it. The crime had taken place nearly eight years before, and although greatly impressed at the time by the ill doings of the man, the idea that he would ever return and endeavor to avenge himself on his father for the part he had taken had not occurred to him. Beyond mentioning his escape, the Squire had never talked to him on the subject.

"It was he who bade us stand and deliver, and the moment he spoke the voice seemed familiar to me, and, thinking it over, I have an impression that it was his. I may be mistaken, for I have had him in my mind ever since I heard that he had escaped, and may therefore have connected the voice with him erroneously, and yet I cannot but think that I was right. You see, there are two or three suspicious circumstances. In the first place, there was this man down here making inquiries. Knapp went down early this morning with the innkeeper, and told me before breakfast that Peters at once recognized the fellow you shot as the man who had made the inquiries. Now, the natural result of making inquiries would have been that the two men would the next evening have broken into the house, thinking that during our absence they would meet with no resistance. Instead of doing this they waylaid us on the road, which looks as if it was me they intended to attack, and not the house."

"But how could they have known that it was us, father? It is certainly singular that one of the two men should have been the fellow who was up at the inn, but it may be only a matter of coincidence."

"I don't know, Mark; I don't say that singular coincidences don't occur, but I have not much faith in them. Still, if they were journeying down to attack the house last night they would hardly have stopped travelers by the way when there was a rich booty awaiting them, as they evidently believed there was, or that man would not have come down specially to make inquiries. My own impression is that when they heard that we should return in two or three days one of them watched us in London, and as soon as they learned that we were to start for home at five o'clock they came down here to stop us. They would hardly have done that merely to get our watches and what money we had in our pockets."

"No, I should think not, father; but they might be friends of men who have got into trouble at Reigate, and, as you are chairman of the bench, may have had a special grudge against you for their conviction."

"That is, of course, possible, and I hope that it is so."

"But even if Arthur Bastow had escaped, father, why should he come back to England, where he would know that he might be arrested again, instead of staying quietly out in Australia?"

"There are two reasons. In the first place the life out there would not be a quiet one; there would be nothing for him but to attack and rob the settlers, and this, as they are sure to be armed, is a pretty dangerous business. Then there are perils from the blacks, and lastly, such a life would be absolutely devoid of comfort, and be that of a hunted dog; living always in the bush, scarcely venturing to sleep lest he should be pounced upon either by the armed constables of the colony or by the blacks. It is not as if the country were extensively populated; there are not a very large number of settlers there yet, and therefore very small scope for robbers. These people would keep very little money with them, and the amount of plunder to be got would be small indeed. Therefore, I take it that the main object of any escaped convict would be to get away from the place.

"That is one of the reasons why the fellow might come back to England in spite of the risks. The other is that I believe him to be so diabolically vindictive that he would run almost any peril in order to obtain revenge upon me or his father. Twice he has threatened me, the first time when we captured him, the second time as he left the court after he had received his sentence. I am not a coward, so far as I know, Mark, but I am as certain as I stand here that he meant what he said, and that, during these years of imprisonment and toil out there, he has been cherishing the thought of coming home some day and getting even with me. You see, he is said to have been the leader of this convict revolt. There is no doubting his daring, and to my mind the attack upon us last night, when they knew that they could have managed a successful robbery here, points to the fact that it was the result of personal animosity, and strengthens my belief that it was Arthur Bastow who called upon us to stand and deliver."

"It is a very unpleasant idea, father."

"Very unpleasant, and it seems to me that we should at any rate spare no pains in hunting the man you wounded down."

"I will undertake that if you like. I have nothing particular to do, and it would be an excitement. You have a lot to keep you here."

"I don't fancy that you will find it an excitement, Mark, for of course the detectives will do the hunting, but I should certainly be glad if you would take a letter for me to the head of the Detective Department, and tell him what I think, and my reasons for thinking so, and say that I offer a reward of a hundred pounds for the capture of the man who tried to stop us, and who was, we are certain, wounded by you. Unless he has some

marvelously out of the way hiding place, it ought not to be difficult. A wounded man could scarcely lie hidden in the slums of London without it being known to a good many people, to some of whom a reward of the sum of a hundred pounds would be an irresistible temptation."

By this time they had reached Reigate. The inquest did not last many minutes, and the jury without hesitation returned a verdict of justifiable homicide.

CHAPTER VII.

The next morning Mark went up to London.

"Of course, Mr. Thorndyke," the chief at Bow Street said, "your father's suspicions as to the man's identity may or may not be justified; that, however, makes no difference to us. Here is a highwayman who has been wounded, and would certainly be a valuable capture: I will set my men to work at once; if he is in London they will get news of him before many days. My men in any case would do their duty, but your father's offer will certainly stimulate their energy. Where are you stopping?"

"At the Bull, in Holborn."

"Very well; I will be sure to let you know as soon as we get any clew to the man's identity."

Mark remained in London a week, and at the end of that time he received a note from Bow Street saying that the superintendent wished to see him.

"I am sorry that I have no news for you, Mr. Thorndyke," the officer said, when he called upon him. "Every place where such a man would be likely to be in hiding has been searched, and no clew whatever has been obtained. We shall now circulate notices of the reward throughout the country. If the man was at all severely hit, we may assume that he must be somewhere in the neighborhood of London, whereas, if the wound was a slight one, he might be able to go a long distance, and may be now in York, for aught we know. However, now that the search in London has terminated, I can really see no use in your staying here any longer; we will let you know directly we have any news."

Three months later John Thorndyke received a letter from the Detective Office asking him to call the next time he came up to town, as although no news had been obtained that would lead to the man's immediate arrest, news had at any rate been obtained showing that he was alive. It happened that Mark was intending to go up on the following day, and his father asked him to call for him at Bow Street.

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, we have heard about your man, and that after we had quite abandoned the search. I had come to the conclusion that the wound you gave him had been a fatal one, and that he had been quietly buried by some of the people with whom he was connected. The discovery was, as half these discoveries generally are, the result of accident. Last week a gentleman entered the Bank and asked for change in gold for a fifty pound note. The cashier, looking at the number, found that it was one of those that had been stolen from a passenger by one of the south coaches several months ago. The gentleman was at once taken into a private office, and questioned as to how he had obtained the note. The account that he gave was that he was a surgeon in practice at Southampton. A gentleman had arrived there on a date which we found to be the day after that on which you were stopped; he was well dressed, and had the air of a gentleman; he had come down by coach, and was evidently very ill. He told the surgeon that he had been engaged in a duel, that the pistols had been discharged simultaneously, and that he had killed his man, but had himself been severely wounded. He said that the person whom he had killed had influential connections, and that it would be necessary for him to remain in seclusion for a time, and he asked him to take charge of his case, as he had ample means of paying him handsomely. The surgeon examined the wound, and found it to be indeed a serious one, and, as he thought, probably fatal. However, having no doubt as to the truth of the story, he had taken the gentleman in, and he remained under his charge until a week before he came up to town.

"For the first month he had been dangerously ill, but he completely recovered. The surgeon had no reason whatever for doubting his patient being a gentleman; he was fashionably dressed, and had evidently changed his clothes after the duel, as there were no bloodstains upon them. He was, however, glad when he left, as his conversation did not please him from its cynical tone. The Bank sent to us directly the man presented the note, which he stated had been given to him in part payment for his medical services and the board and lodging of the patient; the total amount had been 75 pounds, and the balance was paid in gold. As he was able to give several good references, and was identified by three gentlemen, he was, of course, released. I have no doubt whatever that the fellow he attended was your man. The surgeon said, whoever he was, he must have been a man of iron resolution to have made such a journey in the state he was.

"No doubt he must have ridden straight to the place he used as his headquarters, where he had his wound roughly bandaged, changed his clothes, and had ridden in the morning to some point that the coach passed on its way to Southampton. Of course we obtained a minute description from the surgeon of the man's appearance. We found that the people at the coach office had no remembrance of there being anyone answering to that description among the persons who traveled by the coach, but of course that would not go for much, for over three months have elapsed.

"When the coachman who had driven the down coach that day came up to town, we saw him, and he remembered perfectly that on or about that day he had picked up a passenger at Kingston—a gentleman who was in very weak health. There were only three inside passengers besides himself, and he had to be assisted into the coach. The way bill, on being turned up, showed that an inside passenger had been taken up at Kingston. I have already sent down men to make inquiries at every village in the district between Reigate and Kingston, and I trust that we shall lay hands on him, especially now we have got an accurate description of him, while before we were working in the dark in that respect."

"What is the description, sir? My father is much interested on that point, for, as I believe I told you, he has

a strong suspicion that the fellow is the man who was transported more than eight years ago to Australia, and who made his escape from the prison there."

"Yes, I know. At first it appeared to me very improbable, but I am bound to say the description tallies very closely with that given of him. The surgeon took him to be nearly thirty; but after what he has gone through he may well look three or four years older than he is. He had light hair, rather small gray eyes, and a face that would have been good looking had it not been for its supercilious and sneering expression."

"I can remember him," Mark said; "and that answers very closely to him. I should say that it is certainly Bastow, and my father made no mistake when he asserted that he recognized his voice."

The officer added a note to the description in his register: "Strongly suspected of being Arthur Bastow, transported for connivance with highwaymen; was leader of a mutiny in convict jail of Sydney two years and a half ago. Made his escape."

"There is no doubt," he went on, "that he is a desperate character. No doubt he is the man who has been concerned in most of these robberies in the southern suburbs. We must get hold of him if we can, and once we do so there will be an end of his travels, for the mutiny in prison and escape is a hanging business, putting aside the affairs since he got back. Well, sir, I hope he will give you and your father no more trouble."

"I am sure I hope so," Mark said. "I suppose that the fellow who was shot was one of the men who escaped with him from the convict prison."

"That is likely enough. Two would get home as easily as one, and the fact that they were both strangers here would account for the difficulty our men have had in their search for him. You see, we have had nothing whatever to go on. You must not be too sanguine about our catching the man in a short time: he is evidently a clever fellow, and I think it likely that once he got back he lost no time in getting away from this part of the country, and we are more likely to find him in the west or north than we are of laying hands on him here. We will send descriptions all over the country, and as soon as I hear of a series of crimes anywhere, I will send off two of my best men to help the local constables."

On his return home Mark told his father what he had done.

"I thought that I could not have been mistaken, Mark; we have got that rascal on our hands again. I hope now that they have got a description of him to go by, they will not be long before they catch him; but the way he escaped after being badly wounded shows that he is full of resources, and he may give them some trouble yet, if I am not mistaken. At any rate, I will have a talk with the Reigate constable, and tell him that there is very little doubt that the man who attacked us was Arthur Bastow, who has, as we have heard, escaped from Botany Bay, and that he had best tell his men to keep a sharp lookout for him, for that, owing to his animosity against us for his former capture and conviction, it is likely enough that sooner or later he will be in this neighborhood again. After his determined attempt at my life when pretending to rob us, I shall certainly not feel comfortable until I know that he is under lock and key."

"I wish, Guardy, you would give up this magistrate's business," Millicent said at dinner. "I am sure that it is worrying you, and I can't see why you should go on with it."

"It does not worry me, as a rule, Millicent; indeed, I like the duty. Besides, every landowner of standing ought to take his share in public work. There are only two of the magistrates younger than I am, and whatever you may think of me, I feel myself capable of doing what work there is to do. When Mark gets a few years older I shall resign, and let him take my place on the bench. I own, though, that I should be glad if these highway robberies could be suppressed. Poaching and the ordinary offenses of drunkenness and assaults are disposed of without any trouble; but this stopping of the coaches, accompanied occasionally by the shooting of the coachman or guard, gives a great deal of trouble, and the worst of it is that we are practically powerless to put such crimes down. Nothing short of patrolling the roads in parties of three or four between sunset and sunrise would put a stop to them, and the funds at our disposal would not support such an expenditure."

"It is a pity that you cannot get up a corps like the yeomanry, and call it the Mounted Constabulary," said Mark. "There are at least a dozen fellows I know who would, like myself, be glad to join it, and I dare say we could get a score of young farmers or farmers' sons."

"It is not a bad idea, Mark, and I dare say that for a time the duty would be zealously performed, but before very long you would tire of it. A few wet nights or winter's cold, and you would cease to see the fun of it, especially as you may be sure that the news that the roads are well patrolled would soon come to the ears of these scoundrels, and they would cease to work in the district."

"Perhaps you are right, sir; but I think that a few of us would stick to it."

"Perhaps so, Mark, but I should be sorry to wager that the work would be thoroughly done. The first county or hunt ball, or even dinner party, more than half of them would be away. I don't say that you personally might not for some considerable time persist in patrolling the roads, for you have a sort of personal interest in the matter; but I would wager that before two months have passed you would find you were the only one who attended at the rendezvous regularly."

A fortnight later the party were seated round the fire in the dusk. Mr. Bastow was sitting next to the Squire, and was in unusually good spirits. He had heard no word of what the Squire had discovered, nor dreamed that his son was again in England, still less that he was suspected of being one of the men who had endeavored to stop the Squire and his son on their drive from London. Suddenly there was the crack of a pistol outside, and a ball passed between him and the Squire. Without a word, Mark Thorndyke rushed to the door, seized a pistol from his riding coat, and, snatching up a heavy whip, dashed out into the garden.

He was just in time to see a figure running at full speed, and he set off in pursuit. Good runner as he was, he gained but slightly at first, but after a time he drew nearer to the fugitive. The latter was but some sixty yards away when he leaped a hedge into a narrow lane. Mark followed without hesitation, but as he leaped into the road he heard a jeering laugh and the sharp sound of a horse's hoofs, and knew that the man he was pursuing had gained his horse and made off. Disgusted at his failure, he went slowly back to the house. The shutters had been put up.

"I have lost him, father. He ran well to begin with, but I was gaining fast on him when he leaped into a narrow lane where he had left his horse, and rode off before I could get up to him. I need hardly say that there was no use attempting to follow on foot. He missed you all, did he not?"

"Yes, Mark. It is not so easy to take an accurate aim when it is nearly dark. The bullet passed between myself and Mr. Bastow, and has buried itself in the mantelpiece."

"Something ought to be done, Guardy," Millicent Conyers said indignantly. "It is shameful that people cannot sit in their own room without the risk of being shot at. What can it mean? Surely no one can have any enmity against you."

"I hope not, my dear," John Thorndyke said lightly. "Some of the fellows we have sentenced may think that we were rather hard on them, but I do not think that any of them would feel it sufficiently to attempt to murder one; besides, Mark says that the fellow had a horse waiting for him, and none of our poachers would be likely to be the owner of a horse. It may be that the highwayman Mark shot at and wounded has come down to give us a fright. It is no use worrying about it now; in future we will have the shutters closed at sunset. It is hardly likely that the thing will be attempted again, and Mark's chase must have shown the fellow that the game is hardly worth the risk."

"He might have shot you, Mark; you had no right to risk your life in that sort of way," the girl said to him, later, as they were seated together in front of the fire, while the Squire was reading the Gazette at the table, Mrs. Cunningham was working, and Mr. Bastow, who had been greatly shaken by the event, had retired to bed.

"Do you think that he really meant to kill your father?"

"I should imagine he did; a man would hardly run the risk of being hung merely for the pleasure of shooting. I would give a good deal if I had caught him, or better still, if I had shot him," said Mark. "However, I will make it my business to hunt the fellow down. After this evening's affair, we shall never feel comfortable until he is caught. I have no doubt that he is the fellow we have been hunting for the last four months. The people at Bow Street seem no good whatever; I will try if I cannot succeed better."

"Don't do anything rash, Mark," said Millicent, in a low voice; "you have no right to put yourself in danger."

"But our lives are in danger now, Millicent—in much greater danger than mine would be when looking out for him. But there seems no guarding against attacks like this; I mean to hunt him down, if it takes me a year. I have nothing special to do, and cannot employ my time more usefully."

When the ladies went up to bed the Squire said:

"Come into the library, Mark, and we will smoke a pipe, and have a talk over this business." He touched the bell. "Have you got a good fire in the library, Ramoo?"

"Yes, sahib, very good."

"Then take a bottle of number one bin of port there—and a couple of glasses."

When they were quietly seated, glasses filled, and the long pipes alight, the Squire said: "I want to have a serious talk with you, Mark. What I am going to say will surprise you a good deal. I had not intended to tell you for another four years—that is to say, not until Millicent came of age—but after that affair tonight, I feel that my life is so uncertain that I ought not to delay letting you know the truth. I suppose you agree with me that it was Bastow who shot at me this evening?"

"I have not the least doubt about that, father."

"I will not say that he shot at me," the Squire said, "for he may have shot at his father; the villain is quite capable of that. It was his father who brought me upon him, and though I effected his capture eight years ago I don't suppose he cares which of us he killed. However, the point is not what he aimed at, but whether it was he, and that I take there is no doubt about. He missed me this time, but his next shot may be more successful. At any rate, I think that it is high time that I told you the story."

And, beginning with the arrival of Colonel Thorndyke at his place, he repeated the conversation that he had had with him. Several times in the early portion of his narrative he was interrupted by exclamations of surprise from his son.

"Then Millicent is really my uncle's heiress!" exclaimed Mark, when he heard the request the Colonel had made of the Squire.

"That is so, Mark. She does not know it herself, and it was my brother's urgent wish that she should not know it until she came of age or until she married. I fought against it to the utmost, but it was his dying prayer, and I could not refuse it. My solicitor knows the facts of the matter, and so does Mrs. Cunningham, who brought Millicent over from India when she was only about a year old. I may say that I especially urged that it would not be fair to you to be brought up to consider yourself to be heir to the property, but he said:

"Putting aside the estate, I have a considerable fortune. In the first place, there are the accumulations of rent from the Reigate place. I have never touched them, and they have been going on for twelve years. In the next place, the shaking of the pagoda tree has gone on merrily, and we all made a comfortable pile. Then I always made a point of carrying about with me two or three hundred pounds, and after the sacking of some of the palaces I could pick up jewels and things from the troops for a trifle, being able to pay money down. Even without the rents here, I have some 50,000 pounds in money. I should think the jewels would be worth at least as much more, irrespective of a diamond bracelet which is, I fancy, worth more than the rest put together. It was stolen from the arm of some idol.' He then explained how he got it, and the manner in which he had placed it and the rest of his wealth in a secure position.

"Things stolen from a god are frightfully dangerous,' he said, 'for the Brahmins or priests connected with the temples have been known to follow them up for years, and in nine cases out of ten they get possession of them again. Murder in such a case is meritorious, and I would not have them in the house here, were they ten times the value they are. I know that my clothes, my drawers, and everything belonging to me have been gone through at night a score of times. Nothing has been stolen, but, being a methodical man, I could generally see some displacement in the things that told me they had been disturbed. They gave it up for a

time, but I haven't a shadow of a doubt that they have been watching me ever since, and they may be watching me now, for anything I know. Now, half of that fortune I have left by my will to your son; half to the girl. I will tell you where the things are the last thing before I die.

"Now, mind, you must be careful when you get them. When I am dead you are almost certain to be watched. You don't know what these fellows are. The things must remain where they are until your boy comes of age. Don't let him keep those diamonds an hour in his possession; let him pass them away privately to some man in whom he has implicit confidence, for him to take them to a jeweler's; let him double and turn and disguise himself so as to throw everyone that may be spying on him off his track. If you can manage it, the best way would be to carry them over to Amsterdam, and sell them there.'

"I confess it seemed absurd, but it is a matter about which he would know a great deal more than I do, and he was convinced that not only was he watched, but that he owed his life simply to the fact that the fellows did not know where the diamonds were hidden, and that by killing him they would have lost every chance of regaining them.

"So convinced was he of all this, that he would not tell me where he had stowed them away; he seemed to think that the very walls would hear us, and that these fellows might be hidden under the sofa, in a cupboard, or up the chimney, for aught I know. He told me that he would tell me the secret before he died; but death came so suddenly that he never had an opportunity of doing so. He made a tremendous effort in his last moment, but failed, and I shall never forget the anguish his face expressed when he found himself powerless to speak; however, he pressed his snuffbox into my hand with such a significant look that, being certain it contained some clew to the mystery, and being unable to find a hidden spring or a receptacle, I broke it open that night.

"It contained a false bottom, and here are what I found in it. I stowed them away in a secret drawer in that old cabinet that stands by my bedside. It is in the bottom pigeonhole on the right hand side. I bought the cabinet at a sale, and found the spring of the secret drawer quite accidentally. I shall put the things back tonight, and you will know where to look for them. You press against the bottom and up against the top simultaneously, and the back then falls forward. The opening behind is very shallow, and will hold but two or three letters. But, however, it sufficed for this;" and he handed Mark the coin and slip of paper.

"But what are these, father?"

"These are the clews by which we are to obtain the treasure."

As Mark examined them carefully the Squire stood up with his back to the fire, and looking round walked to the door and said: "I thought there was a draught somewhere; either Ramoo did not shut the door when he went out or it has come open again. It has done that once or twice before. When I go into town tomorrow I will tell Tucker to send a man up to take the lock off. Well, what do you make out of that?"

"I can make out nothing," Mark replied. "No doubt the coin is something to be given to whoever is in charge of the treasure, and Masulipatam may be the place where it is hidden."

"Yes, or it may be a password. It reminds one of the forty thieves business. You go and knock at the door of a cave, a figure armed to the teeth presents itself, you whisper in his ear 'Masulipatam,' he replies 'Madras,' or 'Calcutta,' or something of that sort, you take out the coin and show it to him, he takes out from some hidden repository a similar one, compares the two, and then leads you to an inner cave piled up with jewels."

Mark laughed.

"Well, it is no laughing matter, Mark," the Squire went on seriously. "The little comedy may not be played just as I have sketched it, but I expect that it is something of the kind. That coin has to be shown, and the word 'Masulipatam' spoken to the guardian, whoever he may be, of your uncle's treasure. But who that guardian may be or how he is to be found is a mystery. I myself have never tried to solve it. There was nothing whatever to go upon. The things may be in England or, it may be, anywhere in India. To me it looked an absolutely hopeless business to set about. I did not see how even a first step was to be taken, and as I had this estate and you and Millicent to look after, and was no longer a young man, I put the matter aside altogether. You are young, you have plenty of energy, and you have your life before you, and it is a matter of the greatest interest to you.

"Possibly—very improbably, mind, still possibly—when Millicent comes of age and learns who she is, Mrs. Cunningham may be able to help you. I have no idea whether it is so. I have never spoken to her about this treasure of George's, but it is just possible that while he was in town before he came down to me he may have given her some instructions concerning it. Of course he intended to give me full particulars, but he could hardly have avoided seeing that, in the event of my death, perhaps suddenly before the time came for seeking the treasure, the secret would be lost altogether. Whether he has told her or his lawyer or not I cannot say, but I have all along clung to the hope that he took some such natural precaution. Unless that treasure is discovered, the only thing that will come to you is the half of the accumulated rents of this estate during the ten years between my father's death and George's; these rents were paid to our solicitors, and by them invested.

"The rentals amount to about 2500 pounds a year, and of course there is interest to be added, so that I suppose there is now some 25,000 pounds, for I had out 2000 pounds when I came here, to set matters straight. I had a great fight with the lawyers over it, but as I pointed out they had failed altogether to see that the agent did his duty, and that at least a couple of hundred a year ought to be expended in necessary repairs, I had a right to at least that sum to carry out the work that ought to be done from year to year. In addition to that sum I laid out about 1000 pounds a year for the first three years I was here; so that practically 5000 pounds was expended in rebuilding the village and doing repairs on the homesteads; that, however, is not the point now. Altogether, then, there is some 25,000 pounds to be divided between you and Millicent when she becomes mistress of this property.

"According to the terms of my brother's will, I am still to remain here until she marries; when she does so I shall, of course, go back to my own little place; the income of that has been accumulating while I have been here, my only expenses having been for clothes. I have taken nothing out of this estate since I came here, and each year have paid to the solicitors all balances remaining after discharging the household expenses, these

balances averaging 700 or 800 pounds a year. Of course the income was absolutely left to me during the time I remained ostensible owner, but I had no wish to make money out of a trust that I assumed greatly against my will. That money is Millicent's; of course the house had to be kept up in proper style whether I were here or not. Had she at once come into possession, there must have been horses, and carriages, and so on. I don't say that I have not had all the expenses of our living saved; that I had no objection to; but I was determined at least not to take a penny out of the estate beyond those expenses. You see, Mark, you will have your 12,500 pounds anyhow, as soon as Millicent comes of age—not a bad little sum—so that even if you never hear anything more of this mysterious treasure you will not be penniless, or in anyway dependent upon me. At my death, of course, you will come into the Sussex place, with what savings there may be.”

“I am sure I have no reason to grumble, father,” Mark said heartily. “Of course it came upon me at first as a surprise that Millicent was the heiress here, and it flashed through my mind for the moment that the best thing would be to take a commission in the army, or to follow my uncle's example, and get a cadetship in the Company's service. I have no doubt that I should have enjoyed life either way quite as much or possibly more than if I had gone on a good many years as heir to these estates, and afterwards as Squire. Of course, now I shall make it my business to see if it is possible to obtain some sort of clue to this treasure, and then follow it up; but the first thing to which I shall give my mind will be to hunt down Bastow. We shall never feel safe here as long as that fellow is alive, and that will be the first thing I shall devote myself to. After that I shall see about the treasure.”

“As to that, Mark, I cannot impress upon you too strongly what your uncle said. It may, of course, be a pure delusion on his part; but if he is right, and some of these Hindoo fellows are still on the watch to obtain that bracelet, you must use extraordinary precautions when you get it into your hands; he advised me to take it across to Amsterdam, and either get the stones recut or to sell them separately to different diamond merchants there. He said that my life would not be worth an hour's purchase as long as the stones were in my hands.”

“That rather looks, father, as if the things were somewhere in England; had they been in India, you would have had them some months in your hands before you could get them to Amsterdam.”

“I did not think of that before, Mark, and it is possible that you are right; but I don't know; he might have thought that it would be impossible for me to dispose of them at Madras or Calcutta, and may have assumed that I should at once deposit them in a bank to be forwarded with other treasure to England, or that I should get them packed away in the treasure safe in the ship I came back by, and that I should not really have them on my person till I landed in England, or until I took them from the Bank. Still, I see that your supposition is the most likely, and that they may all this time have been lying somewhere in London until I should present myself with a gold coin and the word 'Masulipatam.'”

Suddenly Mark sprang to his feet, and pulled back the curtains across a window, threw it up, and leaped into the garden, and there stood listening for two or three minutes, with his pistol cocked in his hand. He stepped for a moment into the room again.

“You had better put that light out, father or we may have another shot.”

“Did you hear anything, Mark?”

“I thought I did, father. I may have been mistaken, but I certainly thought I heard a noise, and when I pulled the curtains aside the window was not shut by three or four inches. I will have a look through the shrubbery. That fellow may have come back again. Pull the curtains to after me.”

“I will go with you, Mark.”

“I would rather you didn't, father; it would only make me nervous. I shan't go into the shrubbery and give them a chance of getting first shot. I shall hide up somewhere and listen. It is a still night, and if there is anyone moving I am pretty sure to hear him.”

The Squire turned down the lamp, drew the curtains, and seated himself by the fire. It was three quarters of an hour before Mark returned. He shut the window, and fastened it carefully.

“I fancy you must have been mistaken, Mark.”

“I suppose that shot through the window has made me nervous. I certainly did fancy I heard a noise there; it may have been a dead bough snapping, or something of that sort; and of course, the window being partly open, even though only three or four inches, any little noise would come in more plainly than it otherwise would do. However, everything has been perfectly quiet since I went out, and it is hardly likely indeed that the fellow would have returned so soon after the hot chase I gave him.”

“It is very stupid—the window being left open,” the Squire said. “I shall question Martha about it in the morning; it was her duty to see that it was shut and fastened before drawing the curtains. Just at present one can scarcely be too careful. I don't mean to deny that whether there was a window open or not a burglar who wanted to get into the house could do so, still there is no use in making their work more easy for them. I know, as a rule, we are careless about such things; there has not been a burglary in this part for years, and until lately the front door has never been locked at night, and anyone could have walked in who wanted to. Of course the servants don't know that there is any reason for being more careful at present than usual.

“I was thinking the other day of having shutters put to all these downstairs rooms. Some of them have got them, and some have not; still, even with shutters, burglars can always get in if they want to do so. They have only to cut round the lock of a door or to make a hole in a panel to give them room to put an arm through and draw back a bolt, and the thing is done. I know that all the silver is locked up every night in the safe, for Ramoo sees to that, and I have never known him neglect anything under his charge. Well, Mark, I don't know that it is any use sitting up longer, we have plenty of time to talk the matter over; it is four years yet before Millicent comes of age, though, of course, there is nothing to prevent your setting out in quest of the treasure as soon as you like. Still, there is no hurry about it.”

“None whatever, father; but I don't mean to lose a day before I try to get on the track of that villain Bastow.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Mark was some hours before he went to sleep. The news that he had heard that evening was strange and startling. Full of health and strength, the fact that he was not, as he had always supposed, the heir to the estate troubled him not at all. The fact that in four years he would come in for some twelve thousand pounds was sufficient to prevent his feeling any uneasiness as to his future; and indeed in some respects it was not an unpleasant idea that, instead of being tied down to the estate, he should be able to wander at will, visit foreign countries, and make his own life.

In one respect he was sorry. His father had in the last year hinted more than once that it would be a very nice arrangement if he were to make up a match with his ward; he had laughed, and said that there would be plenty of time for that yet. But the idea had been an agreeable one. He was very fond of Millicent—fond, perhaps; in a cousinly way at present; but at any rate he liked her far better than any of the sisters of his friends. Of course she was only seventeen yet, and there was plenty of time to think of marriage in another three years. Still, the thought occurred to him several times that she was budding out into a young woman, and every month added to her attractions. It was but the day before he had said to himself that there was no reason to wait as long as three years, especially as his father seemed anxious, and would evidently be glad were the match to take place. Now, of course, he said to himself, that was at an end. He had never given her any reason to suppose that he cared for her, and now that she was the heiress and he comparatively poor, she would naturally think that it was for the estate, and not for herself, that she was wooed. Then there was the question of this curiously lost treasure, with the mysterious clew that led to nothing. How on earth was he to set about the quest? He puzzled for a long time over this, till at last he fell asleep. He was roused by Ramoo entering the room.

"What is it, Ramoo?"

"Me not know, sahib. Massa Thorndyke's door shut. Me no able to make him hear."

"That is curious, Ramoo," Mark said, jumping hastily out of bed. "I will be with you in a minute."

He slipped on his trousers, coat, and slippers, and then accompanied Ramoo to his father's door. He knocked again and again, and each time more loudly, his face growing paler as he did so. Then he threw himself against the door, but it was solid and heavy.

"Fetch me an ax, Ramoo," he said. "There is something wrong here."

Ramoo returned in a short time with two men servants and with the ax in his hands. Mark took it, and with a few mighty blows split the woodwork, and then hurling himself against the door, it yielded. As he entered the room a cry broke from his lips. Within a pace or two of the bed the Squire lay on the ground, on his face, and a deep stain on the carpet at once showed that his death had been a violent one. Mark knelt by his side now, and touched him. The body was stiff and cold. The Squire must have been dead for some hours.

"Murdered!" he said in a low voice; "my father has been murdered."

He remained in horror struck silence for a minute or two; then he slowly rose to his feet.

"Let us lay him on the bed," he said, and with the assistance of the three men he lifted and laid him there.

"He has been stabbed," he murmured, pointing to a small cut in the middle of the deep stain, just over the heart.

Ramoo, after helping to lift the Squire onto the bed, had slid down to the floor, and crouched there, sobbing convulsively. The two servants stood helpless and aghast. Mark looked round the room: the window was open. He walked to it. A garden ladder stood outside, showing how the assassin had obtained entrance. Mark stood rigid and silent, his hands tightly clenched, his breath coming slowly and heavily. At last he roused himself.

"Leave things just as they are," he said to the men in a tone of unnatural calmness, "and fasten the door up again, and turn a table or something of that sort against it on the outside so that no one can come in. John, do you tell one of the grooms to saddle a horse and ride down into the town. Let him tell the head constable to come up at once, and also Dr. Holloway. Then he is to go on to Sir Charles Harris, tell him what has happened, and beg him to ride over at once.

"Come, Ramoo," he said in a softer voice, "you can do no good here, poor fellow, and the room must be closed. It is a heavy loss to you too."

The Hindoo rose slowly, the tears streaming down his face.

"He was a good master," he said, "and I loved him just as I loved the Colonel, sahib. Ramoo would have given his life for him."

With his hand upon Ramoo's shoulder, Mark left the room; he passed a group of women huddled together with blanched faces, at a short distance down the passage, the news that the Squire's door could not be opened and the sounds made by its being broken in having called them together. Mark could not speak. He silently shook his head and passed on. As he reached his room he heard shrieks and cries behind him, as the men informed them of what had taken place. On reaching his door, the one opposite opened, and Mrs. Cunningham in a dressing gown came out.

"What is the matter, Mark, and what are these cries about?"

"A dreadful thing has happened, Mrs. Cunningham; my father has been murdered in the night. Please tell Millicent."

Then he closed the door behind him, threw himself on his bed, and burst into a passion of tears. The Squire had been a good father to him, and had made him his friend and companion—a treatment rare indeed at a time when few sons would think of sitting down in their father's presence until told to do so. Since he had left school, eight years before, they had been very much together. For the last two or three years Mark had been

a good deal out, but in this his father had encouraged him.

"I like to see you make your own friends, Mark, and go your own way," he used to say; "it is as bad for a lad to be tied to his father's coattail as at his mother's apron string. Get fresh ideas and form your own opinions. It will do for you what a public school would have done; make you self reliant, and independent."

Still, of course, a great portion of his time had been with his father, and they often would ride round the estate together and talk to the tenants, or walk in the gardens and forcing houses. Generally Mark would be driven by his father to the meet if it took place within reasonable distance, his horse being sent on beforehand by a groom, while of an evening they would sit in the library, smoke their long pipes, and talk over politics or the American and French wars.

All this was over. There was but one thing now that he could do for his father, and that was to revenge his death, and at the thought he rose from his bed impatiently and paced up and down the room. He must wait for a week, wait till the funeral was over, and then he would be on Bastow's track. If all other plans failed he would spend his time in coaches until at last the villain should try to stop one; but there must be other ways. Could he find no other he would apply for employment as a Bow Street runner, serve for a year to find out their methods, and acquaint himself with the places where criminals were harbored. It would be the one object of his life, until he succeeded in laying his hand on Bastow's shoulder. He would not shoot him if he could help it. He should prefer to see him in the dock, to hear the sentence passed on him, and to see it carried out. As to the treasure, it was not worth a thought till his first duty was discharged.

Presently a servant brought him a cup of tea. He drank it mechanically, and then proceeded to dress himself. Sir Charles Harris would be here soon and the others; indeed, he had scarcely finished when he was told that the doctor from Reigate had just arrived, and that the constable had come up half an hour before. He at once went down to the library, into which the doctor had been shown.

"You have heard what has happened," he said, as he shook hands silently. "I expect Sir Charles Harris here in half an hour. I suppose you will not go up till then?"

"No, I think it will be best that no one should go in until he comes. I have been speaking to Simeox; he was going in, but I told him I thought it was better to wait. I may as well take the opportunity of going upstairs to see Mr. Bastow. I hear that he fainted when he heard the news, and that he is completely prostrate."

"Two such shocks might well prove fatal to him," Mark said; "he has been weak and ailing for some time."

"Two shocks?" the doctor repeated interrogatively.

"Ah, I forgot you had not heard about the affair yesterday evening; a man fired at us through the window when we were sitting round the fire, before the candles were lit. The ball passed between my father's head and Mr. Bastow's; both had a narrow escape; the bullet is imbedded in the mantelpiece. I will have it cut out; it may be a useful item of evidence some day."

"But what could have been the man's motive? Your father was universally popular."

"Except with ill doers," Mark said. "I ran out and chased the fellow for half a mile, and should have caught him if he had not had a horse waiting for him in a lane, and he got off by the skin of his teeth. I hope that next time I meet him he will not be so lucky. Mr. Bastow was very much shaken, and went to bed soon afterwards. I am not surprised that this second shock should be too much for him. Will you go up and see him? I will speak to Simeox."

The constable was out in the garden.

"This is a terrible business, Mr. Thorndyke. I suppose, after what you told me, you have your suspicions?"

"They are not suspicions at all—they are certainties. Did you hear that he tried to shoot my father yesterday evening?"

"No, sir, I have heard nothing about it."

Mark repeated the story of the attempt and pursuit.

"Could you swear to him, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"No, there was not much light left; besides, as I have not seen him for the last eight years, I should certainly not be able to recognize him unless I had time to have a good look at him. Had it only been last night's affair it might have been anyone; but the shooting through the window was not the act of a thief, but of an assassin, who could only have been influenced by private enmity. I quite see that at present I have no legal evidence against Bastow; I am not even in a position to prove that he is in the country, for it cannot be said that my father's belief that he recognized the voice of the man who said 'Stand and deliver!' is proof. I doubt if anyone could swear that, when he only heard three words, he was absolutely sure that it was the voice of a man he had not seen for some years. However, fortunately, that will make no difference; the man is, as I told you, wanted for his heading the mutiny in the convict prison at Sydney, which will be quite sufficient to hang him without this business. But I own that I should prefer that he were hung for my father's murder if we could secure sufficient evidence. Moreover, there is the attack upon us three or four months ago, and with the evidence of the surgeon who attended him as to his wound, that would be enough to hang him. But we have first got to catch him, and that I mean to make my business, however long the search may take me."

"Was anything taken last night, sir?"

"I don't know; I did not look. We shall see to that when we go upstairs. We may as well go indoors now; Sir Charles may be here in a few minutes, and I want to hear Dr. Holloway's report as to Mr. Bastow."

"He does not suspect, I hope, sir?"

"No, thank God; my father never mentioned to him anything he heard about his son, or his suspicions, therefore he has no reason to believe that the fellow is not still in the convict prison at Sydney. We shall keep it from him now, whatever happens; but it would, for his sake, be best that this shock should prove too much for him. He has had a very hard time of it altogether."

"He is terribly prostrate," the doctor reported when Mark joined him. "I don't think that he will get over it. He is scarcely conscious now. You see, he is an old man, and has no reserve of strength to fall back upon."

Your father has been such a good friend to him that it is not surprising the news should have been too much for him. I examined him at the Squire's request some months ago as to his heart's action, which was so weak that I told the Squire then that he might go off at any time, and I rather wonder that he recovered even temporarily from the shock."

In a few minutes Sir Charles Harris drove up.

"This is terrible news, my dear Mark," he said, as he leaped from his gig and wrung Mark's hand—"terrible. I don't know when I have had such a shock; he was a noble fellow in all respects, a warm friend, an excellent magistrate, a kind landlord, good all round. I can scarcely believe it yet. A burglar, of course. I suppose he entered the house for the purpose of robbery, when your father awoke and jumped out of bed, there was a tussle, and the scoundrel killed him; at least, that is what I gather from the story that the groom told me."

"That is near it, Sir Charles, but I firmly believe that robbery was not the object, but murder; for murder was attempted yesterday evening," and he informed the magistrate of the shot fired through the window.

"Bless me, you don't say so!" the magistrate exclaimed. "That alters the case altogether, and certainly would seem to make the act one of premeditated murder; and yet, surely, the Squire could not have had an enemy. Some of the men whom we have sentenced may have felt a grudge against him, but surely not sufficient to lead them to a crime like this."

"I will talk of it with you afterwards, Sir Charles. I have the very strongest suspicions, although no absolute proofs. Now, will you first come upstairs? Doctor Holloway is here and Simeox, but no one has entered the room since I left it; I thought it better that it should be left undisturbed until you came."

"Quite so; we will go up at once."

An examination of the room showed nothing whatever that would afford the slightest clew. The Squire's watch was still in the watch pocket at the head of the bed, his purse was on a small table beside him; apparently nothing had been touched in the room.

"If robbery was the object," Sir Charles said gravely, "it has evidently not been carried out, and it is probable that Mr. Thorndyke was partly woken by the opening of the window, and that he was not thoroughly aroused until the man was close to his bed; then he leapt out and seized him. Probably the stab was, as Dr. Holloway assures us, instantly fatal, and he may have fallen so heavily that the man, fearing that the house would be alarmed at the sound, at once fled, without even waiting to snatch up the purse. The whole thing is so clear that it is scarcely necessary to ask any further questions. Of course, there must be an inquest tomorrow. I should like when I go down to ask the gardener where he left the ladder yesterday. Have you examined the ground for footmarks?"

"Yes, Sir Charles, but you see it was a pretty hard frost last night, and I cannot find any marks at all. The ground must have been like iron about the time when the ladder was placed there."

The gardener, on being called in, said that the ladder was always hung up outside the shed at the back of the house; there was a chain round it, and he had found that morning that one of the links had been filed through.

"The Squire was most particular about its being locked, as Mr. Mark knows, so that it could not be used by any ill disposed chaps who might come along at night. The key of the padlock was always hung on a nail round the other side of the shed. The Squire knew of it, and so did Mr. Mark and me; so that while it was out of the way of the eyes of a thief, any of us could run and get it and undo the padlock in a minute in case of fire or anything of that sort. I have not used the ladder, maybe, for a fortnight, but I know that it was hanging in its place yesterday afternoon."

"I expect the fellow was prowling about here for some time," Mark said. "I was chatting with my father in the library when I thought I heard a noise, and I threw open the window, which had by some carelessness been left a little open, and went out, and listened for nearly an hour, but I could hear nothing, and put it down to the fact that I was nervous owing to what had happened early in the evening, and that the noise was simply fancy, or that the frost had caused a dry branch of one of the shrubs to crack."

"How was it you did not notice the window was open as you went in?"

"The curtains were drawn, sir. I glanced at that when I went into the room with my father. After being shot at once from outside, it was possible that we might be again; though I own that I did not for a moment think that the fellow would return after the hot chase that I gave him. I suppose after I went in he looked about and found the ladder; it is likely enough that he would have had a file with him in case he had any bars to cut through to get into the house, but to my mind it is more likely that he knew where to find the ladder without any looking for it; it has hung there as long as I can remember."

"Yes, sir," the gardener said, "I have worked for the Squire ever since he came here, and the ladder was bought a week or two after he took me on, and the Squire settled where it should be hung, so that it might be handy either in case of fire or if wanted for a painting job. This aint the first ladder; we got a new one four years ago."

"It is singular that the man should have known which was the window of your father's room."

"Very singular," Mark said.

Shortly after the doctor left, and Mark had a long talk with the magistrate in the library, and told him his reasons for suspecting that the murderer was Arthur Bastow.

"It certainly looks like it," the magistrate said thoughtfully, after he had heard Mark's story, "though of course it is only a case of strong suspicion, and not of legal proof. Your father's recognition of the voice could have scarcely been accepted as final when he heard but three words, still the whole thing hangs together. The fellow was, I should say, capable of anything. I don't know that I ever had a prisoner before me whose demeanor was so offensive and insolent, and if it can be proved that Bastow is in England I should certainly accept your view of the case. He would probably have known both where the ladder was to be found and which was the window of your father's bedroom."

"I should certainly think that he would know it, sir. The bedroom was the same that my grandfather used to

sleep in, and probably during the years before we came here young Bastow would have often been over the house. The first year or two after we came he was often up here with his father, but I know that my father took such an objection to him, his manner and language were so offensive, that he would not have me, boy as I was—I was only about eleven when he came here—associate with him in the smallest degree. But during those two years he may very well have noticed where the ladder was.”

“Do you intend to say anything about all this tomorrow at the inquest, Mark?”

“I don't think I shall do so,” Mark said moodily. “I am certain of it myself, but I don't think any man would convict him without stronger evidence than I could give. However, that business in Australia will be sufficient to hang him.”

“I think you are right, Mark. Of course, if you do light upon any evidence, we can bring this matter up in another court; if not, there will be no occasion for you to appear in it at all, but leave it altogether for the authorities to prove the Sydney case against him; it will only be necessary for the constables who got up the other case against him to prove his sentence, and for the reports of the Governor of the jail to be read. There will be no getting over that, and he will be hung as a matter of course. It will be a terrible thing for his unhappy father.”

“I do not think that he is likely to come to know it, sir; the shock of the affair yesterday and that of this morning have completely prostrated him, and Dr. Holloway, who was up with him before you arrived, thinks that there is very little chance of his recovery.”

When the magistrate had left, Mark sent a request to Mrs. Cunningham that she would come down for a few minutes. She joined him in the drawing room.

“Thank you for coming down,” he said quietly. “I wanted to ask how you were, and how Millicent is.”

“She is terribly upset. You see, the Squire was the only father she had ever known; and had he been really so he could not have been kinder. It is a grievous loss to me also, after ten years of happiness here; but I have had but little time to think of my own loss yet, I have been too occupied in soothing the poor girl. How are you feeling yourself, Mark?”

“I don't understand myself,” he said. “I don't think that anyone could have loved his father better than I have done; but since I broke down when I first went to my room I seem to have no inclination to give way to sorrow. I feel frozen up; my voice does not sound to me as if it were my own; I am able to discuss matters as calmly as if I were speaking of a stranger. The one thing that I feel passionately anxious about is to set out on the track of the assassin.”

“There is nothing unusual in your state of feeling, Mark. Such a thing as this is like a wound in battle; the shock is so great that for a time it numbs all pain. I have heard my husband say that a soldier who has had his arm carried off by a cannon ball will fall from the shock, and when he recovers consciousness will be ignorant where he has been hit. It is so with you; probably the sense of pain and loss will increase every day as you take it in more and more. As for what you say about the murderer, it will undoubtedly be a good thing for you to have something to employ your thoughts and engage all your faculties as soon as this is all over. Is there anything that I can do?”

“No, thank you; the inquest will be held tomorrow. I have sent down to Chatterton to come up this afternoon to make the necessary preparations for the funeral. Let me see, today is Wednesday, is it not? I seem to have lost all account of the time.”

“Yes, Wednesday.”

“Then I suppose the funeral will be on Monday or Tuesday. If there is any message that you want sent down to the town, one of the grooms will carry it whenever you wish.”

“Thank you; 'tis not worth sending particularly, any time will do, but I shall want to send a note to Mrs. Wilson presently, asking her to come up the first thing tomorrow morning.”

“He can take it whenever, you like, Mrs. Cunningham. I have nothing to send down for, as far as I know. I suppose you have heard that the doctor thinks very badly of Mr. Bastow?”

“Yes. Ramoo is sitting with him now.”

“Then I think, if you will write your note at once, Mrs. Cunningham, I will send one down to Dr. Holloway, asking him to send an experienced nurse. He said he should call again this afternoon, but the sooner a nurse comes the better.”

That afternoon Mark wrote a letter to the family solicitors, telling them of what had taken place, and stating that the funeral would be on the following Tuesday, and asking them to send down a clerk with his father's will, or if one of the partners could manage to come down, he should greatly prefer it, in view of the explanations that would be necessary. He had already sent off a letter to the head of the Detective Department, asking him to send down one of his best men as soon as possible. Then he went out into the garden, and walked backwards and forwards for about two hours, and then returned to what he thought would be a solitary meal. Mrs. Cunningham, however, came down. She had thoughtfully had the large dining table pushed on one side, and a small one placed near the fire.

“I thought it would be more comfortable,” she said, “as there are only our two selves, just to sit here.”

He thanked her with a look. It was a nice little dinner, and Mark, to his surprise, ate it with an appetite. Except the cup of tea that he had taken in the morning, and a glass of wine at midday, he had touched nothing. Mrs. Cunningham was a woman of great tact, and by making him talk of the steps that he intended to take to hunt down the assassin, kept him from thinking.

“Thank you very much, Mrs. Cunningham,” he said, when the dinner was over. “I feel very much better.”

“I have brought down my work,” she said, “and will sit here while you drink your wine and smoke a pipe. Millicent has gone to bed, completely worn out, and it will be pleasanter for us both to sit here than to be alone.”

Mark gladly agreed to the proposal. She turned the conversation now to India, and talked of her life there.

“I was not out there very long,” she said. “I was engaged to my husband when he first went out, and six

years afterwards joined him there, and we were married. Your uncle, who was a major of his regiment, gave me away. My husband got his company six months afterwards, and was killed three years later. My pension as his widow was not a large one, and when your uncle offered me the charge of his daughter I was very glad to accept it. He gave some idea of his plans for her. I thought they were very foolish, but when I saw that his mind was thoroughly made up I did not attempt to dissuade him. He said that when he came home to England (and he had no idea when that would be) he should have me here, as head of his establishment, and it would be given out that the child was his ward. I hoped that he would alter his mind later on, but, as you know, he never did."

"Well, of course, she will have to be told now," Mark said.

"Do you think so? It seems to me that it were better that she would go as she is, at any rate, until she is twenty-one."

"That would be quite impossible," Mark said decidedly. "How could I assume the position of master here? And even if I could, it would be a strange thing indeed for me to be here with a girl the age of my cousin, even with you as chaperon. You must see yourself that it would be quite impossible."

"But how could she live here by herself?"

"I don't think she could live here by herself," Mark said, "especially after what has happened. Of course, it has all got to be talked over, but my idea is that the place had better be shut up, and that you should take, in your own name, a house in London. I suppose she will want masters for the harp, and so on. For a time, at any rate, that would be the best plan, unless you would prefer some other place to London. We have done our best to carry out my uncle's wishes, but circumstances have been too strong for us, and it cannot be kept up any longer; but there is no reason, if you and she prefer it, why she should not be known, until you return here, by her present name. Of course the affair will create a great deal of talk down here, but in London no one will know that Millicent is an heiress, though it is hardly likely that you will make many acquaintances for a time."

"Have you known it long, Mark? I thought that you were kept in ignorance of it."

"I only heard it yesterday evening, Mrs. Cunningham; after that shot through the window my father thought I ought to know all about it, for the attempt might be repeated more successfully. He told me all about her, and about the treasure."

"What treasure?" Mrs. Cunningham said. "I don't know what you mean."

He then told her of the story his uncle had related, and how he had been prevented from giving full instructions for its discovery, the only clue being a gold coin and the word Masulipatam, and that this treasure had been left equally divided between him and Millicent by his will.

"He told me that he should provide for you," Mrs. Cunningham remarked, "when I said that it would be unfair that you should be brought up believing yourself the heir. I never heard any more about it, but I am glad that it is so."

"I fancy the chance of its coming to either of us is very small," Mark said; "a coin and a word are not much to go upon. I have not the most remote idea what they mean, and whether the treasure is in England or in India, Heaven only knows."

"Possibly, when he made the will, he may have told the solicitors where it was, and instructed them to keep it secret until the time that Millicent came into possession of the estate."

"It is just possible he did so, Mrs. Cunningham, but the efforts he made to speak at the last moment would almost seem to show that he had not told them, for, if he had, the matter would have been of no vital importance one way or the other. Will Millicent be well enough to come down in the morning?"

"I hope so."

"I hope so, too; but, at any rate, keep her up in her room till the afternoon. The inquest will be at eleven o'clock, and it is better that she should not come down until everyone has gone away."

CHAPTER IX.

Directly after breakfast was over the next morning the Rector came in.

"I would not come in yesterday, Mark," he said. "I knew that you would be best alone; and, indeed, I was myself so terribly upset by the news that I did not feel equal to it. I need not say how deeply I and my wife sympathize with you. Never did a kinder heart beat than your father's; never have I seen people so universally grieved as they are in the village. I doubt whether a man went to work yesterday, and as for the women, had it been a father they had lost they could not be more affected."

"Yes, he will be greatly missed," Mark said unsteadily; "and, between ourselves—but this must go no further—I have a suspicion, amounting almost to a certainty, that the hand that dealt this blow is the same that caused the vacancy that brought you here."

"Do you mean Arthur Bastow?" Mr. Greg said in amazement. "Why, I thought that he was transported for fifteen years."

Then Mark told the Rector the inner history of the past six months, and of the report they had had from the officer at Bow Street of the personal appearance of the wounded man.

"Other things are in favor of it," he went on. "My father's watch and purse were untouched, and a stranger on a dark night would be hardly likely to have discovered the ladder, or to have had a file in his pocket with which to cut through a link, though this might have been part of the apparatus of any burglar. Then, again, an ordinary man would hardly have known which was my father's bedroom, except, indeed, that he saw the light

there after those in the ladies' rooms were extinguished; but, at any rate, he could not have told which was my father's and which was mine. But all this is, as I said, Mr. Greg, quite between ourselves. I had a long talk yesterday with Sir Charles Harris, and, as he said, there is no legal proof whatever, strong as the suspicion is; so I am going to say nothing on the subject at the inquest. The scoundrel's poor father is dying, happily in ignorance of all this. Dr. Holloway was up with him all night, and told me this morning before he drove off that it is very unlikely that he will get through the day."

"It is all very terrible, Mark; but I cannot deny that everything points to the man. Surely no one else could have cut short so useful a life, for certainly no ordinary degree of hatred would drive a man, however brutal his nature, to commit such a crime, and to run the risk of hanging for it. Let us take a brisk walk in the garden for an hour—that will be the best thing for you. I will stop with you until the inquest is over, and then you had better come over and have lunch with us."

"Thank you; I cannot do so," Mark said, "though I should like to. In the first place, Millicent will come downstairs this afternoon, and I should like to be in to meet her. Had it not been for that I might have come, as I can walk across the fields to the Rectory without passing through the village. There is another reason. I sent up yesterday by the coach a letter to be delivered at once by hand, and I expect a detective down here by one o'clock. I don't know that he will do any good; but at the same time it will give me something to do, and at present there is nothing I dread so much as sitting alone. Fortunately, yesterday evening Millicent went to bed at five o'clock, and Mrs. Cunningham sat with me all the evening, and her talk did me a great deal of good."

The inquest occupied a very short time, the only point on which many questions were asked being as to the firing through the window. Mark stated that it was already so dark that although he was within fifty yards of the man when he mounted and rode off, he could not give any very distinct description of his figure. It struck him as being that of a man of medium height.

"You have made out that the bullet was intended for your father?"

"I cannot say that, sir, it went between his head and that of Mr. Bastow, but it might have been meant for either."

"Was your father impressed with the idea that it was an attempt to murder him?"

"He naturally thought so. Mr. Bastow can assuredly have no enemies, while my father, as a magistrate, may have made some. He certainly thought it was an attempt to murder him, and was so impressed by the fact that when we went to the library later on he went into certain family matters with me that he had never communicated before, and which, had it not been for this, he would not have entered into for some years to come."

"He had his opinion, then, as to who was his assailant?"

"He had, sir, but as it was but an opinion, although there were several facts that seemed to justify the conviction, there was no proof whatever, and therefore I do not think myself justified in saying what that opinion was."

"Do you entertain the same opinion yourself?"

"I do," Mark said emphatically; "but until I can obtain some evidence in support of what is really but a matter of opinion, and because, were I to give the name, it would lessen my chance of obtaining such evidence, I decline to mention the name."

"You have no doubt that the author of the second attempt is the same as that of the first?"

"Personally, I have no doubt whatever; it stands to reason that it is barely possible that two men could have, unknown to each other, made up their minds to murder my father on the same evening."

The constable's evidence added nothing to that given by Mark. He had been down to the lane where the man pursued had mounted. The reins of the horse had apparently been thrown over a gatepost, and he thought it had been standing there for some little time, for there were marks where it had scraped the ground repeatedly. He had followed the marks of its hoofs for some distance; it had gone at a gallop for about half a mile, and then the pace had slackened into a trot. It continued until the lane fell into the main road, but beyond this he had been unable to distinguish it from the marks of the traffic in general.

"You found no footprints whatever near the foot of the ladder, or anywhere else round the house?"

"None whatever, sir."

"There were no signs of any other window or door save that of Mr. Thorndyke's room being attempted?"

"None at all, sir."

There was but a short consultation between the jurors, who at once returned a verdict of "Willful murder by some person or persons unknown."

Dr. Holloway had, after giving evidence, returned at once to Mr. Bastow's room. The only point of importance in his evidence was the statement that the wound must have been fatal at once, the heart itself having been penetrated. It had been inflicted by a dagger or a narrow bladed knife.

"Do you mean that it was an unusually small dagger, Dr. Holloway?"

"I should say it was a very fine dagger; not the sort of weapon that you would expect to find a highwayman carry, if he carried one at all, but rather a weapon of Spanish or Italian manufacture."

"Not the sort of wound that a rapier would make?"

"Yes, the wound itself might have been very well made by a light rapier, but there was a slight bruise on the flesh on each side of the wound, such a mark as might be made by the handle or guard of a dagger, and sufficiently plain to leave no doubt in my mind that it was so made."

"Had the wound a downward course, or was it a straight thrust?"

"A straight thrust," the doctor replied. "My idea is that the two men were grappling together, and that as Mr. Thorndyke was a very powerful man, his assailant, who probably was approaching the bed with the dagger in his hand, plunged it into him; had he struck at him I should certainly have expected the course of

the wound to be downward, as I fancy a man very seldom thrusts straight with a dagger, as he would do with a rapier."

When the inquest was over, Mark, going out into the hall, found the doctor waiting there for him.

"Mr. Bastow breathed his last some ten minutes ago. I saw when I went up to him just before I gave my evidence that it was likely that he would die before I returned to the room."

"I am very sorry," Mark said, "although I expected nothing else from what you told me: He was a very kind hearted man; no one could have had a kinder or more patient tutor than he was to me, while my father regarded him as a very dear and valued friend. I am expecting the undertaker here in a few minutes, and they can both be buried at the same time."

It was late in the afternoon before Millicent came down with Mrs. Cunningham. The news of Mr. Bastow's death had set her tears flowing afresh; she had been very fond of him, and that he and the Squire should have been taken at once seemed almost beyond belief. She had, however, nerved herself to some degree of composure before she went down to meet Mark; but although she returned the pressure of his hand, she was unable for some time to speak. Mrs. Cunningham thought it best to speak first on the minor grief.

"So Mr. Bastow has gone, Mark?"

"Yes, Dr. Holloway thought very badly of him yesterday, and said that he had but very faint hope of his rallying. I cannot help thinking that it was best so. Of course, he was not a very old man, but he has for some years been a very feeble one, and now that Millicent and I have both given up our studies with him, I think that he would have felt that his work was done, and would have gone downhill very fast."

"I think so, too," Mrs. Cunningham agreed. "I am sure that even had the Squire's death come quietly, in the course of nature, it would have been a terrible blow to him. He was fond of you and Millicent, but his affection for your father was a passion; his face always lit up when he spoke to him. I used to think sometimes that it was like an old dog with his master. It was quite touching to see them together. I think, Mark, with you, that it is best that it should be as it is."

Gradually the conversation turned to other matters. Millicent was, however, unable to take any part in it, and half an hour later she held out her hand silently to Mark and left the room hurriedly. The next day she was better, and was able to walk for a time with Mark in the garden and talk more calmly about their mutual loss, for to her, no less than to Mark, the Squire had been a father.

"'Tis strange to think that you are the Squire now, Mark," she said as they sat together in the dining room on the evening before the funeral.

"You will think it stranger still, Millicent," he said, "when I tell you that I am not the Squire, and never shall be."

She looked up in his face with wonder.

"What do you mean, Mark?"

"Well, dear, you will know tomorrow, as Mr. Prendergast, one of the family solicitors, is coming down; but I think it is as well to tell you beforehand. It has been a curious position all along. I never knew it myself till my father told me when we went into the library after the shot was fired. The news did not affect me one way or the other, although it surprised me a great deal. Like yourself, I have always supposed that you were my father's ward, the daughter of an old comrade of his brother's. Well, it is a curious story, Millicent. But there is no occasion for you to look frightened. The fact is you are my uncle's daughter and my cousin."

"Oh, that is not very dreadful!" she exclaimed in a tone of relief.

"Not dreadful at all," Mark said. "But you see it involves the fact that you are mistress of this estate, and not I."

Millicent stood up suddenly with a little cry. "No, no, Mark, it cannot be! It would be dreadful, and I won't have it. Nothing could make me have it. What, to take the estate away from you when you have all along supposed it to be yours! How could I?"

"But you see it never has been mine, my dear. Father might have lived another five-and-twenty years, and God knows I have never looked forward to succeeding him. Sit down and let me tell you the story. It was not my father's fault that he reigned here so long as master, it was the result of a whim of your father's. And although my father fought against it, he could not resist the dying prayer of my uncle."

He then related the whole circumstances under which the girl had been brought up as Millicent Conyers, instead of Millicent Conyers Thorndyke, and how the estate had been left by Colonel Thorndyke's will to his brother until such time as Millicent should come of age, or marry, and how he had ordered that when that event took place the rest of his property in money and jewels was to be divided equally between Mark and herself.

"It must not be, Mark," she said firmly. "You must take the estate, and we can divide the rest between us. What is the rest?"

"To begin with," Mark said cheerfully, "there are 25,000 pounds, the accumulations of the rents of the estate after the death of my grandfather up to the time when the Colonel returned from India; and there are, besides, a few thousands, though I don't exactly know how many, that my father paid over to the solicitors as the surplus of the rents of the estates after paying all expenses of keeping up this house. He very properly considered that although he had accepted the situation at your father's earnest wish, he ought not to make money by doing so. If we put it down at 30,000 pounds altogether, you see there is 15,000 pounds for each of us. A very nice sum for a young man to start life with, especially as I shall have my father's estate near Hastings, which brings in 500 pounds a year; and as the rents of this have been accumulating for the last ten years, my share will be raised from 15,000 pounds to 20,000 pounds. Besides this, there is the main bulk of the Colonel's fortune made in India. That seems to be worth about 100,000 pounds but I must own that the chance of getting it seems very small."

"How is that, Mark?"

Mark told her the whole story.

"I mean to make it my business to follow the matter up," he said. "I think that the chance of ever finding it is very small. Still, it will give me an object to begin life with."

"Oh, I hope that you will never find it!" she exclaimed. "From what you say it will be a terrible danger if you do get it."

Mark smiled.

"I hardly think so, Millicent. I cannot believe that people would be following up this thing for over fifteen years, for it was many years before the Colonel came home that he got possession of these diamonds. Even Hindoos would, I think, have got sick of such a hopeless affair long before this; but as they may ever since your father's death have been watching us, although it hardly seems possible, I shall follow out the Colonel's instructions, and get rid of those particular diamonds at once. I shall only keep them about me long enough to take them to Amsterdam and sell them there. The Colonel said they were the finest diamonds that he ever saw, and that he really had no idea of what they were worth. However, that is for the future."

"Mrs. Cunningham has known this all along, Mark?"

"Not about the money affairs, but of course she knew that you were my cousin. She brought you from India, you see, and has known all along that the Colonel was your father. She knows it, and the family solicitors know it, but I believe no one else, except, perhaps, Ramoo. I am not sure whether he was in uncle's service when you were sent over in Mrs. Cunningham's charge. He may know it or he may not, but certainly no one else does, except, as I say, the solicitors and myself. Possibly some other of the Colonel's old comrades knew that there was a child born; but if they were in England and happened to hear that my father had succeeded to the estate, they would, of course, suppose that the child had died."

"Then," Millicent said, in a tone of relief, "there can be no reason why anyone else should know anything about it. I will see Mr. Prendergast when he comes down tomorrow, and beg him to say nothing about it; 15,000 pounds is quite enough for any girl; and besides, you say that my father's greatest wish was that I was not to be married for money, and after all the pains that have been taken, his wish will not be carried out if I am to be made owner of the estate."

"You won't be able to persuade Mr. Prendergast to do that," Mark said, smiling. "It is his duty simply to carry out the provisions of your father's will, and to place you in possession of the estate; and if he would keep silence, which he certainly won't, you don't suppose that I would."

"Then I shall hate you, Mark."

"I don't think you will, Millicent, and I would rather that you did that than that you should despise me. At the present moment you may think that this estate would be only a burden to you, but some day when you marry you might see the matter in a different light."

The girl looked at him reproachfully.

"I should never think so!" she burst out. "What would you have me do? Live here in this great house, with only Mrs. Cunningham, while you are going about the world seeking for this treasure? Never!"

"No, I don't think that it would be nice for you to do that, Millicent," Mark said. "Mrs. Cunningham and I have been talking it over. We thought that the best plan would be for her to take a house in London, and go there with you; you would have the advantages of good masters."

"Then you were saying only a short time since that you would like to learn the harp and take lessons in painting. There would be time enough to think about what you would do with respect to this house afterward."

"It is all horrible," Millicent said, bursting into tears, "and I shall always feel that I have robbed you."

"But I don't feel so in the least," Mark urged. "I was not in the smallest degree put out when my father told me about it. I have always had a fancy for wandering about the world, as my uncle did, and doing something to distinguish myself, instead of settling down for life to be a country magistrate and a squire. Of course it came as a surprise, but I can assure you that it was not an altogether unpleasant one. What can a man want more than a nice little estate of 500 pounds a year and 20,000 pounds in money?"

"It is all very well to say that, but as you said to me just now, you may see it in a different light some day."

Then she sat thinking for some time. "At any rate," she went on at last, "I don't see why anyone should know about it now. If the house is to be shut up and you are going away, why need anyone know anything about it? My father's wish was that I should not have people making love to me just because I was an heiress; after all that has been done, it would be wicked to go against his wishes. I suppose the interest of this 15,000 pounds would be enough for Mrs. Cunningham and I to live comfortably on in London?"

"Yes," Mark said; "it will, at 5 per cent, bring in 750 pounds a year."

"Then I shall remain Millicent Conyers to the world. There is nothing to prevent that, is there?" she said almost defiantly.

"No," he replied thoughtfully. "The rents of this estate might accumulate. I suppose the solicitors would see after that; and as I shall be away it will, of course, make no difference to me. Were I to stay in the neighborhood I could not consent to live as my father did, in a false position; but even then I might give out that the property had only been left to my father during his lifetime, and that it had now gone elsewhere, without saying whom it had gone to. However, as I shall be away there will be no occasion even for that. When the will is read there will be no one present but ourselves, and I don't see why its contents should not be kept a secret for a time; at any rate, we can ask Mr. Prendergast's opinion upon that subject."

At this moment, Mrs. Cunningham coming into the room, Millicent ran to her and threw her arms round her neck.

"He has made me most miserable," she said. "I thought I could not have been more miserable than I was before he told me all about it."

"I knew that he was going to do so, and I was quite sure that you would not be pleased at the news. I have all along thought that it was a mistake on the part of your father; but as it was his decision, and not mine, I only had to carry out his wishes."

"It is cruel," Millicent sobbed. "I don't mean it is cruel of my father; of course he could not have known, and he thought he was doing the best thing for my happiness, but it has all turned out wrong."

"For the present you may think so, dear; but you must remember that up to the present time it has turned out well. I know that your uncle did not like it at first, but I think that he passed ten happy years here. It gave him a great power for doing good, and he worthily availed himself of it. We have all spent a happy time; he was universally liked and respected. I think all of us have benefited by it. It would not have been half as pleasant if it had been known that you, my child, were the real owner of the estate, and he was acting merely as your guardian. Let us hope that everything will turn out as well in future. Colonel Thorndyke told me that he had left a considerable sum in addition to the estates, and that this was to be divided between you and Mark; so you see your cousin will not go out into the world a beggar."

"It is most of it lost," Millicent said with a hysterical laugh. "It is all hidden away, and no one can find it; everything has gone wrong together."

"Well, I think, dear, that you had better go up to bed. I will go with you. At the present time this, of course, has come upon you as an additional shock. I would gladly have shielded you from it for a time if I could have done so, but you must have learned it tomorrow, and I quite agree with Mark that it was better that he should tell you this evening. I sent down to the town today to the doctor's and asked him to send me up a soothing draught, thinking that you might be upset by the news. I hope by the morning you will be able to look at matters more calmly."

Some time later Mrs. Cunningham came down again.

"She has cried herself to sleep," she said. "She is much grieved about this money being lost."

"It is annoying; still I cannot help thinking that the Colonel must have taken some such precaution to prevent the treasure from being lost."

"One would certainly think so," Mrs. Cunningham agreed; "the Colonel seemed to me a methodical man. I know that he had the reputation of being one of the most particular men in the service as to all petty details. His instructions to me before I left him were all very minute, and he gave me a sealed packet which he told me contained instructions and a copy of the register of his marriage and of Millicent's birth, and he said that in case of his death I was to take it to your father. He said that there was a letter inclosed in it to him, and also a copy of his will. The letter was directed to your father, and not to me. I handed it over to him when he asked me to come here. He told me afterwards that the letter contained the request that his brother lived to make personally to him—that the child should be brought up as his ward; and that he had handed the certificates to a lawyer, who had, however, received copies of them from the Colonel himself before he went down to see your father. So, as he took these precautions to insure his wishes being carried out in the event of his sudden death, I should think that he must have done something of the sort with regard to this treasure."

"I should think that extremely likely, Mrs. Cunningham. I certainly had not thought of that before, and I hope that for Millicent's sake and my own it may turn out to be so. I can get on extremely well without it, but at the same time I don't pretend that 50,000 pounds are to be despised."

The next morning Mr. Prendergast, who had arrived at Reigate late the evening before, and had put up at an inn, came up to the house an hour before the time named for the funeral. He learned from Mark that he had already acquainted Millicent with her change of circumstances. A few minutes after he arrived, a servant told him that Miss Conyers would be glad if he would see her alone for a few minutes in the drawing room. Mark had already prepared him for her request.

"Mark has told you that he told me about this hateful thing last night, I suppose, Mr. Prendergast?"

"He has," the old lawyer said kindly; "and he tells me also that you are not at all pleased at the news."

"Pleased! I should think not, Mr. Prendergast," she said indignantly. "I am not going to rob my cousin of what he has always been taught to think as his inheritance. It is abominable, I call it, and most unnatural."

"But, my dear young lady, it is yours, and not his. I do not wish to discuss whether the arrangement was altogether a wise one, but I think that so far it has turned out well for all parties. Your estate has profited greatly by the management of your uncle, the tenants and all connected with it have benefited greatly, he himself has had active employment afforded him, of which he was fond. Your cousin has, I believe, enjoyed the advantages of the position, and has become acquainted with the best people in this part of the country, and will now obtain the benefit of something like 15,000 pounds—a comfortable little sum, especially as he inherits, I believe, his father's property in Sussex. You yourself will have obtained what I cannot but consider the advantage of having been brought up without knowing that you were an heiress, and therefore without being spoiled, which is, in my opinion, the case with many young ladies in such a condition; therefore I cannot but think that, if unwise in its conception, the matter has so far worked out well. I am bound to say that Mr. Mark Thorndyke has been speaking to me very handsomely on the subject, and that he appears in no way disappointed at finding that you are the heiress of the estate, and is really concerned only at your unwillingness to accept the situation."

"I wanted to know, Mr. Prendergast," she said, but in a tone that showed she was convinced by his manner that her request would be refused, "if you could arrange so that things would not be disturbed, and he should come into possession as his father's heir in the natural way."

"But you see he is not his father's heir, Miss Thorndyke. His father only had the use, as we call it, of the property until you came of age, or marriage; it was not necessary for it to come to you on your coming of age, but only, as your father explained to me, in the event of your marriage; that is to say, it was not to become public that you were entitled to the estate until your marriage. If you married before you were twenty-one the property was then to come to you. If you did not you were to be informed of the circumstances or not, as Mr. Thorndyke might decide was best, but you were not to come into the property until you married. Your cousin was also to be informed when you came to the age of twenty-one, and as at that time he was to take his half share of the remainder of the property, he would then be able to arrange his life as he liked. If your uncle died, as unfortunately he has done, before you reached the age of twenty-one, you would then be placed in

your proper position; but your father desired us to say to you that it was his wish, that if it could be arranged, your having succeeded to the ownership should not be publicly known until you divulged it to your husband after marriage. The other portions of the will must be carried out. This being only a request, you are at liberty to follow it or not as you may choose."

"Certainly I should choose," the girl said. "After all this trouble to prevent my being run after as an heiress, it would be wicked to upset it all and to fly in the face of his wishes by setting up as mistress of this estate. Still you understand, Mr. Prendergast, that I don't mean to take it."

The lawyer smiled indulgently. "There is one way in which it might be managed," he said. "Perhaps you can guess what it is?"

A flush of color rose over the girl's face. "Don't say it, I beg of you, Mr. Prendergast. Mrs. Cunningham hinted at it this morning, and I told her that my own wish entirely agreed with that of my father, and that I was determined not to be married for money; and I am quite sure that Mark would be as unwilling as I am that the estate should change hands in that way. No, Mr. Prendergast, you must find some other way of doing it than that. Surely an estate cannot be forced upon anyone who is determined not to take it."

"Well, we must think it over," Mr. Prendergast said quietly. "And now I think that it is time for me to join the others."

CHAPTER X.

The funeral of Squire Thorndyke and Mr. Bastow was over, and all agreed they had never seen a more affecting spectacle than that at the churchyard when the two coffins were brought in. The distance was short, and the tenants had requested leave to carry the Squire's bier, while that of Mr. Bastow was borne by the villagers who had known and loved him. Behind followed all the magistrates and a great number of the gentry for miles round; the churchyard was crowded by every man, woman, and child in the village, and the women, as well as many of the men, wept unrestrainedly as the coffins passed by. Besides these, a large number of people from Reigate and the surrounding villages were present, attracted rather by the crime that had caused the death than by the loss of the Squire himself. The church was crowded, and it was with difficulty that Mr. Greg read the service. The Squire was laid by the side of his father, Mr. Bastow in the spot where many of his predecessors had slept before him.

Mark had been greatly affected, not only by his own loss, but by the sight of the general grief among those for whom the Squire had done so much. Even Mr. Prendergast, who had taken part in many such functions over departed clients, was much moved by the scene.

"I have been at many funerals," he said to Mark as they walked back to the Hall, "but I never have been at one that so affected me. No monument ever raised, sir, did such credit to him who was laid beneath it as the tears of those simple villagers."

Mark did not reply; his heart was altogether too full to speak. As they entered the house he said, "The ladies will have their lunch upstairs, Mr. Prendergast; we may as well have ours at once, and then you can call them down if there is any business to be done."

"That will not take long," the lawyer said. "I have brought down the wills of both your uncle the Colonel, and your father, and I think that it would be as well for me to read them both. That of your father is a very short and simple document, extending, indeed, only over a few lines. Your uncle's is longer and more complicated, but as you are well aware of the gist of it, it will take us but a short time to get through it."

Mark took his meal in a perfunctory manner. For himself he would have eaten nothing, but he made an effort to do so in order to keep his guest company. When it was over he said:

"We may as well go into the library at once, and I will send up for the ladies. It is as well to lose no time, for I know that you want to catch the afternoon coach up to town."

Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent joined them in a minute or two, the girl looking very pale in her deep mourning.

"I am about," Mr. Prendergast said quietly, "to read the wills of Colonel Thorndyke and Mr. John Thorndyke, and I will ask you, if there is any phrase that you do not understand, to stop me, and I will explain to you its purport."

The three persons present were acquainted with the main provisions of the Colonel's will. It began by stating that, being determined that his daughter, Millicent Conyers Thorndyke, should not be married for her money, he hereby bequeathed to his brother, John Thorndyke, his estate in the parish of Crowswood, to be held by him until his daughter Millicent came to the age of twenty-one, or was married; if that marriage did not take place until she was over the age of twenty-one, so long was it to continue in John Thorndyke's possession, save and except that she was, on attaining the age of twenty-one, to receive from it an income of 250 pounds a year for her private use and disposal.

"To Jane Cunningham, the widow of the late Captain Charles Cunningham, of the 10th Madras Native Infantry, should she remain with my daughter until the marriage of the latter, I bequeath an annuity of 150 pounds per annum, chargeable on the estate, and to commence at my daughter's marriage. All my other property in moneys, investments, jewels, and chattels of all sorts, is to be divided in equal portions between my daughter, Millicent Conyers Thorndyke, and my nephew, Mark Thorndyke. Should, however, my daughter die before marriage, I bequeath the said estate in the parish of Crowswood to my brother, John Thorndyke, for his life, and after him to his son Mark, and to the latter the whole of my other property of all kinds, this to take effect on the death of my daughter. Should my brother predecease the marriage or coming of age of my daughter, she is at once to come into possession of the said estate of Crowswood. In which case my nephew

Mark and Mr. James Prendergast, of the firm of Hopwood & Prendergast, my solicitors, are to act as her trustees, and Mrs. Jane Cunningham and the said James Prendergast as her guardians."

All this was, of course, expressed in the usual legal language, but the purport was clear to those previously acquainted with its bearing, the only item that was new to them being the legacy to Mrs. Cunningham. John Thorndyke's testament was a short one. He left all his property to his son Mark, with the exception of a hundred pounds to his niece to buy a mourning ring or brooch or other ornament in memory of him, and fifty pounds to Mrs. Cunningham for a similar purpose, as a token of his great esteem for her character, and 200 pounds to Ramoo for his faithful services to his brother and himself. When the lawyer had folded up the wills Millicent said:

"On my part, I have to say that I absolutely renounce the legacy of the estate in favor of my cousin Mark, who has always believed that it would be his."

"And I as absolutely refuse to accept the sacrifice," Mark said.

"My dear young lady," Mr. Prendergast said quietly, "at present, at any rate, you have no power whatever to take any action in the matter; you are, in the eye of the law, an infant, and until you come of age you have no power to execute any legal document whatever. Therefore you must perforce remain mistress of the estate until you attain the age of twenty-one. Many things may happen before that time; for example, you might marry, and in that case your husband would have a voice in the matter; you might die, in which case Mr. Mark Thorndyke would, without any effort on your part, come into possession of the estate. But, at any rate, until you reach the age of twenty-one your trustees will collect the rents of the estate on your behalf, and will hold the monies in trust for you, making, of course, such payments for your support and maintenance as are fit and proper for your condition."

The tears came into Millicent's eyes as she resumed the seat from which she had risen, and she did not utter another word until Mr. Prendergast rose to leave.

"I shall doubtless learn your wishes as to the future, Miss Thorndyke, from your cousin," he said. "I hope that you will not cherish any malice against me, and that when you think it over you will come to the conclusion that second thoughts are sometimes the wisest, and also that you should have some consideration for your father's wishes in a matter of this kind. He worked hard and risked his life to build up the fortune that he has left. He evidently thought greatly of your welfare, and was, above all things, anxious to insure your happiness. I am sure that on thinking it over you will see that you should not thwart his wishes."

"My dear boy," he said to Mark, as they stood on the doorstep waiting for the carriage to come round, "the best plan by far in this business would be for the interests of your cousin and yourself to be identical. She is a very charming young lady, a little headstrong in this matter, perhaps, but I do not think that that is altogether unnatural."

"That might have come about if it had not been for the property, Mr. Prendergast," Mark said, "but it cannot be now. If she and I had been engaged before all this happened the case would have been different; but you see yourself that now my lips are sealed, for it would seem as if I had not cared for her until she turned out to be an heiress."

"You are a silly young couple," the lawyer said. "I can only hope that as you grow older you will grow wiser. Well, you had better come up and have a talk with me about the assets your uncle mentions in his will."

"Then you don't know anything about them, sir?"

"Nothing at all, except as to the accumulations in his absence. He mentioned vaguely that he was a wealthy man. I thought that, as a matter of course, he had told his brother all about it."

"It is a curious business, sir, and I doubt if there will ever be anything besides the accumulations you speak of."

"Bless me, you don't say so! Well, well, I always thought that it was the most foolish business that I ever heard of. However, you shall tell me all about it when you come up. I shall miss my coach unless I start."

So saying, he shook Mark's hand, took his place in the gig, and was driven away. Millicent did not come downstairs again that day.

"She is thoroughly upset," Mrs. Cunningham said, "and it would be best to let her have her own way for a time. I think the sooner I can get her away from here the better. The house is full of sad memories, and I myself feel shaken and in need of a change."

"I can quite understand her feeling and yours, Mrs. Cunningham. I do hope you will be able to disabuse her mind of the idea that I have any shadow of feeling of regret that she instead of I has the estate, and please try to work upon her on the ground of her father's wishes. I could see that her face changed when Mr. Prendergast put the matter in that light, which I do not think had occurred to her before. I am thinking of going up to town in a couple of days; I was thinking of doing so tomorrow, but a day or so will make no difference. I propose that you both go with me, and that I then help you look for a house. Even if you don't get one at once, a week in London will be a change, and you can then, if you like, go somewhere for a time. Of course Bath would be too gay at present; but you might go to Tunbridge Wells, or, if she would like a seaside place, as she has never been near the sea since she was a baby, that would be the greatest change for her. You might go down for a month or two to Dover or Hastings. There is no occasion for you to settle down in London for a time. There is Weymouth, too, if you would like it better. I believe that that is a cheerful place without being too fashionable."

"I think that will be an excellent plan," Mrs. Cunningham said.

"If you like I will drive you up to town, and the luggage can go by the carrier; it is more pleasant than being shut up in a coach."

"Much more cheerful, of course."

"You will, of course, leave many of your things here, and the packing them up will give her something to do, and prevent her from brooding."

"I think that is an excellent idea, Mark."

Late in the afternoon Ramoo came in in his usual silent manner. The man had said but little during the past few days, but it was evident that he was grieving deeply, and he looked years older than he had done before that fatal night.

"Of course, Ramoo, you will stay with me for the present. I hardly know what I shall be doing for a time, but I am sure that until I settle down, Miss Conyers will be very glad to have you with her."

"No, sahib, Ramoo will return home to India. Ramoo is getting old; he was thirty when he entered the service of the Colonel, sahib; he is fifty now; he will go home to end his days; he has saved enough to live in comfort, and with what the lawyer sahib told him your father has left him he will be a rich man among his own people."

"But you will find things changed, Ramoo, since you left; while here, you know, we all regard you as a friend rather than as a servant."

"You are all very kind and good, sahib. Ramoo knows that he will meet no friends like those he has here, but he longs for the bright sun and blue sky of India, and though it will well nigh break his heart to leave the young missie and you, he feels that he must go."

"All right, Ramoo. We shall all be very sorry to lose you, but I understand your longing to go home, and I know that you always feel our cold winters very trying; therefore I will not oppose your wishes. I shall be going up to town in two or three days, and will arrange to pay your legacy at once, and will inquire what vessels are sailing."

Millicent was unfeignedly sorry when she heard of Ramoo's determination; she was very fond of him, for when as a child she first arrived at Crowswood he had been her companion whenever the Squire did not require his services, and would accompany her about the garden and grounds, listening to her prattle, carrying her on his shoulder, and obeying her behests. No doubt he knew that she was the daughter of his former master, and had to a certain extent transferred his allegiance from the sahib, whose life he had several times saved, to his little daughter. Still, she agreed with Mark that it was perhaps best that he should go. She and Mrs. Cunningham would find but little occasion for his services when established in London, and his swarthy complexion and semi-Eastern costume would attract attention, and perhaps trouble, when he went abroad—the population being less accustomed to Orientals than at present—but still less would they know what to do with him were they for a time to wander about. Mark said at once that so long as he himself was engaged in the task that he had set himself, he could not take Ramoo with him, and as for his staying alone in the house when it was only in charge of a caretaker, it was not to be thought of.

Although not inclined at the present time to agree with Mark in anything, Millicent could not but acknowledge that it were best that Ramoo should not be urged further to reconsider his determination, and she also fell in with his proposal that they should go up to London for a week, and then go down to Weymouth for a time, after which they would be guided by circumstances. Accordingly, two days later, Mark drove Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham up to London. A groom accompanied them on Mark's favorite horse. This was to be left in town for his use, and the groom was to drive the carriage back again. Comfortable rooms were obtained in a quiet inn for the ladies, while Mark put up at the Bull, saying that he would come every day to take them out.

"Why did not Mark stay here, Mrs. Cunningham?" Millicent asked pettishly.

"I suppose he thought it better that he should not do so; and I own that I think he was right."

"When we were, as we supposed, no relation to each other," Millicent said, "we could be like brother and sister. Now that we find that we are cousins we are going to be stiff and ceremonious."

"Not necessarily because you are cousins, Millicent. Before, you were his father's ward, and under his father's care; now you are a young lady on your own account. You must see that the position is changed greatly, and that what was quite right and proper before would not be at all right and proper now."

Millicent shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, if Mark wishes to be distant and stiff he can certainly do so if he likes it. It makes no matter to me."

"That is not at all fair, Millicent, and very unlike yourself. Had not Mark suggested his going to another inn, I should have suggested it myself."

"Oh, yes; no doubt it is better," Millicent said carelessly. "He has several friends in town, and of course we cannot expect him to be devoting himself to us."

Mrs. Cunningham raised her eyebrows slightly, but made no answer. Millicent was seldom wayward, but at present things had gone very hardly with her, and her friend felt that it would be better to leave her entirely to herself until her humor changed. In the morning, when Mark came round, Millicent announced that she felt tired with the drive of the previous day, and would prefer staying indoors. Mark looked a little surprised, more at the tone than at the substance of the words, for the manner in which she spoke showed that the excuse she had given was not her only reason for not going out.

"Of course, I shall stay at home too," Mrs. Cunningham said quietly, as he glanced toward her inquiringly. "Millicent is unnerved and shaken, and perhaps it is just as well for her to have a day's complete rest."

"Very well, Mrs. Cunningham; then I will, as I cannot be of any use to you, set about my own business for the day. I have already been round to the lawyer's, and have got a check for Ramoo's legacy. He will be up this afternoon, and I will go round to Leadenhall Street and find out what ships are sailing and when they start. I will come in this evening for a chat."

Millicent sat without speaking for some minutes after he had left the room. Mrs. Cunningham, whose hands were always busy, took some work out of a bag and set to work at it industriously. Presently the girl said:

"What business is this that Mark is going to occupy himself in?"

"I do not know much about it," she replied. "But from a few words which he let drop I believe that he intends to devote himself to discovering and hunting down your uncle's murderer."

The listless expression faded out at once of Millicent's face.

"But surely, Mrs. Cunningham, that will be very dangerous work."

"No doubt it will be dangerous work, but I don't think that that is likely to hinder Mark. The man, whoever he may be, is of course a desperate character, and not likely to be captured without making a fierce struggle for it."

"Then he ought to put the matter in the hands of the proper authorities," Millicent said decidedly. "Of course such men are dangerous. Very likely, this man may have accomplices, and it is not against one only that Mark will have to fight. He has no right to risk his life in so desperate an adventure."

Mrs. Cunningham smiled quietly over her work. The Squire had often confided to her how glad he would be if these two should some day come together. In that case the disclosure after marriage of the real facts of the case would cause no disturbance or difficulty. The estate would be theirs, and it would not matter which had brought it into the partnership; she had thoroughly agreed with him, but so far nothing had occurred to give any ground for the belief that their hopes would be fulfilled.

Till within the last year Millicent had been little more than a child; she had looked up to Mark as she might have done to a big brother, as something most admirable, as one whose dictum was law. During the last year there had been some slight change, but more, perhaps, on Mark's part than on hers. He had consulted her wishes more, had asked instead of ordered, and had begun to treat her as if conscious that she was fast growing up into womanhood.

Millicent herself scarcely seemed to have noticed this change. She was little more inclined to assert herself than before, but was ready to accompany him whenever he wished her to do so, or to see him go away without complaint, when it so pleased him; but the last week had made a rapid change in their position. Millicent had sprung almost at a bound into a young woman. She had come to think and resolve for herself; she was becoming wayward and fanciful; she no longer deferred to Mark's opinion, but held her own, and was capable of being vexed at his decisions. At any rate, her relations with Mark had changed rapidly, and Mrs. Cunningham considered this little outburst of pettishness to be a good omen for her hopes, and very much better than if they had continued on their old footing of affectionate cousins.

Mark went back again to the lawyer's, and had a long talk with Mr. Prendergast over the lost treasure. The old lawyer scoffed at the idea that there could be any danger associated with the bracelet.

"Men in India, I suppose, get fanciful," he said, "and imbibe some of the native superstitions. The soldier who got them from the man who stole them was stabbed. He might have been stabbed for a thousand reasons, but he had the bracelet on his mind. He was forever hiding it and digging it up, and fancying that someone was on his track, and he put down the attack as being made by someone connected with it. His manner impressed your uncle. He concealed the diamonds or sent them off somewhere, instantly. He never had any further trouble about them, but like many men who have a craze, fancied that he was being perpetually watched and followed. The unfortunate result of all this is that these jewels and the money that he accumulated during his service in India seem to be lost. A more stupid affair I never heard of.

"Now, as to the clew, any reasonable man would have given full instructions as to how the treasure was to be found; or if he did not do that, would, at least, instead of carrying about an absurd coin and a scrap of paper with a name upon it, have written his instructions and put them in that ridiculous hiding place, or, more wisely still, would have instructed his solicitor fully on the subject. The amount of trouble given by men, otherwise perfectly sane, by cranks and fancies is astonishing. Here is something like 100,000 pounds lost owing to a superstitious whim. As to your chance of finding the treasure, I regard it as small indeed. The things are hidden in India, in some old tomb, or other rubbishing place. Your uncle may have committed them to the charge of a native; he may have sent them to a banker at one of the great towns; he may have shipped them to England. He may have sent them to the North Pole for anything I know. How can one begin to search the universe?"

"I thought, sir, that perhaps he might have sent them to some London Bank or agent, with instructions to hold them until claimed by him, and that perhaps an inquiry among such houses would lead to the discovery that they hold certain property forwarded by him."

"Well; there is some sense in that suggestion," Prendergast grumbled, "and I suppose the first thing to be done will be to carry that out. If you wish, we will do it for you. They would be more likely to give the information, if they possess it, to a well known firm of solicitors like ourselves than to any private individual. Besides, if you were to go yourself, they would in each case want you to be identified before they would answer any question, whereas I should write a note to them in the firm's name, with our compliments, saying that we should be glad to know if the late Colonel Thorndyke, of whose will we are the executors, had any account at their firm or has deposited any property in their hands. There are not above five or six banks doing business with India, and as many agents in a large way of business; and if he did such a foolish thing, he would be certain to do it with some houses of good standing—if, indeed, anything can be taken as certain in the case of a gentleman with such extraordinary fancies and plans as his."

"Thank you, Mr. Prendergast," Mark said, with a slight smile at the lawyer's irritability; "that will be clearing the ground to a certain extent. If that does not succeed, I think I shall go to India myself, and shall there make similar inquiries at all the principal establishments at Calcutta and Madras. Should I fail there, it seems to me that the only remaining plan will be to find out from the military authorities the place where my uncle's regiment was encamped on the day—we have the date on which the jewels were given to him—and to institute a minute search of all the old ruins within such a distance as he might have reached within a day's ride."

"But you have no certainty that it was a ruin. He might have dug a hole under his tent and have buried the things there; he might have taken a shovel and buried them in a clump of bushes a quarter of a mile away. The thing is more and more ridiculous the more you look at it."

"I see it is very difficult, sir, but one might narrow it down somewhat if one discovered the spot. Probably there are still native officers in the regiment who were there at the time. If so, they might possibly know who was my uncle's servant at the time. The man may be a pensioner, and in that case I might discover his address through the military authorities, and I could find out from him whether my uncle often rode out at night, what were his habits, and possibly where the tent stood, and so on."

"Well," Mr. Prendergast said, "if you like to undertake a wild goose chase of this sort it is your business, and not mine; but I consider the idea is the most Utopian that I ever heard of. As to where the tent stood, is it likely that a man would remember to within a hundred yards where a tent stood fourteen years ago? Why, you might dig up acres and acres of ground and not be sure then that you had hit upon the right place."

"There is one other circumstance, Mr. Prendergast," Mark said quietly, "that has to be taken into consideration, and which renders it improbable that these diamonds were hidden anywhere by my uncle himself at that time. He certainly spoke of the whole of this treasure collectively. It is morally certain that he would not carry all these jewels that he had been collecting about with him, and certainly not his treasure in money. He must, therefore, have sent these diamonds to the person, whoever he may be, who had the keeping of his other jewels and of his money. This certainly points to a bank."

"There is a sensible conjecture. Yes, there is something in that. He certainly could not have carried about him 50,000 pounds in gold and as much in jewelry; it would have been the act of a madman, and Colonel Thorndyke, although eccentric and cranky, was not mad. But, on the other hand, he may have carried about a banker's passbook, or what is equivalent to it, for the amount that had been deposited with a native banker or agent, together with a receipt for the box containing the jewels, and this he might have hidden with the diamonds."

"I don't think that he would have done that; there could have been no object for his putting the power of demanding his money and valuables out of his possession."

"Well, well," the lawyer said testily, "it is of no use arguing now what he might or might not have done. A man who would have taken the trouble that he did to prevent his daughter knowing that she was an heiress, and fancied that he was followed about by black fellows, might do anything, reasonable or unreasonable, under the sun. At any rate, Mr. Thorndyke, I will carry out your instructions as to inquiries in London, and will duly inform you of the result; beyond that I must really decline to give any advice or opinion upon the matter, which is altogether beyond me."

On leaving the lawyer's, Mark went to Bow Street, and related to the chief the circumstances attending his father's murder.

"I have heard them from the man I sent down at your request, Mr. Thorndyke, and taking the attempt early in the evening and the subsequent murder, there can be no doubt that the affair was one of revenge, and not of robbery. Had the second attempt stood alone, robbery might have been the object; the mere fact that nothing was stolen in no way alters the case. Men are often seized with a certain panic after committing a murder, and fly at once without attempting to carry out their original purpose. Your father, no doubt, fell heavily, and the man might well have feared that the fall would be heard; but the previous attempt precludes the supposition that robbery was at the bottom of it. It points to a case of revenge, and certainly goes a very long way to support the theory that we talked over when I last saw you, that the highwayman who endeavored to stop you on the road, whom you wounded, and who afterwards went down to Southampton, was the escaped convict, Bastow. Since that time I have had a man making inquiries along the roads between Reigate and Kingston, but altogether without success. I should be glad to follow up any other line that you might suggest, and that might offer any reasonable possibility of success, but I must own that at present we are entirely off the scent."

"I am thinking of devoting myself entirely to the quest. I have no occupation at present. I have an income amply sufficient for my wants, and for all expenses that I may incur, and I intend to devote, if necessary, some years of my life to hunting this man down. As your men have searched without success in the country, I think for the present my best plan will be to devote myself to learning something of the ways and haunts of the criminal classes of London, and it is with that object that I have come to you now. I should like, for some time, at any rate, to enter the detective force as an enrolled member. I should, of course, require no pay, but should be prepared to obey all orders and to do any work required, as any other member of the corps would do. I am strong, active, and have, I hope, a fair share of intelligence. I should not mind risking my life in carrying out any duty that you might assign to me. I presume that I need not always be on duty, and could, when not required, employ my time as I liked, and keep up my acquaintances in town. Should it be otherwise, however, I am perfectly ready to submit myself in all respects to your rule. I have a first rate horse and should be available for country duty, wherever you might think fit to send me. I should not desire any distinction to be made between me and the paid officers."

"Your proposal is an altogether novel one, Mr. Thorndyke, but it is worthy of consideration. I have no doubt that you would make a very useful officer; the work is certainly interesting, though not without serious hazards. However, I will think the matter over, and if you will call in tomorrow you shall have my answer. We are always glad to have a new hand in the force, for the faces of our men are so well known among the criminal class that they are liable to be detected even under the cleverest disguises. There is work, too, upon which it is absolutely necessary that a gentleman should be employed, and in the event of your joining us, I should wish you to keep the matter strictly from all your acquaintances; and it would certainly be advantageous that you should, when disengaged, continue to mix with your friends and to mingle in society of all kinds as freely as possible. There is crime among the upper classes as well as among the lower, though of a different type; and as Mr. Thorndyke of Crowswood you would have far better opportunities of investigating some of these cases than any of my men would have. You would not object to take up such cases?"

"Not at all, sir; that is, if it could be arranged that I should not do the actual work of making an arrest, or have to appear in court as a witness."

"That could be managed," the chief said "When you have got to a certain point the matter of the final arrest could always be handed over to someone else, but as a rule we keep our officers in the background as much as possible, because at every trial the court is half full of men of the criminal class, and the faces of our men would soon be known to every one of them. Well, if you will call about ten o'clock tomorrow you shall have my answer; but I should advise you to think the matter well over before you see me again. The responsibilities as well as the dangers are great, and indeed in some of the work you would literally have to carry your life in your hand; and I can assure you that the task you would undertake is by no means a light one."

CHAPTER XI.

Mark called that evening, as he had promised, upon Mrs. Cunningham.

"I hope that you feel all the better for your day's rest, Millicent," he said.

The girl looked quickly at him to see if there was any sarcasm in the question, but it was evident that the inquiry was made in earnest.

"Yes, I feel better now," she said. "I have dozed a good deal today. I did not feel up to anything. Mrs. Cunningham's work has progressed wonderfully. I should say that she has done more today than she ordinarily finds time to do in a week. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I have been having a long talk with Mr. Prendergast about the lost treasure."

"And of course he said that you would never find it, Mark?"

"Well, yes, he distinctly expressed that opinion."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards I went to Bow Street and had a long talk also with the chief officer there."

"I don't like the idea of your searching for this man, Mark. In the first place, I don't see why you should hope to succeed when the men whose business it is to do such work have failed. In the next place, I think that you may get into serious danger."

"That I must risk, Millicent. I have already proved a better shot than he is, and I am quite ready to take my chance if I can but come upon him; that is the difficult part of the matter. I know that I shall need patience, but I have plenty of time before me, and have great hopes that I shall run him to earth at last."

"But you would not know him if you saw him?"

"I think I should," Mark said quietly; "at least, if he is the man that I suspect."

"Then you do suspect someone?" Mrs. Cunningham said, laying down her work.

"Yes, I know of no reason why you should not know it now. I suspect—indeed, I feel morally certain—that the man who murdered my father was Arthur Bastow."

An exclamation of surprise broke from both his hearers, and they listened with horror while he detailed the various grounds that he had for his suspicions. They were silent for some time after he had brought his narrative to a conclusion, then Mrs. Cunningham said:

"What a merciful release for Mr. Bastow that he should have died before this terrible thing came out! For after what you have told us I can hardly doubt that you are right, and that it is this wicked man who is guilty."

"Yes, it was indeed providential," Mark said, "though I think that, feeble as he has been for some months, it might have been kept from him. Still, a word from a chance visitor, who did not associate Bastow the murderer with our dear old friend, might have enlightened him, and the blow would have been a terrible one indeed. It is true that, as it was, he died from the shock, but he did not know the hand that struck the blow."

"Now that you have told me this," Millicent said, "I cannot blame you, Mark, for determining to hunt the man down. It seems even worse than it did before; it is awful to think that anyone could cherish revenge like that. Now tell me how you are going to set about it."

"I have promised the chief officer that I will tell absolutely no one," he said. "I have a plan, and I believe that in time it must be successful. I know well enough that I could tell you both of it without any fear of its going further, but he asked me to promise, and I did so without reservation; moreover, I think that for some reasons it is as well that even you should not know it. As it is, you are aware that I am going to try, and that is all. If I were to tell you how, you might be picturing all sorts of imaginary dangers and worrying yourself over it, so I think that it will be much the best that you should remain in ignorance, at any rate for a time. I can say this, that I shall for the present remain principally in London, and I think that I am more likely to come upon a clew here than elsewhere."

Millicent pouted, but Mrs. Cunningham said: "I think, perhaps, that you are right, Mark, and it is better that we should know nothing about it; we shall know that you are looking for a clew, but of course no danger can arise until you obtain it and attempt to arrest him. I feel sure that you will do nothing rash, especially as if any harm befell you he might escape unpunished, and therefore that when the time comes to seize him you will obtain such help as may be necessary, and will, if possible, arrest him at a moment when resistance is impossible."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cunningham; I shall certainly spare no efforts in taking him that way, and would far rather he met his fate on a gibbet than by a bullet from my pistol."

"I agree with you, Mark," Millicent said; "even hanging is too good for such a wicked man. When are you going to set about it?"

"I hope to be able to begin tomorrow," he said. "I am impatient to be at work, even though I know perfectly well that it may be months before I can get on his track. I hope to get a good deal of information as to the habits of men of his kind from the Bow Street runners, and I have an appointment tomorrow morning to see their chief, who will give me every assistance in his power."

"Then you will not be able to take us out?" Millicent said.

"I trust to do so later on, but I cannot say how long I shall be engaged. However, I hope to get away so as to go out with you after lunch, and may possibly be able to postpone my getting regularly to work until after you have gone, so as to be able to devote myself to your service."

"But what sort of work? I cannot make out how you are going to begin."

"I can tell you this much, that to begin with I shall go in company with a constable to various places where such a man is likely to be found. It will take some time to acquaint myself with all these localities; the next step will be to find out, if possible, if anyone at all answering to his description is in the habit of coming there occasionally, and whom he visits; another thing will be to find out the places where receivers of stolen goods do their business, and to watch those with whom highwaymen are suspected of having dealings. All this, you see, will entail a lot of work, and require a very large amount of patience. Of course, if nothing whatever comes of such inquiries, I shall have to try quiet places in the suburbs; you must remember that this fellow during his time as a convict must have had opportunities of getting a vast amount of information likely to be useful to him, such as the addresses of men holding positions of apparent respectability, and yet in alliance with thieves. You may be sure that when he returned he took every imaginable pains to obtain a safe place of concealment before he began his work; my own opinion is that I am more likely to find him living quietly in a suburban cottage than in a London slum."

Millicent was now thoroughly interested in the search. "It seems a great business, Mark, but going into it as thoroughly as you are doing I feel sure that you will succeed. I only wish that I could help you; but I could not do that, could I?" she asked wistfully.

He saw that she was in earnest, and suppressed all semblance of a smile.

"I am afraid, dear, that you would be a much greater source of embarrassment than of assistance to me," he said gravely. "This is essentially not a woman's work. I believe that women are sometimes employed in the detection of what we may call domestic crimes, but this is a different matter altogether."

"I suppose so," she sighed; "but it will be very hard to be taking our ease down at Weymouth while we know that you are, day after day, wearing yourself out in tramping about making inquiries."

"It will be no more fatiguing than tramping through the stubble round Crowswood after partridges, which I should probably be doing now if I were down there. By the way, before you go we shall have to talk over the question of shutting up the house. We had too much to think of to go into that before we came away, and I suppose I shall have to run down and arrange it all, if you have quite made up your mind that you don't mean to return for a year or two."

"Decidedly our present idea is to have a few weeks at Weymouth, and then when we feel braced up to come back here and look for a house. Where are you likely to be, Mark?" Mrs. Cunningham asked.

"I shall consult with Dick Chetwynd; he knows the town thoroughly, and is more up here than he is down in the country; he will recommend me to some lodging in a street that, without being the height of fashion, is at least passable. I have not the least wish to become a regular man about town, but I should like to go into good society. One cannot be at work incessantly."

The next morning the chief of the detective department told Mark that he had decided to accept his offer.

"As you will receive no pay," he said, "I shall regard you as a sort of volunteer. For the first two or three months you will spend your time in going about with one or other of my men on his work. They will be able to put you up to disguises. When you have once learned to know all the thieves' quarters and the most notorious receivers of stolen goods, you will be able to go about your work on your own account. All that I require is that you shall report yourself here twice a day. Should I have on hand any business for which you may appear to me particularly well suited, I shall request you to at once undertake it, and from time to time, when there is a good deal of business on hand, I may get you to aid one of my men who may require an assistant in the job on which he is engaged."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, sir," Mark said, "and will, I can assure you, do my best in every way to assist your men in any business in which they may be engaged."

"When will you begin?"

"It is Saturday today, sir. I think I will postpone setting to until Monday week. My cousin and the lady in whose charge she is came up with me on Thursday, and will be leaving town the end of next week, and I should wish to escort them about while here. I will come on Monday morning ready for work. How had I better be dressed?"

"I should say as a countryman. A convenient character for you to begin with will be that of a man who, having got into a poaching fray, and hurt a gamekeeper, has made for London as the best hiding place. You are quite uncertain about your future movements, but you are thinking of enlisting."

"Very well, sir, I will get the constable at Reigate, who knows me well, to send me a suit. I might find it difficult to get all the things I want here."

Accordingly, for the next week Mark devoted himself to the ladies. Millicent, in her interest in the work that he was about to undertake, had now quite got over her fit of ill temper, and the old cordial relations were renewed. On the Friday he saw them into the Weymouth coach, then sauntered off to his friend Chetwynd's lodgings.

Ramoo had already sailed. On his arrival in town he had said that he should, if possible, arrange to go out as a steward.

"Many men of my color who have come over here with their masters go back in that way," he said, in answer to Mark's remonstrances. "It is much more comfortable that way than as a passenger. If you go third class, rough fellows laugh and mock; if you go second class, men look as much as to say, 'What is that colored fellow doing here? This is no place for him.' Much better go as steward; not very hard work; very comfortable; plenty to eat; no one laugh or make fun."

"Well, perhaps it would be best, when one comes to think of it, Ramoo; but I would gladly pay your passage in any class you like."

"Ramoo go his own way, sahib," he said. "No pay passage money; me go to docks where boats are sailing, go on board and see head steward. Head steward glad enough to take good servant who is willing to work his way out, and ask for no wages. Head steward draw wages for him, and put wages in his own pocket. He very well satisfied."

On Wednesday he came and told Mark that he had arranged to sail in the Nabob, and was to go on board early the next morning. He seemed a great deal affected, and Mark and Millicent were equally sorry to part with the faithful fellow.

"Well, old man," Dick Chetwynd said, when Mark entered the room, where he was still at breakfast, "I was beginning to wonder whether you had gone to Reigate. Why, when I saw you last Friday you told me that you would look me up in a day or two."

"I have been busy showing London to Mrs. Cunningham and Miss Conyers," he replied—for Millicent had insisted on keeping her former name, at any rate for the present—and Mark was somewhat glad that there had been no necessity for entering into any explanations. It was agreed that when he went down to discharge some of the servants and called upon his friends he should say nothing of the change in his position, but should assign as a motive that he intended to travel about for a long time, and that he felt he could not settle down in the lonely house, at any rate for two or three years; and therefore intended to diminish the establishment.

"You will have some breakfast, Mark?"

"No, thank you. I breakfasted two hours ago."

"Then you still keep to your intention to stay in London for a while?"

"Yes. I don't feel that I could bear the house alone," Mark replied. "You see, Mrs. Cunningham and my uncle's ward could not very well remain in a bachelor's home, and naturally, after what has happened, they would not like to do so, even if they could. They have gone down to Weymouth for a few weeks for a complete change; and Mrs. Cunningham talks of taking a house in town for a time. I am going to look for lodgings, and I want your advice as to the quarter likely to suit me."

"Why not take up your abode here for a time? There is a vacant room, and I should be very glad to have you with me."

"Thank you very much, Dick, but I should prefer being alone. You will have friends dropping in to see you, and at present I should be poor company. It will be some little time before I shall feel equal to society."

"Of course, Mark. I always speak first and think afterwards, as you know pretty well by this time. Well, what sort of lodgings do you want?"

"I want them to be in a good but not in a thoroughly fashionable street. In time, no doubt, I shall like a little society, and shall get you to introduce me to some of the quieter of your friends, and so gradually feel my way."

"I will do all that sort of thing for you, Mark. As you know, I am not one of those who see much fun in gambling or drinking, though one must play a little to be in the fashion. Still, I never go heavily into it. I risk a few guineas and then leave it. My own inclinations lie rather towards sport, and in this I can indulge without being out of the fashion. All the tip top people now patronize the ring, and I do so in my small way too. I am on good terms with all the principal prize fighters, and put on the gloves with one or other of them pretty nearly every day. I have taken courses of lessons regularly from four or five of them, and I can tell you that I can hold my own with most of the Corinthians. It is a grand sport, and I don't know how I should get on without it; after the hard exercise I was accustomed to down in the country, it keeps one's muscles in splendid order, and I can tell you that if one happens to get into a fight in the streets, it is no light thing to be able to polish off an antagonist in a round or two without getting a mark on your face that would keep you a prisoner in your room for a week or more."

"Yes, I should like very much to take lessons too, Dick; it is one of the things that I have always wished to do. I suppose one can do it of an evening, or any time you like?"

"Yes, any hour suits those fellows. You ought to get either a heavy middleweight or a light heavyweight; you will be a heavyweight yourself by the time you have filled out. Let me think; what is your height—six feet one, if I remember rightly?"

"Yes, that is about it."

"Well, with your shoulders and long reach and activity, you ought to be something out of the way if you take pains, Mark. You see, I am barely five feet ten, and am something like two stone lighter than you are. I suppose you are not much under twelve stone and a half."

"That is just about my weight; I weighed at the miller's only a fortnight ago."

"Good. I will make some inquiries, and see who would be the best man to take you in hand to begin with. And now about lodgings. Well, I should say Essex Street, or any of those streets running down from the Strand, would suit you. The rooms in Essex Street are bigger than those in Buckingham Street, and you will find anything between the two in some of the others. I may as well saunter round there with you. Of course money is no object to you?"

"No," Mark agreed, "but I don't want big rooms. I think a small one, when you are sitting by yourself, is more cozy and comfortable."

Finally two rooms were taken in Villiers Street; they were of moderate size and handsomely furnished: the last tenant had fitted them out for himself, but had lived to enjoy them only three months, having at the end of that time been killed in a duel over a quarrel at cards.

"Well, I think you are in luck, Mark; you might look through a good many streets before you would find rooms so fashionably furnished as these. I see he went in for driving; that is evident from these engravings on the walls."

"They are common, gaudy looking things," Mark said, "and quite out of character with the furniture."

"Not at all, as times go, Mark; it is quite the thing for a man to have prints showing his tastes, riding or driving, shooting or coaching, or the ring. If you don't like them you can take them down, or, what will be better, take them out of their frames and put some of the champions past and present up there instead."

"I will see about it," Mark said with a laugh. "I may turn out a complete failure."

"There is no fear of that, Mark; and as the ring is all the fashion now, I can assure you it would be

considered in good taste, though I own that in point of art most of these things leave a good deal to be desired. Now that that important thing is settled, suppose you come and lunch with me in Covent Garden? I don't belong to a club yet, though I have got my name down at a couple of them, but as far as I can see they are slow sort of places unless you know a lot of people. The coffee houses are much more amusing; you see people of all sorts there—fellows like myself, who have no clubs to go to; country gentlemen up for a week; a few writers, who, by the way, are not the best customers of these places; men whom nobody knows, and men whom everybody knows. Of course, the best time to see them is of an evening.”

“Yes, I have generally been in of an evening when I have been up in towns Dick, and I have always been amused. However, I am quite ready to lunch there now, for I breakfasted early.”

“I have to make some calls this afternoon, Mark. At seven this evening I will look in at your lodgings, and you shall go along with me to Ingleston's in St. Giles'. It is one of the headquarters of the fancy, and Jack Needham, who taught me, is safe to be there, and he will tell me who he thinks is best for you to begin with.”

Accordingly, after taking luncheon, they separated, and Mark went to his inn.

Ingleston's was at that time regarded as the headquarters of the fancy. At the back of the house was a large room, with benches rising behind each other to accommodate the spectators. Here, on the evenings when it was known that leading men would put on the gloves, peers of the realm would sit side by side with sporting butchers, and men of fashion back their opinion on a coming prize fight with ex-pugilists and publicans. A number of men were assembled in the bar; among these was Jack Needham.

“Good evening, Mr. Chetwynd,” the man said as they came up to him. “It's going to be a good night. Tring and Bob Pratt are going to have a round or two together, and Gibbons will put on the gloves with anyone who likes to take him on.”

“This gentleman is Mr. Thorndyke, a squire, Jack, whose place is near mine at Reigate. He has come up to town for a few months, and wants to learn how to use his mauleys. I told him that you would advise him as to who would be the best man for him to go to.”

“I can tell you better when I have seen him strip, sir. There is no one in the big room at present. It won't be open for half an hour. Ingleston keeps it shut as long as he can so as to give everyone a fair chance of a good place. If the gentleman will come in there with me I will have a look at him.”

Mark expressed his willingness to be looked at, and the man having gone and got the key of the room from Ingleston, went in with them and locked the door behind.

“Now, sir, if you will strip to the waist I shall be better able to say who you should have as your teacher than I can now.”

Mark stripped, and the man walked round and round him, examining him critically.

“He's a big 'un,” he said to Dick when he had completed his examination. “He has got plenty of muscle and frame, and ought to be a tremendous hitter; he is about the figure of Gibbons, and if he goes in for it really, ought to make well nigh as good a man, if not quite. I don't think Bill would care about taking him up till he knows a bit about it. I tell you what, sir; you will be too big altogether for me by the time you get to be quick on your legs, and to use your strength, but if you like I will take you on for a month or so—say, two months; by that time I think you will be good enough to go to Gibbons. I will just call him in if you don't mind; he came in just before you.”

In a couple of minutes he came in with a man of similar height and somewhat similar figure to Mark.

“This is Gibbons, sir, ex-champion, and like enough he might be champion now if he chose; as fine a boxer as ever stripped, but he is ring maker now to the P. C. and it suits him better to do that and to teach, than to have a chance of getting a battle once a year or so.”

“Have you a great many pupils, Gibbons?”

The man shook his head.

“I am too big, sir; gentlemen like to learn from someone about their own weight, or perhaps a bit lighter, and there are not many of them who would care to stand up against a man who has been champion, and so I have plenty of time on my hands. I am a hard hitter, too, even with the gloves; that is one reason why Jack had best take you on until you get a little handy with your fists. I do more in the dog fancier line than I do with boxing, but there is nothing I like better than getting the gloves on with an amateur who is likely to be a credit to me. That is my card, sir; you will find me in pretty nearly any time of the day, and I have got a place behind the house where I do teaching when I get a chance. It is handy in one way, because you can drop in and take a lesson any time you like.”

“That would suit me exceedingly well,” Mark said; “and when I have had a couple of months with Needham I will come to you.”

Mark now put on his clothes again, and they went out together, and re-entered a few minutes later, when the door was open. The benches were soon crowded. Mark had been to several prize fights with Dick Chetwynd, had often boxed with him and other lads, and had had lessons from an ex-prize fighter at Reigate, and was therefore able to appreciate the science shown by the various men who confronted each other. The event of the evening was the contest between Tring and Bob Pratt; both were very powerful men, who were about to go into strict training for matches that had been made for them against two west countrymen, who were thought very highly of by their friends, and who were regarded as possible candidates for the championship.

Bob Pratt was a stone heavier than his opponent, but far less active, and owed his position more to his ability to take punishment, and to hard hitting powers, than to his science. In the two rounds that were fought, Tring had the advantage, but the general opinion was that in the long run the other would wear him down. Both fought with good temper, and were warmly applauded as they shook hands at the finish.

“I think I should back Tring in a fight,” Mark said, as the meeting broke up, “but it is difficult to say, for he is in better condition than the other, and it may be that when both are thoroughly fit the heavy man might show more improvement than he would do.”

The hat was passed round at the conclusion: Every man dropped in his guinea, some more, it being understood that the collection was divided between the two men to pay the expenses of their training.

CHAPTER XII.

The next morning Mark commenced work in earnest, and for two months visited all the worst slums of London in company with one of the Bow Street men. Both were generally in disguise, but Mark's companion sometimes went openly to some of the houses inhabited by men well known as criminals. On such occasions Mark remained within call, ready to go in if assistance should be required; but there was small fear of this, the men who were visited were all personally known to the officer, and generally greeted him with "You aint wanting me, are you?"

"Not at all; what I am wanting is a little information for which I shall be quite willing to pay the first man who enables us to lay hands on the gentleman I want to find." Then he would describe Bastow's appearance.

"He has taken to the road, I fancy, and has given us a good deal of trouble; if it is the man I think it is, he has been away from London for some years, and came back eight or ten months ago."

The reply was always to the same effect:

"I don't know of such a man, and never heard of him. For my part, I would not split on a pal, not for anything; but I should not mind earning five guineas to put you on a cove who is not one of us. Besides, it aint only the money; you know, you might do me a good turn some day."

"Quite so; well, I can tell you it is a good deal more than five guineas that would be earned if you could put me in the way of laying my hand on his shoulder. I don't think that he is living in town. I expect he is in some quiet neighborhood; still, if he is on the road, he must have a horse somewhere. You might ask among the stables, and find out whether anyone keeps a horse there who is in the habit of going out in the afternoon and not coming back until the next day. You have plenty of time upon your hands, and it would pay you well if you could bring me the information I want."

The officer said to Mark at the end of two months: "These knights of the road don't often mix themselves up with the London housebreakers. The most likely men to be able to tell you about the doings of such a fellow would be receivers of stolen goods, but it would be dangerous to question any of them—they would be sure to put him on his guard. I will give you a list of some of them, and I should say that your best way would be to watch their places of an evening, from the time it gets dark till ten or eleven. Of course, it is just a chance. You may watch one place for a month and he may happen to go there the very day you have gone off to watch another crib. Still, there is just the chance, and I don't see that there is one any other way."

During this time Mark had been taking a lesson every evening with Needham, and had surprised his teacher with the rapidity of his progress; he had said, the very evening before, when Mark had countered him with a blow that knocked him for two or three minutes senseless:

"We have had enough of this, governor; you have got beyond me altogether, and I don't want another blow like that. You had better take on Gibbons now. You are too big altogether for me, and yet you don't fight like a heavyweight, for you are as quick on your pins as I am."

Well pleased at having the day to himself and of having got clear of his work in the thieves' rookeries, Mark went the next morning to Gibbons' shop. His entry was hailed by a chorus of barking from dogs of all sorts and sizes, from the bulldog down to the ratting terrier.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Thorndyke," Gibbons said, when he had silenced the barking. "I saw Jack last week, and he told me that he should hand you over to me pretty soon, for that you were getting beyond him altogether, and he thought that if you stuck to it you would give me all my work to do in another six months."

"I finished with him last night, Gibbons, and I shall be ready to come for a lesson to you every morning, somewhere about this hour. I have brought my bag with my togs."

"All right, sir, I am ready at once; the place is clear now behind. I have just been making it tidy, for we had a little ratting last night, one of my dogs against Sir James Collette's, fifty rats each; my dog beat him by three quarters of a minute."

"You will never see me here at one of those businesses. I have no objection to stand up to a man my own size and give and take until we have had enough, but to see rats slaughtered when they have not a chance of making a fight of it is altogether out of my line."

"Well, sir, I do not care about it myself; there are lots who do like it, and are ready to wager their money on it, and as it helps to sell my dogs, besides what I can win out of the event—it was a wager of twenty guineas last night—it aint for me to set myself up against it."

Calling a boy to look after the shop, Gibbons went away into a wooden building in the back yard; it was about twenty-five feet square, and there were holes in the floor for the stakes, when a regular ring was made. The floor was strewn with clean sawdust; a number of boxing gloves hung by the wall.

"There is the dressing room," Gibbons said, pointing to a door at the other end. When both were ready he looked Mark over. "Your muscles have thickened out a good bit, sir, since I saw you strip. Before another four years, if you keep on at it, you will be as big a man as I am. I am about eight years too old, and you are four years too young. You will improve every day, and I shan't. Now, sir, let us see what you can do. Jack tells me that you are wonderfully quick on your feet; there is the advantage you have of me. I am as strong as ever I was, I think, but I find that I cannot get about as I used to."

He stood somewhat carelessly at first, but as they sparred for an opening he became more careful, and presently hit out sharply. Mark leaped back, and then, springing forward, struck out with his left; Gibbons only just stopped it and then countered, but Mark was out of reach again.

"That is good enough," Gibbons said; "I can see Jack has taught you pretty nearly all there is to know. We will just take those hits again. You were right to get away from the first, but the second time you should have guarded with your left, and hit at my chin with your right. That jumping back game is first rate for avoiding punishment, but you have got to come in again to hit. You took me by surprise that time, and nearly got home, but you would not do it twice," and so the lesson went on for three quarters of an hour.

"That will do for today, sir; I am getting blown, if you are not. Well, I can tell you I have never had a more promising pupil, and I have brought forward two or three of the best men in the ring; no wonder that Jack cannot do much with you. Give me six months, every day, and you should have a turn occasionally with other men, and I would back you for a hundred pounds against any man now in the ring."

Three or four days later Mark received a message that the chief wanted to speak with him that afternoon, and he accordingly went down.

"I've got a job for you, Mr. Thorndyke; it is just the sort of thing that will suit you. There is a house in Buckingham Street that we have had our eye on for some time; it is a gambling house, but with that we have nothing to do unless complaints are made, but we have had several complaints of late. It is a well got up place, and there are a good many men of title frequent it, but men of title are not always more honest than other people; anyhow, there are some rooks there, and several young fellows of means have been pigeoned and ruined. They are mighty particular who they let in, and there would be very little chance of getting my regular men in there. Now, you are a stranger in London, but you have friends here, and no doubt you could get introduced. We want to know if the play is fair; if it isn't, we would break the place up altogether. We know enough to do it now; but none of the poor beggars who have been ruined will come forward, and, indeed, haven't any idea, I think, that they have lost their money in anything but a run of bad luck.

"One young fellow blew his brains out last week, and his father came here with a list of what are called debts of honor, which he found in his room. There they are, and the names of the men they are owed to; of course some of them have been fairly won, but I have a strong suspicion that those I have marked with a cross have not been. For instance, there is Sir James Flash, a fellow who was turned out of White's two years ago for sharp practice with cards; there is John Emerson, he is a man of good family, but all his friends have given him up long ago, and he has been living by his wits for the last five years. The others marked are all of the same sort. Now, what I want you to do is to become a frequenter of the place; of course you will have to play a little, and as you are a stranger I expect that they will let you win for a bit; but if not the old gentleman has placed 200 pounds in my hands for the expenses."

"I could play with my own money," Mark said rather warmly.

"You forget, Mr. Thorndyke," the chief said firmly, "that at the present moment you are a member of my force, and that you go to this place in that capacity, and not as Squire of Crowswood; therefore you must, if you please, do as I instruct you. The gentleman will be ready to pay that sum. As you see, the amounts entered here total up to nearly 10,000 pounds. He said that it will ruin him to pay that sum, but that he must do so rather than his son should be branded as a defaulter. I have advised him to write to all these people saying that it will take him some time to raise the money, but that he will see that nobody shall be a loser by his son's debts. I have told him in the meantime that I will endeavor to get proof that the play was not fair, and in that case he would, of course, refuse to pay any of the claims on that ground; and you may be sure that if unfair play was proved none of those concerned would dare to press their claims."

"Then my function would be simply to watch?"

"Yes, to watch, and to bring me word of anything you may observe. You see, without making a public scandal, if it could be found that a man was discovered cheating, and the way in which he was doing it, one would be able to put so strong a pressure on him, that not only might he be forced to abstain from going to any club, but would be frightened into giving up any IOUs he might hold."

"I shall be glad to do the best I can, sir; but frankly I know next to nothing of cards, and should have but little chance of detecting anything that might be going on, when it must be done so cleverly that experienced gamblers, watching a man closely, fail to see anything wrong."

"I quite understand that; but one of my men has made a study of the various methods employed by gamblers to cheat, and although it would take you years to learn how to do it yourself, a few hours' instruction from him would at least put you up to some of their methods, and enable you to know where to look for cheating. The man is now waiting in the next room, and if you will take two or three hours daily with him, say for a week, you ought to be able to detect the doings of these fellows when to others everything seems right and above board. You may have no inclination for cards, but knowledge of that sort is useful to anyone in society, here or anywhere else, and may enable him either to save his own pocket or to do a service to a friend."

Mark was greatly interested in the tricks the man showed him. At first it seemed to him almost magical, after he himself had shuffled the cards and cut them the dealer invariably turned up a king. Even admitting he might have various places of concealment, pockets in the lining of the sleeve, in the inside of the coat, and in various other parts of the dress, in which cards could be concealed and drawn out by silken threads, it did not seem possible that this could be done with such quickness as to be unobserved. It was only when his teacher showed him, at first in the slowest manner, and then gradually increasing his speed, that he perceived that what seemed impossible was easy enough when the necessary practice and skill had been attained. The man was indeed an adept at a great variety of tricks by which the unsuspecting could be taken in.

"I ought to know," he said. "I was for three years in a gambling house in Paris, where every other man was a sharper. I have been in places of the same sort in Belgium, Holland, Germany, and Italy. At first I was only a boy waiter, and as until evening there was nothing doing at these places, men would sometimes amuse themselves by teaching me tricks, easy ones to begin with, and when they saw I was sharp and quick handed they went on. After a time I began to work as a confederate, and at last on my own account; but I got disgusted with it at last. A young fellow shot himself at the table of the gambling house at Rome, and at another place I was nearly killed by a man who had lost heavily—do you see, it has left a broad scar right

across my forehead?—so I gave it up.

“I was in the French police for a time, and used to watch some of the lower hells. I was nearly killed there once or twice, and at last I came back here. My French chief gave me a letter to the chief, and I was taken on at once, for, talking as I do half a dozen languages, and being acquainted with most of the swell mobsmen of Paris, I was just the man who happened to be wanted here at the time. Since I came over I have done a good deal in the way of breaking up hells where sailors and others are plundered. But, you see, I cannot be used for the higher class of work; my nose has been broken, and I have half a dozen scars on my face. I hate the sight of cards now. I have seen so much of the ruin they do, and have, I am sorry to say, taken a hand so often in doing it, that save showing someone who would use the knowledge in the right way how the tricks are done, nothing would persuade me to touch them again. However, as a protection, the knowledge is as useful as it is dangerous when used the other way. It would take you ten years to learn to do these tricks yourself so well as to defy detection; but in a very short time, by learning where to keep your eyes, you would get to detect almost any of them.

“You see, there are three methods of cheating: the first by hidden cards, the second by marked cards, the third simply by sleight of hand, this being generally used in connection with marked cards. These tricks require great skill and extreme delicacy of touch, for the marks, which are generally at the edge of the cards, are so slight as to be altogether imperceptible save to a trained hand. There are also marks on the back of the cards; these are done in the printing, and are so slight that, unless attention were attracted to them, no one would dream of their existence.”

In the course of a week's practice Mark learned where to look for cheating; he could not indeed follow the fingers of his instructor, for even when he knew what was going to be done, the movements were so rapid that his eye could not follow them, and in nine cases out of ten he was unable to say whether the coup had been accomplished or not; but he could see that there was a slight movement of the fingers that could only mean that something was being done.

“It would be a good thing,” he said one day, “if every young fellow before going out into the world were to have a course of such instruction as you are giving me; he would learn, at least, the absolute folly of sitting down to play cards with strangers. He would see that he could be robbed in fifty different ways, and would be at the absolute mercy of any sharper. I never had any inclination for gambling, but if I had been inclined that way you would have cured me of the passion for life.”

The week's instruction was lengthened to a fortnight, and at the end of that time Mark went to Dick Chetwynd.

“Do you know, Dick,” he said, “a gambling place in Buckingham Street?”

“I know that there is a hell there, Mark, but I have never been in it. Why do you ask?”

“I have rather a fancy to go there,” he replied. “I hear that, although a good many men of fashion haunt the place, the crowd is rather a mixed one.”

“It has a bad name, Mark; I have heard some queer reports about it.”

“Yes, so have I. I should think that it is a very likely place for a man like Bastow to go to if he has any liking for play. Of course he would get up as a gentleman. At any rate, I have been making what inquiries I can in some of the thieves' quarters, and have come to the conclusion that he is not likely to have taken up his abode there, and I don't think I can do better than make a round of some of these doubtful houses. I should like to begin with this, and then work downwards.”

“Well, I dare say I could manage it, Mark; I know half a dozen men who play there; they say there is more fun and excitement to be got than at White's or Crockford's, or any of those places. Some men, of course, play high, but a good many who go there only risk a few guineas; some go because it is the proper thing at present for a man about town either to play or to bet on horses or cock fights, or to patronize the ring; and, after all, it is easier to stroll for an hour or two of an evening into comfortable rooms, where you meet a lively set and there is champagne always going, than it is to attend races or prize fights.”

Very few days passed that Mark did not go in for half an hour's chat with his friend, and two days after this conversation Dick said:

“By the way, Mark, I have arranged for us to go to that hell tonight; young Boldero, who is a member of my club, told me some time ago that he played there sometimes. I met him yesterday evening, and said that I had a fancy to go and have a look at it, and that a friend of mine from the country also wanted to go; he said at once that he would take us there.

“I should advise you not to play much, Chetwynd,” he said; “sometimes they play uncommonly high, and there are some fellows who have wonderful luck. Of course, on ordinary occasions, when the play is low, you could stake a few guineas there as well as elsewhere, but when really high play is on we small fish always stand out. All I can say is that I have never seen anything that savors of foul play in the smallest degree; but you understand how it is, if one man happens to have a big run of luck, there are always fellows who go about hinting that there is something wrong in it. However, it is a jolly place to drop into, and, of course there is no occasion to play always, and if one loses one is likely to win on the next race or on the next fight.”

Accordingly that evening Mark met Boldero, whom he had once or twice before seen in Dick's company, and the three went together to the house in Buckingham Street. Boldero nodded to the doorkeeper as he went in, and they then proceeded upstairs and entered a handsome room, with comfortable sofas and chairs, on which a dozen men were seated, for the most part smoking. Several champagne bottles stood on the tables, and all who liked helped themselves. Boldero was known to several of those present, while two or three were also known to Dick. Boldero introduced them both to his friends. One of these was the Hon. John Emerson, a man of some five and thirty, with a languid air and a slight drawl.

“Glad to make your acquaintance, sir,” he said to Mark. “Have you been long in town?”

“Two or three months only,” Mark replied.

“Is this your first visit here?”

“Yes, this is my first visit to any place of the sort, but I thought that I should like to go the rounds before I

went home again."

"Quite so. Going to punt a few guineas, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose that is the right thing to do."

"Well, everyone who comes is expected to do a little that way; there is no occasion to play high."

"Oh, I should not like to do that," Mark said innocently; "indeed, I know very little about cards."

"Oh, that is quite immaterial so long as you only play games of chance; in fact, you don't want to know anything about them. You see others staking their money, some on one side of the table, and some on the other; you place your money whichever side you like, and take your chance. There is no skill in it. Some people play on what they call a system, but there is nothing in it; you have just as much chance if you put your money down blindfolded. If luck is with you, you win; if luck is against you, you lose."

After chatting for a few minutes Mark went with his two companions upstairs. The room they now entered was furnished as a drawing room, except that in the middle was a table, round which some fifteen people were seated, while as many more looked on; round the room were several small tables, on which were packs of cards. These were for those who preferred to play piquet or ecarte, two or three couples being so engaged. Mark knew enough of cards to know that hazard was being played at the large table. There was an inner room, and Mark strolled across and looked in. It was at present untenanted; it contained a center table capable of holding four, and two or three small ones, with two chairs set in readiness to each.

"That is where the heavy play goes on," Boldero said. "None of your four or five guineas wagers there, fifties and hundreds are nearer the mark, and I have seen a thousand wagered many a time. It is exciting work even looking on, I can tell you; what it must be for the players I cannot say, but I should think it must be frightful."

Mark took up his stand at the hazard table, and after looking on for some little time began to play. Beginning with guineas, he gradually, as luck favored him, played five guineas, and after half an hour's play won fifty. Then luck turned, and in a few minutes he had lost all he won.

"You ought to have stopped, Mark," Dick said reproachfully, as he stepped back from his place, which was at once filled by one who had been standing behind him.

The play in the inner room had now begun, and Mark went in and joined those who were looking on. In half an hour one of the players had had enough, and a young man said to Emerson, who was standing on the other side of the table:

"Now, Mr. Emerson, will you give me my revenge?"

"I would really rather not, Mr. Cotter. The luck has been so one sided lately that I would rather leave it alone."

"But it may turn tonight," the other said. "At any rate, I will try it, if you have no objection."

There was a certain eagerness in the young man's voice that caused Mark to watch him closely. He was a good looking young fellow, but his face was not a strong one; and although he evidently tried to assume an appearance of indifference as he sat down, there was a nervous movement of his fingers. Mark took his place behind him as play began. The game was ecarte, and for a time Emerson lost.

"I think the luck has changed, Mr. Cotter, but as we generally raise the stakes after playing for a bit, I am ready to do so. Shall we make it fifty pounds again?"

"With pleasure," the young man said.

He won the next two games, then for some time they won alternately.

"Shall we say a hundred again?" he said.

"As you like," Emerson replied. "We don't seem to get much forwarder either way at present."

A considerable number of lookers on had now gathered round. So far Mark, although watching the fingers of the opposite player intently, had seen no sign whatever of unfair play. He now redoubled his attention. Cotter won the first game, his adversary the three next. Mark noticed now that after looking at his hand Emerson looked abstractedly, as if meditating before taking the next step; there was no expression in his face, but Mark fancied that his eyes rested for a moment on the man standing next to himself. He looked at his watch and then, as if finding the hour later than he had expected, moved away from his place, and presently joined Dick, who was standing with Boldero on the other side of the table.

"Who is that man playing with Emerson?" he asked in a whisper.

"He is the son of Cotter, the head of Cotter's Bank, in Lombard Street."

As the men were standing two or three deep round the table, Mark could not see the table itself, but this mattered little, for his attention was entirely directed towards the man standing behind Cotter's chair. He saw that after glancing down at the young man's hand he looked across as if seeing what Emerson was going to do; sometimes his eyes dropped for an instant, at other times there was no such movement, and after noticing this four or five times, and noticing the course Emerson took, he had no doubt whatever in his own mind that the movement of the man's eyes was an intimation to Emerson of the nature of Cotter's hand. The young man had lost four games in succession; he had grown very pale, but showed no other signs of agitation. Presently he said:

"You have your usual luck again; I will only play one more game tonight, but we may as well make it worth playing. Shall we say five hundred?"

"At your service," Emerson replied.

This time the face of the man standing behind Cotter's chair was immovable, and Mark, placing himself behind a short man and straining his head forward, saw that Cotter scored four. The next time there was still no sign. Emerson showed a king and scored it, and then won every trick and the game.

"That makes nine hundred pounds," the young man said quietly, writing an IOU for that amount and handing it to Emerson. There was a general movement of the spectators, and two fresh players took the seats vacated by the late antagonists.

"Who was the man standing behind Cotter's chair?" Mark asked Boldero.

"That is Sir James Flash. He is just going to play, you see; it is sure to be another hot game, and an interesting one."

"Well, I think I will go," Mark said; "the heat of the room has given me a bit of a headache. I will see you tomorrow, Dick."

"Good night, old man," Chetwynd said; and, shaking hands with Boldero, Mark went downstairs immediately after Cotter. The latter went into the room below, drank off a tumbler of champagne, and then went down, took his hat, and went out. Mark followed him for a short distance, and joined him as soon as he got up into the Strand.

"Mr. Cotter," he said, "I have not the pleasure of knowing you personally, and I must introduce myself. My name is Mark Thorndyke, and I am the owner of an estate close to Reigate. Would you mind my exchanging a few words with you?"

Cotter looked up, and was about to give a flat refusal, but the expression of Mark's face was so friendly and pleasant that he changed his mind and said in a hard voice:

"I really do not know what you can have to say to me, Mr. Thorndyke, but of course I can hardly refuse to hear you."

They walked across the road and turned up a quiet street.

"For certain reasons it is not necessary for me to explain," Mark said, "I went to that place for the first time tonight, and I watched the play between you and Mr. Emerson."

"It does not matter, sir; I lost, and I am not going there again."

"I hope, on the contrary, that you will go there again, Mr. Cotter. If I mistake not, from what I heard, you have lost considerable sums to that man."

"I imagine, sir, that that is no business of a stranger."

"In no way personally," Mark replied, not heeding the angry ring in the voice, "but as an honest man it does concern me. I am absolutely convinced, sir, that that money has not been won from you fairly."

The young man gave a start.

"Impossible!" he said shortly. "Mr. Emerson is a man of good family and a gentleman."

"He is a man of good family, I admit, but certainly not a gentleman; his antecedents are notorious."

"I have never heard a word against him; he is intimate with Sir James Flash and other gentlemen of position."

"I am not surprised, that you have not heard of it; it was probably to the interest of several persons that you should not do so. Nor do I suppose that you are aware that Sir James Flash was himself expelled from White's for cheating at cards."

"Impossible!" Mr. Cotter replied.

"I can assure you of the fact," Mark said quietly. "Probably you have among your acquaintances some members of White's. I am sure if you ask them they will confirm the fact. Now, sir, I can assure you that I have no interest in this matter, save to prevent a gentleman from being ruined by blacklegs. May I ask how much you owe to Mr. Emerson and Sir James Flash?"

The young man hesitated. "I believe you, sir," he said at last. "They hold my IOUs for 29,000 pounds. I need hardly say it is absolute ruin. My intention is to make a clean breast to my father about it tomorrow morning. My father will give me the money, in the first place because he loves me and would save my name from disgrace, and in the second because were I posted as a defaulter it would strike a severe blow at the credit of the bank. So he will give me the money, but he will bid me leave his house forever. That will matter little, for I shall pay the money, and tomorrow night I shall blow out my brains."

"Well, sir, if you will follow my advice you will neither pay the money nor blow out your brains. I saw enough tonight to feel absolutely certain that you have been cheated. Sir James Flash stood behind you, and was, I am sure, signaling your hand to Emerson. I believe that Emerson played fair otherwise, until the last game, but I am convinced that he then cheated. You had good hands, but he had better; and although I did not see him cheat—for I was on the other side of the table—I am convinced that he did so. Now, sir, I advise you to go in as usual tomorrow evening, and to play, raising your stakes as you did tonight. When the times comes I will expose him. Should I not be able to detect him we must try another night. I am so much convinced that this is the case, and that I shall succeed, that whether you play one night or three I will guarantee that you shall be no loser, but will, on the honor of a gentleman, place in your hands the amount of your losses; so that you will not have to ask your father for a check larger than you would do if you confessed to him tomorrow morning. I only ask in return that you, on your part, will give me your word of honor that you will never touch a card again after you rise from the table."

"I cannot accept so generous an offer from a stranger," Cotter said in a low tone.

"I do not think that it is generous," Mark replied quietly, "because I am perfectly convinced that I shall not have to pay at all. Have you any other IOUs out?"

"I have given them for about 5000 pounds, but that is not in addition to the 29,000 pounds. Emerson told me that as he knew that I should have difficulty in paying them at the present moment, he had taken them up, and held them with his own."

"Will you give me the names of the persons to whom you gave them in the first place?"

"Certainly;" and he mentioned three names, all of which stood with a black cross against them on Mark's list.

"Thank you. Then you will go tomorrow night again?"

"Yes; and I swear to you that I will never touch a card afterwards."

"I don't think that you need fear," Mark said. "I have not been long in London, but I happen to have been

shown a good many of the tricks that these blacklegs play on greenhorns, which will account for my having noticed what has never been observed by the honest portion of the men who frequent the place. Now I will say good night, sir. I shall be behind your chair or his tomorrow night."

"I don't know what to say," Cotter said hesitatingly.

"There is no occasion to say anything; it is the duty of every honest man to interfere if he sees another honest man being robbed, and that is my sole object in this matter. Good night;" and turning round, he walked rapidly away.

CHAPTER XIII.

The next morning, before going round to Gibbons', Mark saw his chief and told him of what had taken place on the previous evening.

"I certainly did not think that you would succeed so soon; you believe that you will be able fairly to expose these fellows?"

"I have no doubt whatever that I shall be able to expose one of them; and I have equally no doubt that if the others are arrested, either false cards or pockets for cards will be found upon them. What do you wish me to do, sir? I can, of course, expose any fellow I catch at it, but can do nothing about the others."

"I must have more than one captured," the chief said. "At even the most irreproachable club there may be one blackleg, but if it is clear that this place is the haunt of blacklegs we can break it. There are half a dozen Acts that apply; there is the 11th Act of Henry VIII, statute 33, cap. 9, which prohibits the keeping of any common house for dice, cards, or any unlawful game. That has never been repealed, except that gaming houses were licensed in 1620. What is more to the point is that five Acts of George II, the 9th, 12th, 13th, 18th, and 30th, impose penalties upon the keepers of public houses for permitting gambling, and lay heavy penalties upon hazard, roulette, and other gambling games, on the keepers of gambling houses and those who play there. Having received complaints of several young men being rooked in the place, we can, if we prove that some of its frequenters are blacklegs, shut the place up altogether. We should do it quietly, and without fuss, if possible; but if we shut it up several others of the same sort will be certain to close their doors. But mind, there will probably be a desperate row, and you had better take pistols with you. I will have four men close at hand from ten o'clock till the time the place closes, and if they hear a scrimmage, or you fire a pistol out of the window, they will rush in and seize all engaged in the row, and march them to the lock up. Of course you will have to be included."

Mark then went to Chetwynd.

"Well, what did you think of it last night?"

"Well, I own that it went against my grain to see that young fellow being victimized by a sharper."

"My dear Mark, you must not use such language as that. I fancy from what I have heard that the Honorable John is not altogether an estimable character, but to call him a sharper is going too far altogether."

"I don't think that it is, for from what I saw last night I am pretty well convinced that he did not play fair. I mean to go again tonight."

"But why on earth should you mix yourself up in such an affair, Mark? It is no business of yours; you are not an habitue of the place. Above all, it is extremely unlikely that you are right. There were some shady people there, no doubt, but there were also a good many gentlemen present, and as you know nothing of cards, as far as I know, it is the most unlikely thing in the world that you should find out that Emerson cheated when no one else noticed it."

"It is my business; it is the duty of every honest man to see that a poor lad like that should not be eaten up by a shark like Emerson. I don't care if there is a shindy over it. I shall not interfere unless I can prove that the man is cheating, in which case no man of honor would go out with him. I shall be glad if you and Boldero would go with me again this evening. I am not known there, and you are to a good many men, and Boldero to many more. I only want that, if I get into a row, you should testify to the fact that I am a gentleman, and ordinarily sane. If there is a row you will have an opportunity of seeing how much I have benefited by my lessons."

"Yes, I heard you were making tremendous progress. Jack Needham told me a month ago that you had knocked him out of time, and I went into Gibbons' yesterday morning with a man who wanted to buy a dog, and he told me that he considered that it was a great misfortune that you were an amateur, for that you only required another six months' practice, and he would then be ready to back you for a hundred pounds against any man in the ring. But about this affair, Mark. Are you really in earnest?"

"I am, Dick, thoroughly in earnest; so would you be if you had spoken to Cotter last night, as I did. I tell you that if I had not given him a little hope that the thing might come out right, he would have blown out his brains today."

"Well, Mark, if you have set your mind on it, of course I will stick to you, though I have some doubts whether Cotter has any brains to speak of to blow out, else he would not be mad enough to back himself against Emerson and other men whom Boldero tells me he has been playing with."

"He has made an ass of himself, no doubt, Dick; but I fancy a good many fellows do that at one time or other of their lives, though not, I grant, always in the same way."

"Well, I will go, Mark. I need not ask Boldero, for he told me that he should look in again at ten o'clock this evening, for he thought that another night's play would probably bring Cotter to the end of his tether."

Accordingly a little before ten they walked into the gambling house together.

"Now, Dick, I want you, as soon as you sit down, to take your place in the front line within a yard or two of Emerson. I don't want you to be just behind him, but a short distance away; and I want you to keep your eye upon Sir James Flash, who, if I am not mistaken, will take up the same position that he did last night, near enough to Cotter to see his hand. You will remark, I have no doubt, as I did last night, that whenever Cotter has a bad hand, Flash will either close his eyes, or put his hand up to his mouth and stroke his mustache, or make some sign of that sort. When Cotter has a good hand he will stand perfectly still or look about the room. At any rate, he will make no sign—that, of course, is a guide to Emerson whether to propose or to refuse to allow Cotter to do so. I need not point out to you what a tremendous advantage the knowledge whether an opponent's hand is good or not gives him. Of course, while watching an hour's play I can only know that Flash was making signs, and that when he did so Cotter's hand was a bad one. It is possible that the manner in which the sign was made, either by closing his eye or twisting his mustache, or so on, may have been an intimation as to the suit in which Cotter was strongest or weakest."

"By Jove, this is a serious thing, Mark."

"It is a serious thing. I don't want you to get into a row with the fellow. I should like you to give me a nod when you have satisfied yourself that I was not mistaken. I will take upon myself to denounce the fellow, and to say what I noticed yesterday and you can back me up by saying that you saw the same thing. I have no doubt that I shall be able to convince every decent man there that my charge is well founded. I am going to watch Emerson. With the help he gets from Flash, he won't risk anything by cheating until it comes to a big stake like the last game yesterday, in which case, if Cotter's hand happens to be a strong one, he is likely to do so, and I fancy if he does I shall be able to catch him at it. You had better keep Boldero near you. You can whisper to him what you are watching Flash for, and get him to do so too; as, if I catch Emerson cheating, there is likely to be a row; he can lend a hand if necessary, and, at any rate, his joining in with you will suffice to show his friends that the thing is genuine."

"All right, Mark. I am interested in the matter now, and am ready for anything."

Soon after ten Cotter and Emerson again sat down, and, as usual, a lot of spectators gathered round the table. The game resembled the one on the previous evening. Mark placed himself by the side of Cotter, a stranger stood immediately behind his chair, another member of the club was on the other side, and Sir James Flash stood partly behind him, so that although somewhat in the background he could obtain a view between their heads of Cotter's cards. Mark saw to his satisfaction that Dick and Boldero had secured the exact position that he wished them to take. For the first few games the play was even, and Dick began to think that Mark had been mistaken, for Flash appeared to take little interest in the game, and made no sign how Emerson should proceed.

As soon as the stake rose to a hundred again he distinctly saw Flash close his eyes and play with his mustache; he called Boldero's attention to the fact, and found the latter, who had also been watching, had noticed it. By the time a few games had been played he verified Mark's assertion that these signs were signals that Cotter's hand was a bad one, and in each case Emerson played without giving his opponent the opportunity of discarding and taking in fresh cards. He and Dick nodded quietly to Mark, who had satisfied himself that so far Emerson had not cheated in any other way. As on the previous evening, Cotter, after losing five or six hundred pounds, proposed a final game of five hundred. Mark bent down his head, so that the intentness of his gaze should not be noticed, but from under his eyebrows he watched Emerson's every movement; suddenly he placed a foot on the edge of the chair of the man sitting in front of him, and with a sudden spring leaped upon the table, seized Emerson's hand, and held it up to the full length of his arm.

"Gentlemen," he shouted, "this fellow is cheating; there is a card in his hand which he has just brought from under the table."

In a moment there was a dead silence of surprise; then Mark forced the hand open and took Emerson's card, which he held up.

"There, you see, gentleman; it is a king."

Then a Babel of sounds arose, a dozen hands were laid upon Emerson, who was pulled back from his chair and thrown down on a sofa, while hands were run over his coat, waistcoat, and breeches.

"Here they are!" a man shouted, and held a dozen cards over his head.

The place of concealment had been cleverly chosen; the breeches apparently buttoned closely at the knee, but in reality they were loose enough to enable a finger and thumb to be passed between them and the stocking, and in the lining of the breeches was a pocket in which the cards had been placed, being held there by two pieces of whalebone, that closed the pocket. The searchers, among whom were Dick and Boldero, did not have it all their own way; four or five men rushed upon them, and endeavored to pull them off Emerson. The din of voices was prodigious, but Mark, still standing on the table, stilled it for a moment by shouting:

"The scoundrel has an accomplice, who this evening and yesterday has been signaling the strength of the cards in Mr. Cotter's hands."

"Who is he?" was shouted over the room.

"It is Sir James Flash," Mark said. "I denounce him as a cheat and a sharper."

As pale as death, Flash rushed to the table.

"I don't know who you are, sir," he said, in a tone of concentrated rage, "but you are a liar, and you shall answer for this in the morning."

"I will answer to any gentleman that calls me to account," Mark said, in a ringing voice, "but I don't meet a man who has been expelled from White's for cheating, and who I have no doubt is well stocked with cards at the present moment, in readiness for the victim that he is next going to meet after the plucking of Mr. Cotter has been done. Now, gentlemen, search him and see if I am wrong; if I am I will apologize for that part of my accusation."

Flash drew a pistol from his pocket, but in an instant his arm was seized by those standing round him, and it exploded harmlessly. Among those who seized Flash was the man who had played with him the previous evening. In spite of his struggles and curses, and the efforts of his friends to rescue him, he too was thrown

down and eight court cards were found concealed in his sleeve. The uproar while this was going on had been tremendous, but it was suddenly stilled as four men in dark clothes entered the room. Each held in his hand the well known symbol of his office, the little ebony staff surmounted by a silver crown.

"I arrest all present in the name of the king," one said, "for breaking the laws against gambling, and for brawling and the use of firearms. Now, gentlemen, resistance is useless; I must request that you each give me your card, and your word of honor that you will appear at Bow Street tomorrow morning."

"What is all this about, sir?" he asked Mark, who was still standing on the table.

"Two fellows here have been caught cheating."

"What is your name and address, sir?"

"My name is Mark Thorndyke, and I am a landed gentleman at Reigate; my friends Mr. Chetwynd and Mr. Boldero will bear this out."

"Who are the two men?" the constable asked.

"The two fellows with torn clothes," Mark said. "They are Mr. Emerson and Sir James Flash."

"You are certain of the charge that you are making?"

"Quite certain; the cards have been found hidden upon them."

"Yes, yes!" a score of voices shouted; "they have been caught in the act of cheating."

"Take those two men into custody," the constable said to two of his companions.

"Who fired that pistol?" he went on.

A number of voices shouted:

"Sir James Flash; he attempted to murder Mr. Thorndyke."

The constable nodded to the man who had laid his hands on Sir James Flash, and in a moment a pair of handcuffs closed on his wrists.

"You shall repent this!" Flash exclaimed furiously.

"Calm yourself, Sir James," the constable said calmly. "We know our duty, and do it whether a man is a peer or a peasant; you are accused of card sharpening and an attempted murder."

"What is your address in town, Mr. Thorndyke?" he asked.

"18 Villiers Street."

"Is there any charge against anyone else here? A good many of you seem to have your clothes torn and disarranged."

"Some fellows attempted to rescue Emerson and Flash while we were searching them; for what reason we can all pretty well imagine."

"I shall require the names in the morning of your assailants," the constable said; "it looks very much as if they were confederates of the two prisoners. Now, gentlemen, you can all leave. This house is closed, and will not be opened again until this affair is thoroughly investigated."

In five minutes the house was deserted.

"How can I thank you, Mr. Thorndyke?" Cotter, who was one of those who had seized Flash's arm, diverted his aim and searched him, said, when they got outside the house. "You have saved my life. It did not seem possible to me that you could succeed in showing that I was being cheated, and I had firmly resolved that, instead of allowing you to suffer loss, I would tomorrow morning make a clean breast of the whole affair to my father, as I had intended to have done this morning."

"If I might advise you, Mr. Cotter, I should say, carry out your intention as far as making a clean breast of it is concerned. Happily, you are free from debt, as those IOUs are worthless, for they were obtained from you by cheating, therefore you have no demand to make upon his purse. The police will, I have no doubt, endeavor to keep this thing quiet, but your name may come out, and it would be far better that your father should hear this story from you than elsewhere; and your assurance that you will never touch a card again, and the heavy lesson that you have had, will doubtless induce him to look at the matter leniently. It will, no doubt, be a painful story to tell, but it will be far better told by you."

"I will do it, sir; as you say, the lesson has been a heavy one, and henceforth my father shall have no reason to complain of me. May I call and see you tomorrow evening?"

"Certainly. I shall be at home from seven to eight, after which hour I have an engagement. Good night."

Cotter walked on, and Mark fell back, and joined Dick and Boldero, who had fallen behind when they saw him speaking to Cotter.

"Well, Mark, I congratulate you," Dick Chetwynd said. "You did it wonderfully, though how on earth you knew that fellow had a card in his hand is more than I can guess."

"I felt sure he was going to cheat," Mark said quietly; "I saw that Cotter's hand was a very strong one, and knew that Emerson would be aware that it was so, because he would receive no signal from Flash, therefore this was the time, if any, that he would cheat. He had been playing with both hands upon the table. I saw him withdraw one, there was a little pause, and then it came up again, and I had not a doubt in the world that there was a card in it, and that it had been hidden somewhere in his breeches, which is one of the best places of concealment, for his hand being under the table while getting at the card, no one present who was not behind the scenes, as I was, could detect him doing it."

"The wonder to me is," Boldero said, "that while there were a number of men looking on closely, for Emerson has long been suspected of not playing fair, you, just fresh from the country, if I may say so, should have spotted him."

"That is easily explained," Mark said. "Not wishing to fall a victim, I have of late been put up to a great many of these sharpers' tricks by a man who at one time had been in the trade himself."

"That was a capital idea, Mark," Dick said. "I wish you would introduce me to him."

"I won't do that, Dick, but I shall be very glad to teach you all I know myself about it; but I fancy that after this you will be in no great hurry to enter a gambling hell again."

"That is so, Mark. I have never had any great inclination for play; but after this you may be quite sure that I will light shy of cards altogether. Still, I shall be glad if you will put me up to some of these tricks, for I may be able to some day save a victim of card sharpers, as you have done this evening."

The next morning, when those who had been present at the scene of the previous evening arrived at the office of the detectives in Bow Street, they were shown into some private rooms, and asked to wait. Cotter, Mark, and his two friends first had an interview with the chief.

"You will understand," the latter said, "that this is an altogether informal affair. I propose you first tell me your story as briefly as possible."

This was done.

"Now, Mr. Cotter. I take it that you do not wish to prosecute?"

"Certainly not. I would, in fact, give anything rather than appear in it."

"You have said that, in addition to the IOUs that you have given to the two men caught cheating, they hold others to the amount of some five or six thousand pounds, given by you to three other frequenters of the club. In fact, these papers have been found in Emerson's pocketbook; he told you, I believe, that he had taken them up, so that you should not be inconvenienced by them. I understand, then, that you will be quite content if you get these IOUs back again; those given to Emerson and Flash are, of course, worthless. After what has happened, they could not be presented, but probably you might have trouble about the others, for, though I have no doubt that the whole of the men were in league together, we have no means of absolutely proving it."

"I shall be more than content, sir; I have no wish to prosecute."

"We are glad," the chief said, "to be able to close a dangerous place; and as the exposure will put a stop to the career of these two men, and no doubt alarm a good many others, we don't care about taking the matter into court. Such gross scandals as this are best kept quiet, when there is no object in ventilating them. Therefore, gentlemen, as Mr. Cotter is willing to do so, we shall let the matter drop. I shall be obliged if you will step into the next room, however, until I have seen these three men."

When they had left, the three were brought in.

"You have been concerned, sirs," the chief said sternly, "in winning large sums of money from the Hon. William Denton, from Mr. James Carew, from Mr. William Hobson, and others; in all of these cases the two men caught cheating last night were also concerned. You all hold notes of hand of Mr. Hobson. I shall advise that gentleman's father to refuse to pay those notes, and promise him that if any further request for payment is made I will furnish him with such particulars for publication as will more than justify him in the eyes of the world in refusing to honor them. You, as well as Mr. Emerson and Sir James Flash, have won large sums from Mr. Cotter, and the fact that the IOUs he gave you were found on Mr. Emerson points very strongly to their being in confederacy with you in the matter; at any rate, they point so strongly that, whether a jury would convict or not on the evidence that we shall be able to lay before them, there can be no question whatever as to what the opinion of men of honor will be. These IOUs are in our hands. Mr. Cotter does not desire to pursue the case; he will, however, refuse absolutely to pay those IOUs, and in doing so he will have the approval of all honorable men. That being so, the IOUs are absolutely useless to you, and if you will agree to my tearing them up now, he has most kindly consented to let the matter drop in your cases."

The three men, who had all turned very white when he was speaking, now protested angrily against imputations being made on their honor.

"Well, sirs," the officer said, "in that case the matter can, of course, go on. You know best what the feeling will be as to these IOUs. They will form an important item of evidence against you, you will see. As the matter stands, either you gave them to Emerson to collect for you, without any money passing between you—a very strange procedure, which you will find it difficult to explain—or else he gave you the coin for them, and you passed them over to him, and have, therefore, parted with all claim on Mr. Cotter on your own account. Of course I impound them with the other IOUs as proof of a conspiracy between you. Now, sirs, am I to tear them up or not?"

The three men looked at each other, and then one of them said:

"We protest altogether against the assertion, sir, but at the same time, as there can be little doubt that Emerson and Sir James Flash have played unfairly, and we do not wish any association of our names with theirs, we are perfectly willing that the IOUs, which, under the circumstances, we should never have dreamt of presenting, should be destroyed."

"I think that you have chosen wisely," the chief said dryly. "It is a pity that you did not do so at first. These are the IOUs he gave to one or other of you. Perhaps it would be pleasanter for you to destroy them yourselves."

The three men took the papers with their names on them and tore them up.

"Thank you," he went on sarcastically. "That will place you in a better position. You will be able to tell your friends that you felt so indignant at the manner in which Mr. Cotter had been swindled by Emerson and Flash that you at once destroyed his IOUs for the sums that you had won of him. But, gentlemen,"—he spoke sternly now,— "remember that we have a long list against you, and that the next victim, or let us say his father, might be more disposed to push matters to their full length than is Mr. Cotter. Remember, also, that we keep ourselves acquainted with what is going on, and that should trouble arise we shall produce all the complaints that have been made against you, and shall also mention your connection with this affair, in which, as I understand, you all did your best to prevent those two fellows from being searched."

Without saying another word the three men went out of the room, too crestfallen to make even an attempt at keeping up their air of indignation. The others were then called in.

"I am sorry, gentlemen," he said, "that you have had the trouble of coming here, for the gentleman swindled has declined to prosecute the swindlers, and you will understand that he is somewhat anxious that

his name should not appear in the matter. Fortunately, as instead of paying in cash he gave IOUs for his losses, he will not be a loser to any large amount by these transactions. I may say that the proprietor of the hell has been there this morning, and to avoid trouble he has consented to close his place for good. I have only to remark that I should advise you, gentlemen, in future, only to indulge in gambling in places where you may be fairly assured of the character of the men you play with. I think, in conclusion, that you may all feel grateful to Mr. Cotter for refusing to prosecute. It has saved you from having to appear in court as witnesses in so utterly disreputable an affair."

There was a general murmur of assent, and in a minute or two the room was clear. Flash and Emerson were then brought in, with a constable on each side of them.

"Mr. Cotter has, I regret to say, declined to prosecute, and Mr. Thorndyke has done the same with regard to Sir James Flash's use of his pistol. You have, therefore, escaped the punishment due to swindlers at cards. It is the less matter, as you are not likely to have an opportunity of making fresh victims, for the story will be known by this afternoon in every club in London. These IOUs will be of no use to you—they are not worth the paper on which they are written. However, I shall take it upon myself to hand them back to Mr. Cotter, to prevent the possibility of their getting into other hands and giving him trouble.

"You can unlock those handcuffs, constable; these men are at liberty to go, and if they will take my advice they will lose no time in crossing the water and establishing themselves somewhere where their talents are likely to be better appreciated than they are here. They can go; one of you can call a hackney coach for them if they wish it. They will scarcely care to walk with their garments in their present condition."

Then the chief went into the next room.

"There is an end of that affair, Mr. Cotter. Here are the IOUs you gave to those two swindlers. Those you gave to the other three men, who were no doubt their confederates, have been torn up by them in my presence. They declare that after seeing how shamefully you had been victimized they had not the slightest idea of ever presenting them."

"I am sure that I am extremely grateful to you," Cotter said. "I know that I have behaved like a madman, and that I don't deserve to have got off as I have done. It will be a lesson to me for life, I can assure you."

On leaving, Dick Chetwynd walked for some distance with Mark—as far as Gibbons' place in St. Giles.

"There is one thing which I cannot understand," he said, "and that is how it was that the constables happened to be so close at hand, just at the time they were wanted."

"Well, you see, Dick, my relations with Bow Street are just at present of a somewhat close nature, for they are aiding me in the search that I told you that I was making for my father's murderer. The consequence was that I had only to mention to the chief that I fancied I had detected cheating at that place, and that there was a likelihood of a row there last night, and he at once said he would send four men, to come in if they heard a rumpus; and he was, indeed, rather glad of an opportunity for breaking up the place, concerning which he had had several complaints of young men being plucked to the last feather. Well, it was lucky they came. I don't say that it would have made any difference, because I think our side was a great deal stronger than they were, still it would have led to a nasty row, and perhaps to half a dozen duels afterwards. Well, I will say goodbye now. I am very glad that the affair has been dropped; it would not have mattered so much to me, as I am single and my own master, but there were a good many men there who would have been ready to have paid up handsomely rather than that their names should appear in connection with a row at a gambling house."

At seven o'clock in the evening Philip Cotter called at Mark's lodgings, accompanied by his father, who, as he came in with him, advanced at once to Mark and shook him warmly by the hand.

"My son has told me everything, Mr. Thorndyke," he said, "and I cannot thank you sufficiently for the noble part you took in rescuing him from the terrible effects of his folly. I have been down here twice this afternoon, for I felt that I could not rest until I had shaken you by the hand. It is not the question of money so much, though that would have been a serious loss to me, but it is the saving of my son's life, and the saving of the honor of our name."

"I am glad indeed to have been of service, Mr. Cotter, and I trust that you have consented to forgive the folly that he has committed, and which I feel sure will never be repeated."

"Yes. It was a heavy blow to me, Mr. Thorndyke, when Philip told me; but as he has sworn most solemnly never to touch a card again, and as I feel sure that the lesson cannot but be a useful one to him all his life, I have agreed to say no more about it, and let the matter drop altogether. He has been fortunate to have escaped so easily. He has told me of the noble offer you made to pay his losses if you should not be able to prove that he was being cheated."

"I was not committing myself heavily," Mark said with a smile. "I had seen enough to be absolutely certain, and was sure that I should be able to bring it home to them."

"But it was at a considerable risk to yourself, Mr. Thorndyke. As it was, you had a narrow escape of being shot."

"Not a very narrow escape," Mark replied. "With so many men standing round him and their attention called to him, it was certain that he would be seized before he could take aim at me. I had pistols in my pocket, and was prepared to fire in an instant, but I saw at once that there was no occasion for that."

"But I cannot imagine how you should have detected the cheating," the banker said. "You are younger than my son, and he said that you told him that you had only recently come up to London. It is astonishing that while experienced players should never have noticed that anything was wrong you should have discovered it."

"The explanation is simple, Mr. Cotter. I have no inclination for play myself, but I happened a short time since to fall in with a man who was well acquainted with all the various methods of card sharpening. I thought that a knowledge of that might some day be useful, and I got him to put me up to a number of the tricks of card sharpeners both at home and abroad. Having these fresh in my mind, and seeing that your son was playing with a man whose reputation I knew to be bad, I naturally concentrated my attention upon him, and was not long in discovering that he had a confederate standing behind your son's chair. Being a stranger in the place,

I could not denounce him, but the next night I set two friends to watch that method of cheating, while I kept my eyes fixed on Emerson's hands. As I anticipated, there was nothing suspicious about his movements so long as play was comparatively low, for the advantage that he gained from his confederate enabled him to be sure of winning in the long run; it was only in the last game, which was a high one, that, as he knew that your son had a strong hand, he was tempted to stock his hand with false cards; and watching closely, I had no difficulty in detecting his method."

"Well, sir, you have, at any rate, laid us both under the deepest obligation. Is there any possible way in which we can show our gratitude?"

Mark thought for a moment.

"In one way you might do me a favor, Mr. Cotter. A ward of my father's, who will inherit some property when she comes of age, is at present finishing her education in town, and is living with a lady who has been her friend and companion since childhood. I have a good many acquaintances, but they are all bachelors; and having been living down at my father's place, near Reigate, for so many years, the ladies have no acquaintances in London. They live at Islington, and their life is a very dull one. I am anxious, for several reasons, that the young lady should have the advantage of going somewhat into society. Hitherto I have had no means of introducing her. If it is not too much to ask, Mr. Cotter, I should be extremely glad and obliged if Mrs. Cotter would call on them and give them an introduction into society. The lady with my father's ward is the widow of a captain in the Indian Army, and is in all ways a very charming person, and has been at the head of my father's establishment for the last twelve years."

"With the greatest pleasure in the world, Mr. Thorndyke. I am only sorry that it is so slight a thing that you ask of me. I have thought it but right to tell my wife what has passed, and I had difficulty in persuading her not to come with me this evening to also express her gratitude to you. She will be pleased indeed to call upon your friends at once, and I am sure she will do so tomorrow. I was going to ask you to dine with us, and I hope that you will do so. We shall have no one else, and I hope that you will be able to arrange to meet your friends at our house a few days later."

The next morning Mark called on Mrs. Cunningham.

"I think you will have a visitor today," he said. "It has happened that I have been able to do a service to the son of Mr. Cotter, a wealthy banker. I am going to dine there this evening. He asked me about my friends in London, and I mentioned that my only lady friends were you and Millicent. He asked a few questions as to where you were living, and so on, and said that his wife would have much pleasure in calling and introducing Millicent into society. As your life is very dull here, and it is clearly very desirable that Millicent should go into society, I gladly accepted the offer, and I believe that she will call today."

"That will be very nice indeed, Mark. Millicent is not complaining, but she must have felt it very dull. I have even felt it so myself after the cheerful society we had at home."

"I don't know that I shall like it," Millicent said doubtfully.

"Oh, yes, you will, Millicent; and besides, it will be good for you. It is not natural for a girl of your age to be here without friends, and I shall be very glad to know that you are going to mix a little with other people."

Mrs. Cotter called that afternoon, and three days later Mark met Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent at a dinner party at the banker's, and Mrs. Cotter introduced them very warmly to several of her friends, with the result that in a very short time they were frequently invited out, while they became very intimate with the banker and his wife, and often spent the day there.

CHAPTER XIV.

Some little time after this Mark was intrusted by his chief with the work of discovering a man who had committed a very atrocious murder, and was, it was tolerably certain, hiding in the slums of Westminster. It was the first business of the kind that had been confided to him, and he was exceedingly anxious to carry it out successfully. He dressed himself as a street hawker, and took a small lodging in one of the lanes, being away the greater portion of the day ostensibly on his business, and of an evening dropped into some of the worst public houses in the neighborhood. He was at first viewed with some suspicion, but it was not long before he became popular. He let it be understood that he had got into trouble down in the country, and that he was quite ready to take part in any job that promised to be profitable. But he principally owed his popularity to the fact that the bully of the locality picked a quarrel with him, and, to the astonishment of those present, Mark invited him to go outside.

"You had better make it up with him, mate," a man sitting by his side whispered. "He was in the prize ring at one time, and thrashed big Mike Hartley at Kennington. He had to give it up owing to having fought a cross. He would kill you in five minutes."

"I will chance that," Mark said quietly, as he moved towards the door. "I don't think that he is stronger than I am, and I can use my fists a bit, too."

By the time they had taken off their upper garments a crowd had assembled. The news that a hawker was going to stand up against Black Jim circulated rapidly, and caused intense excitement. To the astonishment of the spectators, the bully from the first had not a shadow of a chance, and at the end of the third round was carried away senseless, while the hawker had not received a scratch. A few days later Mark, who, on the strength of his prowess, had had two or three hints that he could be put up to a good thing if he was inclined to join, was going down to Westminster when two men stopped and looked after him.

"I tell you, Emerson, that is the fellow. I could swear to him anywhere. What he is got up like that for I cannot tell you, but I should not be surprised if he is one of that Bow Street gang. He called himself Mark

Thorndyke, and Chetwynd said that he was a gentleman of property; but that might have been part of the plan to catch us. I have never been able to understand how a raw countryman could have caught you palming that card. I believe that fellow is a Bow Street runner; if so, it is rum if we cannot manage to get even with him before we go. It seemed to me that luck had deserted us altogether; but this looks as if it was going to turn again. Let's go after him."

Keeping some fifty yards behind him, they watched Mark to his lodgings, waited until he came out again, and followed him to a public house.

"He is acting as a detective, sure enough," Emerson said. "The question is, what are we to do next?"

In half an hour Mark came out again. Several people nodded to him as he passed them, but they saw a big man, who happened to be standing under a lamp, turn his back suddenly as Mark approached him, and, after he had passed, stand scowling after him, and muttering deep curses. Flash at once went up to him. "Do you know who that fellow is, my man?" The fellow turned savagely upon him.

"I don't know who he is; but what is that to you?"

"He is not a friend of ours," Flash said quietly; "quite the contrary. We have known him when he was not got up like this, and we are rather curious to know what he is doing here."

"Do you mean that?"

"I do; I owe the fellow a grudge."

"So do I," the man growled. "Just step up this next turning; there won't be anyone about there. Now, then, what do yer want to know?"

"I want to know who he is."

"Well, he calls himself a hawker; but my idea of him is he is one of the fancy, perhaps a west countryman, who is keeping dark here till he can get a match on. I have been a prize fighter myself, but he knocked me out in three rounds the other day."

"Well, the last time I saw him," Flash said, "he was dressed as a swell. My idea of him is, he is a Bow Street runner, and he is got up like this to lay his hands on some of the fellows down here."

"You don't mean it!" the man said with a deep oath. "Then I can tell you he has come to the wrong shop. I have only got to whisper it about, and his life would not be worth an hour's purchase. I had meant to stick a knife in him on the first opportunity, but this will save me the trouble."

"Well, you can have your revenge and five guineas besides," Flash said. "But we must be there at the time. I should like him to know that I was at the bottom of his being caught."

They stood talking together for a few minutes, and then separated, Flash and his companion going back to a quiet lodging they had taken until they could finish their arrangements for disposing of their furniture and belongings before going abroad, while at the same time they finished plucking a country greenhorn they had met at a coffee house. Two days later, wrapped up in great coats, and with rough caps pulled down over their eyes, they entered the thieves' resort half an hour before Mark's usual time of getting there. A larger number of men than usual were assembled, and among them was Black Jim. The men were all talking excitedly, and were evidently furious at the news that the pugilist had just told them.

"Those are the gents that have given me the office," he said, as Flash and his companion entered. "They can tell yer he is one of that cursed Bow Street lot."

"That is right enough, my men," Flash said. "He and four of his mates broke into a place where we were having a bit of play, three weeks since, marched us all away to Bow Street, and shut the place up. I don't know what he is down here for, but you may be sure that it's for no good to some of you. We owe him a heavy one ourselves. He came spying on us dressed up as a swell and spoilt our game, and got the darbies put on us, and we have sworn to get even with him."

"You will get even, don't you fear," one of the men growled, "and more than even, strike me blind if you don't."

"Look here, lads," Flash said. "There is one thing I say—don't use your knives on him; remember he is a runner, and no doubt his chief knows all that he is doing, and no doubt ordered him to come here. There will be a big search, you may be sure, when he don't turn up to make his report. So don't let's have any bloodshed. Let the thing be done quietly."

"We can chuck his body into the river," one said.

"Yes, but if it is picked up with half a dozen holes in it, you may be sure that they will be down here, and like enough every man who has used this place will be arrested; you know that when there are twenty men in a job the chances are that one will slip his neck out of the halter by turning King's evidence."

An angry growl went round the room.

"Well, you know well enough it is so, it is always the case; besides, we ought to give him a little time to prepare himself. My idea is that the best plan will be to bind and gag him first, then we can hold a little court over him, and let him know what is coming. An hour later, when the place gets a bit quiet, we can carry him down to the river—it is not above fifty yards away—tie a heavy weight round his neck, cut his cords the last thing, and chuck him over; if his body is found, it will be thought it is that of some chap tired of life who took pains to drown himself pretty quickly, and there won't be any fuss over him, and there will be nothing to come upon any of you fellows for."

There was a general murmur of assent. Several of those present had already committed themselves to some extent with the supposed hawker, and were as eager as Flash himself that he should be killed; still, all felt that it was as well that it should be managed with the least possible risk of discovery, for while an ordinary man could be put out of the way without any trouble arising, the fact that he was a Bow Street runner added enormously to the risk of the discovery of his fate.

There was a little talk, and then two of the men went out and brought back a couple of strong ropes. A few minutes after their return Mark Thorndyke came in. He paused as he entered the room, in surprise at the silence that reigned, for he was accustomed to be greeted with friendly exclamations. However, as he walked

in the door closed, and then suddenly, with shouts of "Down with the spy!" the men sprang from their seats and made a sudden rush at him. For a minute the struggle was tremendous; man after man went down under Mark's blows, others clung onto him from behind, a rope was passed round his legs and pulled, and he fell down with a crash, bringing down five or six of his assailants; a minute later he was gagged and bound.

While the struggle was going on no one noticed that a Lascar's face was pressed against the window; it disappeared as soon as Mark fell, and ten minutes later a dark faced sailor ran into Gibbons'; it was a quiet evening at Ingleston's, and Gibbons, after smoking a pipe with half a dozen of the pugilists, had just returned.

"Hallo," he said, as he opened the door, "what the deuce do you want?"

The man was for a moment too breathless to answer.

"You know Mr. Thorndyke," he said at last, in very fair English.

"Yes, I know him. Well, what of him?"

"He has been attacked by a number of thieves in a public house near the river, at Westminster, and he will be murdered unless you go with others to help him."

"What the deuce was he doing there?" Gibbons muttered, and then, seizing his cap, said to the Lascar,

"Come along with me; it aint likely that we shall be in time, but we will try, anyhow."

He ran to Ingleston's.

"Come along, Ingleston," he exclaimed, "and all of you. You all know Mr. Thorndyke. This man says he has been attacked by a gang down at Westminster, and will be murdered. I am afraid we shan't be in time, but it is worth trying."

The prize fighters all leaped to their feet. Mark had sparred with several of them, and, being open handed and friendly, was generally liked. In a moment, headed by Ingleston and Gibbons, they started at the top of their speed, and in less than a quarter of an hour were at bank side.

"That is the house," the sailor said, pointing to the public, where a red blind had been lowered at the window, and two men lounged outside the door to tell any chance customer that might come along he was not wanted there at present.

Inside a mock trial had been going on, and Mark had been sentenced to death as a spy, not a voice being raised in his defense. As soon as he had been lifted up and seated so that he could see the faces of those present, he recognized the two gamblers, and saw at once that his fate was sealed; even had they not been there the chance of escape would have been small. The fact that one of the detectives had been caught under circumstances when there was but slight chance of its ever being known how he came to his end, was in itself sufficient to doom him. Several of the men present had taken him into their confidence, and he had encouraged them to do so, not that he wanted to entrap them, or that he intended to do so, but in order to obtain a clew through them as to the hiding place of the man he was in search of.

The savage exultation on the faces of the two gamblers, however, was sufficient to extinguish any ray of hope. He felt sure at once that they had been the authors of his seizure, and that no thought of mercy would enter the minds of these two scoundrels whose plans he had frustrated, whose position he had demolished, and to whom he had caused the loss of a large sum of money. Neither Flash nor Emerson would have taken share in a crime known to so many had they not been on the point of leaving England. Their names were known to no one there, and even should some of these afterwards peach they would at least be safe. Mark had been asked whether he could deny that he was a member of the detective force, and had shaken his head. Even if he had told a lie, which he would not do, the lie would have been a useless one. No one would have believed it, for the two gamblers would have been witnesses that he was so.

He had been placed in one corner of the room, so that what light there was would not fall on his face, and had anyone entered they would not have noticed that he was gagged. One, indeed, had suggested that it would be better to lay him under one of the benches, but Black Jim said, with a brutal laugh:

"No, no; it is better that we should keep sight of him, and if anyone asks a question of course we can say that the gentleman has the toothache."

Presently Flash spoke to the ruffian in a low voice.

"Yes, I think you are right," he replied. "Look here," he went on, raising his voice. "There is no occasion to have such a lot in this business; Jake Watson, Bill the Tinker, and me are quite enough to carry him to his bed. I reckon the rest had better make themselves scarce when the times comes, go home, and keep their mouths shut. I need not say that anyone who lets his tongue wag about it is likely to come to a worse end than this bloodhound. We will have another glass of grog before you turn out; the streets won't be quiet for another hour yet, and there is another guinea of this worthy hawker's to be spent. Summers, make another big bowl of punch. Don't put so much water in it as you did in the last."

The landlord, a notorious ruffian, was just coming into the room with a huge bowl when there was the sound of a scuffle outside.

"You had better see what is up," Black Jim said, and two of the men nearest the door unbarred and opened it. As they did so there was a rush, and eight powerful men ran in, knocking to the floor those who had opened the door. The rest sprang to their feet; Gibbons looked round, and as his eye fell upon Mark, who had, the moment the men inside rose, got into a standing position, Gibbons launched himself towards him, striking four of the ruffians who endeavored to stop him to the ground with his crushing blows.

"This way," he shouted to his friends. "Ingleston and Tring, do you keep the door."

The moment the six men had closed round Mark, one of them, taking out his knife, cut the cords, removed the bandage from his mouth, and extricated the gag. The name of the two prize fighters had created something like a panic among the crowd, which had increased when one of them shouted, "It is Charley Gibbons."

Flash and Emerson sprang to their feet with the rest, and the latter shouted, "Go at them, men; there are only eight of them, and we are twenty. Knife them, or you will all hang for this job."

The knowledge of their danger was evident to all the men, and, nerved by desperation, they rushed at the

prize fighters; but the eight were now nine, and each of them in a fray of this kind was equal to half a dozen ordinary men. Scarce a word was spoken, but the sound of crushing blows and scuffling, and an occasional oath, made a confused din in the half lighted room. Mark burst his way through his assailants to the spot where Flash and Emerson were standing, somewhat in the rear of the crowd, for they had been sitting at the other end of the room. Flash had a pistol in his hand, but the man who was standing in front of him was struck with such violence that he fell backwards, knocking Emerson to the ground and almost upsetting Flash, and before the latter could steady himself Mark struck him with all his force under the chin. A moment later the landlord blew out the two candles, and in the darkness the ruffians made a dash for the door, carried Tring and Ingleston off their feet, and rushed out into the lane.

"If the man who blew those candles out don't light them again at once," Gibbons shouted, "I, Charley Gibbons, tell him that I will smash him and burn this place over his head; he had best be quick about it."

The landlord, cowed with the threat, soon returned with a candle from the kitchen, and lit those that he had extinguished.

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, we just arrived in time, I fancy," Gibbons said.

"You have saved my life, Gibbons—you and the others. How you got to know that I was here I cannot imagine. I would have been a dead man in another half hour if you had not arrived. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart."

"That is all right, sir," Gibbons said. "It is a pleasure to give such scoundrels as these a lesson. Is anyone hurt? I fancy I have got a scratch or two."

Several of the men had been cut with knives, but the blows had been given so hurriedly that no one was seriously injured. Twelve men lay on the ground.

"Now sir, what shall we do with these fellows?"

"I should say we had better leave them alone, Gibbons. I don't want any row over the affair. It is the work of these two fellows here. I think I pretty well settled one of them."

Gibbons stooped over Flash.

"You have broken his jaw, sir; but he will come round in time. I believe this other fellow is only shamming. I don't see any of our handiwork upon his face. The others have all got as much as they want, I think," and taking a candle he looked at their faces. "There is not one of them who will want to show up for a week or so," he said, "and there are two or three who will carry the marks to their graves. Well, sir, if you don't want anything done to them, the sooner we are off the better. Those fellows who got away may bring a lot of others down upon us. As long as it is only fists, we could march through Westminster; but as they would have knives, it is just as well to get out of it before there is any trouble. You are got up in a rum way, Mr. Thorndyke."

"Yes; I will tell you about it afterwards. I agree with you that we had best be moving at once."

But the men who had fled were too glad to have made their escape to think of anything but to make for their dens as quick as possible, and the party passed through the lanes into the open space in front of Parliament House without interruption.

"We will go up to your place, Ingleston, and talk it over there," Mark said. "You can get those cuts bound up, and I shall be very glad to get a drink. That thing they shoved into my mouth hurt my tongue a good deal, and I have not gone through a pleasant half hour, I can tell you."

He walked up past Whitehall with Gibbons and Ingleston, the others going in pairs, so as not to attract attention. As soon as they reached Ingleston's place, the latter told the man in the bar to put the shutters up, led the way into the bar parlor, and mixed a large bowl of punch.

"Now, Gibbons, in the first place," Mark said, after quenching his thirst, "how did you know of my being in danger?"

"Well, sir, a black sailor chap ran into my place suddenly and told me."

"Do you mean a colored man, Gibbons?"

"Yes, sir, one of those Lascar chaps you see about the docks. I did not ask any questions, but ran as hard as I could. I had only left here five minutes before, and knew that Tring and some of the others would still be here. They did not lose a moment, and off we went. The sailor chap he kept ahead. I tried to come up to him two or three times to get to know something about it, but he always seemed to quicken his pace when I was coming up, and I soon got too blown to want to do much talking. He led us to the door, and after that I saw nothing more of him. What became of him I don't know. I expect he was better at running than he was at fighting."

"It is curious," Mark said thoughtfully. "He might have been in the place when I went in, and slipped out while I was making a fight for it. I have seen a Lascar several times while I have been down there. I dare say it was the same man, though why he should take such trouble for the sake of a stranger I don't know. There seems to be a good many of them about, for now I think of it, I have run against them several times wherever I have been in town."

"Now, sir, what did they want to kill you for?"

"Well, Gibbons, it happened in this way. My father, you know, was murdered by a man who had a grudge against him, and who is both a highwayman and a house breaker."

"They don't often go together," Ingleston said. "The highwaymen generally look down upon the burglars and keep themselves to themselves."

"I hew they do, Ingleston; but this fellow has been a convict, and is not particular what he turns his hand to. The detectives have been after him for a long time, but have failed, and I determined to take the matter up myself, and ever since I have been up here I have been hunting about in the worst quarters of the town. The people of Bow Street have aided me in every way they could, and I suppose some of these men have seen me go in or out of the place. Of course, when I am going into these bad quarters, I put on a disguise and manage to get in with some of these thieves, and so to try to get news of him through them. Three weeks ago I decided to try Westminster. I was getting on uncommonly well there, principally because I gave a tremendous

thrashing to a fellow they call Black Jim. He has been a prize fighter."

"I know him," Tring said; "it was the fellow that was kicked out for selling a fight. He was not a bad man with his fists, either; but I expect you astonished him, Mr. Thorndyke."

"Yes, I knocked him out of time in three rounds. Well, he has been a bully down there, and everyone was very glad he was taken down. After that I got to know several of the worst lot down there. They fancied that I was one of themselves, and several of them made proposals to me to join them, and, of course, I encouraged the idea in hopes of coming upon the man that I was after. Then some fellow in the street recognized me, I suppose, and denounced me to the rest as being one of the runners. I suppose he told them this evening, before I went in.

"The place was a regular thieves' den, which, of course, was why I went there. Naturally they were furious, especially those who had been proposing to me to join them. Anyhow, they had evidently settled among themselves that I was to be put out of the way, and directly I went in I was attacked. I knocked down a few of them, but they jumped on my back, and one of them managed to get a rope round my legs, and down I went with three or four of them, and before I could get up again they had tied and gagged me. Then they held a sort of court. Man after man got up and said that I had been drawing them on to find out what they were up to, and had agreed to join them, of course with the intention of getting them caught in the act, and two got up and said that they knew me as one of the runners. They all agreed that I must be put out of the way.

"I suppose, as the landlord did not want blood spilt in his house, they did not knife me at once; however, they told me that they had decided that as soon as the coast was clear I should be carried down to the river, and chucked in, with an old anchor tied to my neck. I had just a gleam of hope a short time before you came in, for then it had been settled that it was just as well no more should be engaged in the affair than was necessary, and that Black Jim, with two others, whom I had been talking to, and the two men who had told them that I was a runner, should manage it, and the rest were to go off to their homes.

"I had been all the time trying to loosen my ropes, and had got one of my hands nearly free, and I thought that if they waited another half hour I might have got them both free, and been able to make a bit of a fight of it, though I had very little hope of getting my legs free.

"However, I had my eye on the knife of the man who was sitting next to me, and who was one of those who was to stay. I thought that if I had my hands free, I could snatch his knife, settle him, and then cut the ropes from my legs; that done, I could, I think, have managed Black Jim and the others. As for the men who denounced me, they were small men, and I had no fear of them in a fight, unless; as I thought likely enough, they might have pistols. One of them is the fellow whose jaw I broke; I hit him hard, for he had a pistol in his hand."

"There is no doubt you hit him hard," Gibbons said dryly. "He looked a better sort than the rest."

"Yes, the fellow was a card sharper whom I once detected at cheating; and so was the one who was lying next to him, the man whom you said you thought was shamming."

By this time the men's wounds were all bandaged up. Mark told them that he would be round there again in the morning, and hoped that they would all be there.

"I shall go home at once, and turn in," he said. "Straining at those cords has taken the skin off my wrists, and I feel stiff all over; it will be a day or two, Gibbons, before I am able to put the gloves on again. I wish I could find that Lascar; I owe him a heavy debt."

As Mark made his way home he thought a good deal about the colored sailor. If the man had been in the den the ruffians would hardly have ventured to have attacked him in the presence of a stranger. Of course, he might have been passing, and have seen the fray through the window, but in that case he would run to the nearest constable. How could he know anything about his habits, and why should he have gone to Gibbons for assistance? That, and the fact that he had so often observed Lascars in the places he had gone to, certainly looked as if he had been watched, and if so, it could only be connected with those diamonds. It was a curious thing altogether.

The next morning he went early to Bow Street. As soon as the chief came he related the events of the previous evening, and told him that it was Flash and Emerson who had denounced him.

"I know the place," the officer said. "It is one of the worst thieves' dens in London. However, it is just as well you decided not to take any steps. Of course, all the fellows would have sworn that they did not intend to do any harm, but that Flash had put them up to frightening you, and I doubt whether any jury would have convicted. As to the other men, we know that they are all thieves, and some of them worse; but the mere fact that they proposed to you to join in their crimes won't do, as no actual crime was committed. However, I shall have the gang closely watched, and, at any rate, you had better leave Westminster alone; someone else must take up the work of looking for that man you were on the watch for. Anyhow, you had best take a week's rest; there is no doubt you have had a very narrow escape. It is strange about that Lascar; he might not have cared for going in to take part in the fray, but you would have thought that he would have waited outside to get a reward for bringing those men to your rescue."

As Mark did not care to tell about the diamonds till the time came for getting them, he made no reply, beyond expressing an agreement with the chief's surprise at the man not having remained to the end of the fray. On leaving Bow Street he went up to Ingleston's. The men who had rescued him the night before were gathered there; and he presented each of them with a check for twenty-five guineas.

"I know very well," he said, "that you had no thought of reward when you hurried down to save me, but that is no reason why I should not show my gratitude to you for the service you have rendered me; some of you might very well have been seriously hurt, if not killed, by their knives. At any rate, I insist upon you taking it; money is always useful, you know, and it is not often so well earned as this."

The men were greatly pleased, and Tring said:

"Well, sir, if you get into another scrape you may be sure that you can count upon us."

"I shall try and not get into any more," Mark laughed. "This has been a good deal more serious than I had bargained for, and I shall be very careful in the future."

CHAPTER XV.

"The burglary season seems to have recommenced in earnest," Mark's chief said some nine months after he had been at work. "For a time there had been a lull, as you know, but I have had three reports this week, and it strikes me that they are by the same hand as before; of course I may be mistaken, but they are done in a similar way, the only difference being that there is ground for believing that only one man is engaged in them. I fancy the fellow that you are after has either been away from London for some time, or has been keeping very quiet. At any rate, we have every ground for believing that he keeps himself aloof from London thieves, which is what I should expect from such a man. If one has nerve enough to do it, there is nothing like working singly; when two or three men are engaged, there is always the risk of one being caught and turning Queen's evidence, or of there being a quarrel, and of his peaching from revenge.

"If your man has been away from town, he has certainly not been working any one district; of course, one gets the usual number of reports from different quarters; but although burglaries are frequent enough, there has been no complaint of a sudden increase of such crimes as there would have been judging from the numerous daring attempts here, had Bastow been concerned; therefore I feel sure that he has been living quietly. He would have his mate's share—that man you shot, you know—of the plunder they made together; he would know that after that affair at your place there would be a vigilant hunt for him, and it is likely enough that he has retired altogether from business for a time.

"However, men of that sort can never stand a quiet life long, and are sure sooner or later to take to their trade again, if only for the sake of its excitement. Now that the burglaries have begun again, I shall be glad if you will devote yourself entirely to this business. You have served a good apprenticeship, and for our sake as well as yours I should be glad for you to have it in hand."

"I shall be very pleased to do so, sir. Although we do not know where he is to be found, I think I can say that it is not in the slums of London; it seems to me that he may be quietly settled as an eminently respectable man almost under our noses; he may show himself occasionally at fashionable resorts, and may be a regular attendant at horse races.

"He would not run any appreciable risk in doing so, for his face is quite unknown to anyone except the constables who were present at his trial, and even these would scarcely be likely to recognize him, for he was then but eighteen, while he is now six or seven and twenty, and no doubt the life he has led must have changed him greatly."

"I quite agree with you," the chief said. "After the first hunt for him was over, he might do almost anything without running much risk. Well, I put the matter in your hands, and leave it to you to work out in your own way; you have given ample proof of your shrewdness and pluck, and in this case especially I know that you will do everything that is possible. Of course you will be relieved of all other duties, and if it takes you months before you can lay hands upon him, we shall consider it time well spent, if you succeed at last. From time to time change your quarters, but let me know your address, so that, should I learn anything that may be useful, I can communicate with you at once. You had better take another name than that by which you are known in the force. I shall be glad if, after thinking the matter over, you will write me a few lines stating what you propose to do in the first place."

Mark went back to his lodgings, and sat there for some time, thinking matters over. His first thought was to attend the races for a time, but seeing the number of people there, and his own ignorance of Bastow's appearance, he abandoned the idea, and determined to try a slower but more methodical plan. After coming to that conclusion he put on his hat and made his way to Mrs. Cunningham's.

"Well, Mr. Constable," Millicent said saucily, as he entered, "any fresh captures?"

"No, I think that I have for the present done with that sort of thing; I have served my apprenticeship, and am now setting up on my own account."

"How is that, Mark?"

"There is reason to believe that Bastow has begun his work again near London. As I have told you, it is absolutely certain that he is not hiding in any of the places frequented by criminals here, and there is every reason for supposing that he has been leading a quiet life somewhere, or that he has been away in the country. As long as that was the case, there was nothing to be done; but now that he seems to have set to work again, it is time for me to be on the move. I have seen the chief this morning, and he has released me from all other duty, and given me carte blanche to work in my own way."

"Then why don't you leave the force altogether, Mark? You know that I have always thought it hateful that you should be working under orders, like any other constable."

"Of course, women don't like to be under orders, Millicent; but men are not so independent, and are quite content to obey those who are well qualified to give orders. I have had a very interesting time of it."

"Very interesting!" she said scornfully. "You have nearly been killed or shot half a dozen times; you have been obliged to wear all sorts of dirty clothes, to sleep in places where one would not put a dog, and generally to do all sorts of things altogether unbecoming in your position."

"My dear, I have no particular position," he laughed, and then went on more seriously: "My one position at present is that of avenger of my father's murder, and nothing that can assist me in the task is unbecoming to me; but, as I said, it has been interesting, I may almost say fascinating, work. I used to be fond of hunting, but I can tell you that it is infinitely more exciting to hunt a man than it is to hunt a fox. You are your own hound, you have to pick up the scent, to follow it up, however much the quarry may wind and double, and when at last you lay your hand upon his shoulder and say, 'In the King's name,' there is an infinitely keener pleasure than there is when the hounds run down the fox. One sport is perhaps as dangerous as the other: in the one

case your horse may fail at a leap and you may break your neck, in the other you may get a bullet in your head; so in that respect there is not much to choose between man and fox hunting. There is the advantage, though, that in the one you have to depend upon your horse's strength, and in the other on your own courage."

"I know that you are an enthusiast over it, Mark, and I can fancy that if I were a big strong man, as you are, I might do the same; but if you are going now to try by yourself, why should you not leave the force altogether?"

"Because, in the first place, I shall get all the information they obtain, and can send for any assistance that I may require. In the next place, by showing this little staff with its silver crown, I show that I am a Bow Street runner, and can obtain information at once from all sorts of people which I could not get without its aid."

"Well, I won't say anything more against it, Mark. How are you going to begin?"

"I mean to go the round of all the places near London—say, within ten miles. I shall stay from a week to a fortnight in each, take a quiet lodging, give out that I am on the lookout for a small house with a garden, and get to talk with people of all kinds."

"But I cannot see what you have to inquire for."

"I imagine that Bastow will have taken just the sort of house that I am inquiring for, and in the course of my questions I may hear of someone living in just that sort of way—a retired life, not making many friends, going up to London sometimes, and keeping, perhaps, a deaf old woman as a servant, or perhaps a deaf old man—someone, you see, who would not be likely to hear him if he came home in the middle of the night, or in the early morning. Once I hear of such a man, I should ascertain his age, and whether generally he agreed in appearance with what Bastow is likely to be by this time, then get down one of the constables who was at the trial, and take his opinion on the subject, after which we should only have to watch the house at night and pounce upon him as he came back from one of his excursions. That is the broad outline of my plan. I cannot help thinking that in the long run I shall be able to trace him, and of course it will make it all the easier if he takes to stopping coaches or committing murderous burglaries."

"Then I suppose we are not going to see you often, Mark?"

"Well, not so often as you have done, Millicent, for some time, at any rate. I shall not be more than five or six miles away, and I shall often ride into town for the evening, and return late with some sort of hope that I may be stopped on the road again; it would save me a world of trouble, you see, if he would come to me instead of my having to find him."

"Which side of London are you going to try first?"

"The south side, certainly; there are a score of places that would be convenient to him—Dulwich, Clapham, Tooting, Wimbledon, Stockwell; the list is a long one. I should say Wimbledon was about the most distant, and I should think that he would not go so far as that; if he only acted as a highwayman he might be as far off as Epsom; but if he is really the man concerned in these burglaries he must be but a short distance away. He would hardly risk having to ride very far with the chance of coming upon the patrols. I think that I shall begin at Peckham; that is a central sort of position, and from there I shall work gradually west; before I do so perhaps I shall try Lewisham. He is likely, in any case, to be quite on the outskirts of any village he may have settled in, in order that he may ride in and out at any hour without his coming and going being noticed."

"You certainly seem to have thought it over in all ways, Mark; you almost infect me with your ardor, and make me wish that I was a man and could help you."

"You are much nicer as you are, Millicent."

The girl tossed her head in disdain at the compliment.

"It is all very well, Mark," she went on, ignoring his speech, "but it seems to me that in finding out things a woman would be able to do just as much as a man; she can gossip with her neighbors and ask about everyone in a place quite as well, if not better, than a man."

"Yes I don't doubt that," Mark laughed, "and if I want your aid I shall have no hesitation in asking for it. Until then I hope you will go on with your painting and harping steadily, like a good little girl."

"I am nearly eighteen, sir, and I object to be called a good little girl."

"Well, if I were to say a good young woman you would not like it."

"No, I don't think I should. I don't know why, but when anyone says a girl is a good young woman or a nice young woman, there always seems something derogatory about it; it is almost as bad as saying she is a very respectable young person, which is odious."

"Then, you see," he went on, "you are quite getting on in society; since Mr. Cotter's introduction to Mrs. Cunningham and his mother's subsequent call you have got to know a good many people and go about a good deal."

"Yes, it has been more lively of late," she admitted. "At first it was certainly monstrously dull here, and I began to think that we should have to change our plans and go down again to Weymouth, and settle there for a time. Now I am getting contented; but I admit, even at the risk of making you conceited, that we shall certainly miss you very much, as you have been very good, considering how busy you have been, to come in three or four evenings every week for a chat."

"There has been nothing very good about it, Millicent; it has been very pleasant to me; it is like a bit of old times again when I am here with you two, and seem to leave all the excitement of one's work behind as I come in at the door."

"I wonder whether the old time will ever come back again, Mark?" she said sadly.

"It never can be quite the old time again, but when you are back at the old place it may be very near it."

She looked at him reproachfully.

"You think that I shall change my mind, Mark, but at heart you know better. The day I am one and twenty I hope to carry out my intentions."

"Well, as I have told you before, Millicent, I cannot control your actions, but I am at least master of my own. You can give away Crowswood to whom you like, but at least you cannot compel me to take it. Make it over to one of the hospitals if you like—that is within your power; but it is not in your power to force me into the mean action of enriching myself because you have romantic notions in your mind. I should scorn myself were I capable of doing such an action. I wonder you think so meanly of me as to suppose for a moment that I would do so."

"It is a great pity my father did not leave the property outright to your father, then all this bother would have been avoided," she said quietly. "I should still have had plenty to live upon without there being any fear of being loved merely for my money."

"It would have been the same thing if he had," Mark said stubbornly. "My father would not have taken it, and I am sure that I should not have taken it after him; you are his proper heiress. I don't say if he had left a son, and that son had been a second Bastow, that one would have hesitated, for he would probably have gambled it away in a year, the tenants might have been ruined, and the village gone to the dogs. Every man has a right to disinherit an unworthy son, but that is a very different thing from disinheriting a daughter simply from a whim. Well, don't let us talk about it any more, Millicent. It is the only thing that we don't agree about, and therefore it is best left alone."

The next day Mark established himself at an inn in Peckham, and for six weeks made diligent inquiries, but without success. There were at least a dozen men who lived quietly and rode or drove to their business in town. Many of them were put aside as needing no investigation, having been residents there for years. Some of the others he saw start or return, but none of them corresponded in any way with the probable appearance of the man for whom he was in search. During this time he heard of several private coaches being held up on the road between Epsom and London, and three burglaries took place at Streatham.

He then moved to Stockwell. Before proceeding there he had his horse up again from Crowswood, and rode into Stockwell from the west. He was dressed now as a small country squire, and had a valise strapped behind his saddle. The inn there was a busy one.

"I want a room," he said, as he alighted. "I shall probably stay here a few days."

Presently he had a talk with the landlord.

"I am on the lookout," he said, "for a little place near town. I have come in for a small estate in the country, but I have no taste for farming, and want to be within easy reach of town, and at the same time to have a place with a paddock where I can keep my horse and live quietly. I don't much care whether it is here or anywhere else within a few miles of town, and I intend to ride about and see if I can find a place that will suit me. I do not want to be nearer the town than this, for I have not money enough to go the pace; still, I should like to be near enough to ride or walk in whenever I have a fancy for it."

"I understand, sir. Of course there are plenty of places round here, at Clapham and Tooting, and I may say Streatham, but most of them are a deal too large for a bachelor, still I have no doubt you would find a place to suit you without much difficulty. These sort of places are most in request by London tradesmen who have given up business and want to get a little way out of town and keep a gig. I should say there must be a score of such people living round here. I am often asked about such places, but I don't know of one to let just at the present moment.

"Still, there ought to be, for of late people have not cared so much to come out here; there has been such a scare owing to highwaymen and burglars, that men with wives and families don't fancy settling out of town, though there aint much work about it, for to every one house that is broken into there are thousands that are not, and besides, the houses that these fellows try are large places, where there is plenty of silver plate and a few gold watches, and perhaps some money to be had."

Mark soon made the acquaintance of the stablemen, and a few pints of beer put them on good terms with him. Every day he took rides round the neighborhood, going out early, stabling his horse, and after having a chat with the ostlers, strolling round the place. Clapham, Ewell, and Streatham were also visited.

"I know of a place that would just suit you," the ostler at the Greyhound at Streatham said to him, on the occasion of his third visit there; "but it is let; my old mother is the gentleman's housekeeper. He took the place through me, for he rode up just as you have done, one afternoon, nigh a year ago. He was from town, he was; he told me that he had been going the pace too hard, and had to pull in, and wanted a little place where he could keep his horse and live quiet for a time. I told him of a place that I thought would suit him just outside the town, and he called in the next day and told me he had taken it. 'Now,' he said, 'I want a woman as house keeper; an old woman, you know. I cannot be bothered with a young one. If you speak a civil word to a wench she soon fancies you are in love with her. I want one who can cook a chop or a steak, fry me a bit of bacon, and boil an egg and keep the place tidy. I intend to look after my horse myself.'

"'Well, sir,' I said, 'there is my old mother. She is a widow, and it is as much as she can do to keep off the parish. She is reckoned a tidy cook and a good cleaner, and she could keep herself well enough if it wasn't that she is so hard of hearing that many people don't care to employ her.'

"'I don't care a rap about that,' he said. 'I shall not need to talk to her except to tell her what I will have for dinner, and if she is deaf she won't want to be away gossiping. Does she live near here?'

"'She lives in the town,' I said. 'I can fetch her down in half an hour.'

"'That will do,' says he. 'I am going to have lunch. When I have, done I will come out and speak with her.'

"Well, sir, he engaged her right off, and he tipped me a guinea for finding the place for him, and there he has been ever since. It was a lucky job for mother, for she says there never was a gentleman that gave less trouble. He is a wonderful quiet man, and in general stops at home all the day smoking and reading. He has a boy comes in two or three times a week to work in the garden. Sometimes of an evening he rides up to town. I expect he cannot keep away from the cards altogether."

"Is he an elderly man?" Mark asked.

"Lor', no, sir; under thirty, I should say. He is a free handed sort of chap, and though he aint particular about his eating, he likes a bottle of good wine, the old woman says, even if it is only with a chop. He never

rides past here and I happen to be outside without tossing me a shilling to drink his health."

Mark went into the house and ordered lunch. It would not have done to have asked any more questions or to have shown any special interest in the matter, but he felt so excited that he could not have avoided doing so had he waited longer with the ostler. After he had finished his meal he strolled out again into the stable yard.

"Well," he said to the ostler, "can't you put me up to another good thing, just as you told that gentleman you were speaking to me about?"

"There are two or three places that I know of that might suit you, sir. There is a house on the hill. I know that it has got a paddock, but I don't know how big it is; it is in general known as Hawleys—that is the name of the last people who lived there. Anyone will tell you which is the house. Then there is another place. You turn to the right the third turning on the hill; it stands by itself two or three hundred yards down; it has got a goodish bit of ground. There is only one house beyond it; that is the one where my mother lives. That was an old farm once, but this was built later. I believe the ground belonged to the farm. You will know it by a big tree in front of it; it stands back forty feet or so from the road."

"Where does the road lead to?"

"Well, sir, it aint much of a road beyond the next house; it is only a lane, but you can get through that way into the main road, through Tooting down into Balham, and on to Wimbledon."

"I think I will go and have a look at both those places," Mark said.

"Will you take your horse, sir?"

"No; I suppose it is not much above half a mile?"

"About that, sir."

"Then I will walk; I shall not be likely to find anyone to hold my horse there."

Mark had no difficulty in finding the house. It looked as if it had been untenanted for some time, and in the window was a notice that for keys and information applications were to be made at a shop in the High Street. Well pleased to find that there was no one in the house, Mark entered the gate and passed round into what at one time had been a kitchen garden behind it; at the bottom of this was a field of three or four acres.

The ground was separated by a hedge from that of the house beyond. This was fully a hundred yards away. A well bred horse was grazing in the field, a man smoking a pipe was watching a boy doing gardening work behind the house. Mark remained for nearly an hour concealed behind the hedge in hopes that he would come nearer. At the end of that time, however, he went into the house, and after waiting another ten minutes Mark also left, resisting the temptation to walk along the road and take a closer look at it, for he felt that such a step would be dangerous, for should the man notice anyone looking at the place his suspicions might be aroused.

It was evident that the lane was very little used; in many cases the grass grew across it. There were marks of horses' feet, but none of wheels, and he concluded that when going up to town the man came that way and rode quietly through Streatham, for the hoof prints all pointed in that direction, and that on his return at night he came up the lane from the other road.

"Well, master, what do you think of the houses?" the ostler asked on his return to the inn.

"I have only been to the one in the lane that you spoke of, for I want to get back to town. I had a good look at it, but it is rather a dreary looking place, and evidently wants a lot of repairs before it can be made comfortable. The next time that I am down I will look at the other."

Mounting his horse, he rode at a rapid pace into London, and dismounted at Bow Street.

"You have news, I see, Mr. Thorndyke," the chief said when he entered.

"I have, sir; I believe that I have marked the man down; at any rate, if it is not he, it is a criminal of some sort—of that I have no doubt."

"That is good news indeed," the chief said. "Now tell me all about it."

Mark repeated the story the ostler had told him, and the result of his own observations.

"You see," he said, "the man, whether Bastow or not, has clearly taken the place for the purpose of concealment, for he can approach it by the lane, which is a very unfrequented one, on his return from his expeditions. He has taken on a deaf old woman who will not hear him ride in at night, and will have no idea at what hours he comes home. Riding out through the main street in the afternoon he would excite no notice, and the story to the ostler would very well account for his taking the house and for his habit of coming up here of an afternoon and returning late. I thought it best to come back and tell you, and I will adopt any plan that you suggest for his capture."

"You say that he has been there for nearly a year?"

"About a year, the ostler said."

"Then one of my men, at least, must have been very careless not to have found him out long ago. Let me see;" and he took down a volume of reports. "Streatham. Tomlinson has been here a fortnight making every inquiry. 'No man of suspicious appearance or of unknown antecedents here.'

"Humph! That is not the first time that Tomlinson has failed altogether in his duty. However, that does not matter for the moment. What is your own idea, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"My idea is that a couple of good men should go down with me to Streatham, and that we should be always on the watch in High Street until we see him ride past. Directly it is dark we will go to his house, fasten the old woman up, and search it thoroughly. If we find stolen property so much the better; but in any case we shall wait inside the house until he returns, and as he comes in throw ourselves upon him before he has time to draw a pistol. I should say it would be as well the men should go down in a trap. There is an empty house next door, and when we go to search the place we can leave the horse and trap inside the gate. Directly we have him secure we can fetch up the trap, put him in, and one of the men and myself can drive him back here, leaving the other in charge of the house, which can then be searched again next day."

"I think that will be a very good plan, and will avoid all unnecessary fuss. I will send Malcolm and Chester down with you tomorrow. Where will you meet them?"

"I should say that they had better put up at the Greyhound. I don't suppose he will go out until six or seven o'clock, but they had better be there earlier. One should station himself in the main street, the other concealing himself somewhere beyond the fellow's house, for it is likely enough that sometimes he may take the other way. I will go down to the Greyhound at six, and will wait there until one of them brings me news that he has left."

"I think you had better come in in the morning, and give your instructions to the men; there will be less fear of any mistake being made. I should say you had better put your horse up and come here on foot; one can never be too careful when one is dealing with so crafty a rogue as this; he certainly does not work with an accomplice, but for all that he may have two or three sharp boys in his pay, and they may watch this place by turns and carry him news of any stir about the office."

"I will walk in," Mark replied. "It is no distance from Stockwell."

Mark slept but little that night. He had believed all along that he should be finally successful, but the discovery had come so suddenly that it had taken him completely by surprise. It might not be the man, and he tried hard to persuade himself that the chances were against his being so, so that he should not feel disappointed should it turn out that it was some other criminal, for that the man was a criminal he had not a shadow of doubt.

The next morning he was at the office early. The chief arrived half an hour later, and the two officers were at once called in.

"You will go with Mr. Thorndyke," the chief said, "and he will give you instructions. The capture is a very important one, and there must be no mistake made. We believe the man to be Bastow. I think you were present at his trial, Chester; he escaped from Sydney Convict Prison some three years ago, and is, I believe, the author of many of the highway robberies and burglaries that have puzzled us so. Of course, you will take firearms, but if he is alone you will certainly have no occasion to use them, especially as you will take him completely by surprise. You will order a gig from Morden, and leave here about three o'clock. I should say you had better get up as two countrymen who have been up to market. However, Mr. Thorndyke will explain the whole matter to you fully."

Mark then went off with the two officers to a private room, and went into the whole matter with them.

"I think, Chester," he said, "that you had better watch in the High Street, because you know the man. At least, you have seen him, and may recognize him again."

"I think I should know him, however much he has changed. I took particular notice of him at the trial, and thought what a hardened looking young scamp he was. It is very seldom I forget a face when once I have a thorough look at it, and I don't think I am likely to forget his."

"Malcolm, I think you cannot do better than take your place in the garden of the house next to his; it is a place that has stood empty for many months, and there is no chance of anyone seeing you. His paddock comes up to the garden, and you can, by placing yourself in the corner, see him as he comes out into the lane. As soon as you see that he has gone, come back to the Greyhound with the news. I shall be there, and you will pick up Chester in the High Street as you come along; of course you won't pretend to know me, but the mere fact of your coming back will be enough to tell me that he has gone. As soon as it gets dark we will pay our reckoning, and drive off in the gig, leaving it in the drive in front of the house this side of his. I shall have strolled off before, and shall be waiting for you there. If he does not come out by ten o'clock we can give it up for tonight. You had better say that you have changed your mind, and will take beds at the Greyhound; and the next morning drive off in your gig and put up again at the inn at the other end of the town, the White Horse. I will come over again at two o'clock in the afternoon. You will bring handcuffs, and you had better also bring a stout rope to tie him with."

When every detail had been arranged, Mark strolled to Dick Chetwynd's lodgings.

"Well, Mark what has become of you? I have not seen you for the last two months, and I hear that you have not been near Ingleston's crib since I saw you."

"No, I have been away on business. You know I told you that I was spending much of my time in endeavoring to hunt down my father's murderer. I can tell you now that I have been working all the time with the Bow Street people, and I think I know every thieves' slum in London as well as any constable in the town."

"You don't say so, Mark! Well, I should not like such work as that. The prize fighters are a pretty rough lot, but to go to such dens as those is enough to make one shudder. But that does not explain where you have been now."

"No. Well, having persuaded myself at last that his headquarters were not in town, I have been trying the villages round, and I believe that I have laid my hands on him at last."

"You don't say so, Mark! Well, I congratulate you heartily, both on your having caught the fellow and for having got rid of such horrid work. Where is he? Have you got him lodged in jail?"

"No, we are going to capture him tonight; or if not tonight, tomorrow night. Two of the Bow Street officers are going down with me, and we shall have him as he comes home from one of his expeditions either on the highway or as a house breaker. If he does not go this evening we shall wait until tomorrow, but at any rate, the first time that he goes out we shall have him."

"I have got a special engagement for this evening, Mark, or I would offer to go with you and lend you a hand, if necessary."

"There is no occasion for that, Dick. We shall take the fellow by surprise as he goes into his own house, and have him handcuffed before he can draw a pistol. Then, when we have got him fairly tied up, we shall put him into a light cart that we shall have handy, and bring him straight to Bow Street. To tell you the truth, I am so excited over the thought that I do not know how I should have got through the day if I had not come in to have a chat with you."

"I can quite understand that, old fellow. Well, the best thing we can do is to take a stroll out and look at the fashions. It is early yet, but just at present it is all the rage to turn out early. It will do me good too, for I was at Ingleston's last night, and the smoke and row has given me a headache. I shall really have to give up going there, except when there is an important fight on. It is too much to stand, and the tobacco is so bad that I am obliged to keep a suit of clothes for the purpose. Let us be off at once."

CHAPTER XVI.

At four o'clock Mark put up his horse at the Greyhound, and chatted for a quarter of an hour with the ostler, who had been making inquiries, and had heard of one or two other houses in the neighborhood which were untenanted. Mark then strolled up the town, exchanging a passing glance with Chester, who, in a velvet coat, low hat and gaiters, was chatting with a wagoner going with a load of hay for the next morning's market in London. He turned into an inn, called for a pint of the best port, and sat down in the parlor at a table close to the window, so that he could see all who went up or down. He entered into conversation with two or three people who came in, and so passed the time till seven, when he felt too restless to sit still longer, and went out into the street.

When he was halfway to the Greyhound he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs behind him, and saw a quietly dressed man coming along at an easy trot. Had it not been that he recognized the horse, he could not have felt sure that its rider was the man whose coming he had been waiting for, there being nothing in his appearance that would excite the slightest suspicion that he was other than a gentleman of moderate means and quiet taste, either returning from a ride or passing through on his way to town. He had a well built and active figure, carried himself with the ease of a thorough horseman, and nodded to one or two persons of his acquaintance, and checking his horse at the principal butcher's, ordered some meat to be sent in that evening.

Mark could trace no resemblance in the face to that of the young fellow he remembered. It was a quiet and resolute one. If this were Bastow, he had lost the sneering and insolent expression that was so strongly impressed on his memory. It might be the man, but if so, he was greatly changed. Mark's first impression was that it could not be Bastow; but when he thought over the years of toil and confinement in the convict prison, the life he had led in the bush, and the two years he had passed since he returned home, he imagined that the insolence of youth might well have disappeared, and been succeeded by the resolute daring and dogged determination that seemed to be impressed on this fellow's face.

Mark paused fifty yards before he reached the inn. In a few minutes he saw Chester coming along. There was no one else in sight.

"Is it Bastow?" he asked, as the officer came up.

"It's Bastow sure enough, sir. But he is so changed that if I had not had him in my mind I should not have recognized him. I calculate that a man who has gone through what he has would have lost the expression he had as a boy. He must have learnt a lot in the convict prison, and the fact that he headed the mutiny and escaped from the searchers and managed to get home showed that he must have become a resolute and desperate man. All those burglaries, and the way in which he has several times stopped coaches single handed, show his nerve and coolness. I had all that in my mind as he came along, and his face was pretty much as I expected to see it. He is a cool hand, and I can understand how he has given us the slip so long. There is none of the shifty look about his eyes that one generally sees in criminals, no glancing from side to side; he rode with the air of a man who had a right to be where he was, and feared no one. He will be an awkward customer to tackle if we do not take him by surprise."

"Yes, I agree with you there. However, he won't have much chance of using either his pistols or his strength. Here is Malcolm coming, so I will walk away for a few minutes, and let you go in first. You can tell the ostler now that you will have your horse put in at nine o'clock. I have been thinking, by the way, that we had better take the trap round behind the house instead of leaving it in the drive. The man may come back this way, and if so, he might hear the horse stamp or make some movement, and that would at once put him on his guard."

As the officers entered the inn Mark went into the yard and told the ostler that he had met some friends, and should let his horse remain there for the night.

"It is possible that they may drive me into the town in the morning," he said; "and I shall very likely send a man down for the horse."

At a quarter to nine he went out again, and walked to the house he had before visited; in ten minutes he heard the sound of wheels, threw open the gate, and the men, jumping down, led the horse in.

"You may as well take him out of the trap," he said. "We cannot very well get that round the house, but there is no difficulty about taking the horse."

The officers had brought a halter and a nosebag full of corn. The horse was fastened to a tree with soft ground round it, the nosebag put on, and a horse cloth thrown over its back; then Mark and his two companions went out into the lane, and in a couple of minutes entered the next gate, treading lightly, and going round to the back of the house.

A light burned in the kitchen, and an old woman could be seen knitting. They lifted the latch and walked in. Dropping her knitting, she rose with an exclamation of terror.

Mark advanced alone.

"Do not be frightened," he said; "we are not going to do you any harm." He took out his little ebony staff. "We are constables," he went on, "and have orders to search this house. We must secure you, but you will be

released in the morning. Now, which is your room?"

In spite of Mark's assurance, the old woman was almost paralyzed with terror. However, the two constables assisted her up to her room, and there secured her with a rope, taking care that it was not so tightly bound as to hurt her. Then they placed a gag in her mouth, and left her.

"Now let us search his room in the first place," Mark said, when they came downstairs again. "I hardly expect we shall find anything. You may be sure that he will have taken great pains to hide away any booty that he may have here, and that it will need daylight and a closer search than we can give the place now, before we find anything."

The search of the house was indeed fruitless. They cut open the bed, prized up every loose board in the bedroom and the parlor, lifted the hearth stone, tapped the walls, and searched every drawer; then, taking a lantern, went out into the stable. The officers were both accustomed to look for hiding places, and ran their hands along on the top of the walls, examining the stone flooring and manger.

"That is a very large corn bin," Mark said, as he looked round, when they desisted from the search.

"You are right, sir. We will empty it."

There were two or three empty sacks on the ground near it, and they emptied the corn into these, so that there should be no litter about. Chester gave an exclamation of disappointment as they reached the bottom. Mark put his hand on the bin and gave it a pull.

"It is just as I thought," he said. "It is fastened down. I saw an ax in the woodshed, Malcolm; just fetch it here."

While the man was away Mark took the lantern and examined the bottom closely. "We shan't want the ax," he said, as he pointed out to Chester a piece of string that was apparently jammed in the form of a loop between the bottom and side. "Just get in and clear those few handfuls of corn out. I think you will see that it will pull up then."

There was, however, no movement in the bottom when Mark pulled at the loop.

"Look closely round outside," he said, handing Malcolm, who had now returned, the lantern. "I have no doubt that there is a catch somewhere."

In a minute or two the constable found a small ring between two of the cobblestones close to the foot of the wall. He pulled at it, and as he did so Mark felt the resistance to his pull cease suddenly, and the bottom of the bin came up like a trapdoor.

"That is a clever hiding place," he said. "If I had not happened to notice that the bin was fixed we might have had a long search before we found it here."

Below was a square hole, the size of the bin; a ladder led down into it. Mark, with a lantern, descended. Four or five sacks piled on each other lay at the bottom, leaving just room enough for a man to stand beside them.

"The top one is silver by the feel," he said, "not yet broken up; these smaller sacks are solid. I suppose it is silver that has been melted down. This—" and he lifted a bag some eighteen inches deep, opened it, and looked in—"contains watches and jewels. Now I think we will leave things here for the present, and put everything straight. He may be back before long."

Mark ascended, the bottom of the trap was shut down again, the corn poured in, and the bags thrown down on the spot from which they had been taken. They returned to the house, shut the door, and extinguished the light.

"That has been a grand find," he said; "even if this is not Bastow, it will be a valuable capture."

"That it will, Mr. Thorndyke. I have no doubt that this fellow is the man we have been in search of for the last eighteen months; that accounts for our difficulty in laying hold of him. He has been too crafty to try to sell any of his plunder, so that none of the fences have known anything about him. No doubt he has taken sufficient cash to enable him to live here quietly. He intended some time or other to melt down all the rest of the plate and to sell the silver, which he could do easily enough. As for the watches and jewels, he could get rid of them abroad."

"No doubt that is what he intended," Mark agreed. "It is not often these fellows are as prudent as he has been; if they were, your work would be a good deal more difficult than it is."

"You are right, sir; I don't know that I ever heard of such a case before. The fellow almost deserves to get away."

"That would be rewarding him too highly for his caution," Mark laughed. "He is a desperate villain, and all the more dangerous for being a prudent one. Now, I think one of us had better keep watch at the gate by turns. We shall hear him coming in plenty of time to get back here and be in readiness for him. We must each understand our part thoroughly. I will stand facing the door. It is possible that he may light that lantern we saw hanging in the stable, but I don't think it likely he will do so; he will take off the saddle, and either take the horse in there—there is plenty of food in the manger—or else turn it out into the paddock. As he comes in I will throw my arms round him and you will at once close in, one on each side, each catch an arm tightly, handcuff him, and take the pistols from his belt. Don't leave go of his arms until I have lit the candle; he may have another pistol inside his coat, and might draw it."

It was now one o'clock, and half an hour later Malcolm, who was at the gate, came in quietly and said he could hear a horse coming along the lane.

"Which way, Malcolm?"

"Tooting way."

"That is all right. I have been a little nervous lest if he came the other way our horse might make some slight noise and attract his attention; that was our only weak point."

They had already ascertained that the front door was locked and bolted, and that he must therefore enter through the kitchen. They heard the horse stop in front, a moment later the gate was opened, and through

the window they could just make out the figure of a man leading a horse; then the stable door opened, and they heard a movement, and knew that the horse was being unsaddled; they heard it walk into the stable, the door was shut behind it, and a step approached the back door. It was opened, and a voice said with an oath, "The old fool has forgotten to leave a candle burning;" then he stepped into the kitchen.

In an instant there was a sound of a violent struggle, deep oaths and curses, two sharp clicks, then all was quiet except heavy breathing and the striking of flint on a tinderbox; there was the blue glare of the sulphur match, and a candle was lighted. Mark then turned to the man who was standing still grasped in the hands of his two captors.

"Arthur Bastow," he said, producing his staff, "I arrest you in the King's name, as an escaped convict, as a notorious highwayman and house breaker."

As his name was spoken the man started, then he said quietly:

"You have made a mistake this time, my men; my name is William Johnson; I am well known here, and have been a quiet resident in this house for upwards of a year."

"A resident, but not a quiet resident, Bastow. I don't think we are mistaken; but even if you can prove that you are not Bastow, but William Johnson, a man of means and family, we have evidence enough upon the other charges. We have been in search of you for a long time, and have got you at last. You don't remember me, though it is but eighteen months since we met; but I fancy that I then left a mark upon you that still remains on your shoulder. I am Mark Thorndyke, and you will understand now why I have hunted you down."

"The game is not finished yet," the man said recklessly. "The hunting down will be the other way next time, Mark Thorndyke."

"I don't think so. Now, Chester, you may as well tie his feet together, and then search him. When that is done I will look after him while you fetch the trap round."

In his pockets were found two gold watches, forty-eight pounds in gold, and a hundred pounds in bank notes.

"We shall hear where this comes from tomorrow," Malcolm said, as he laid them on the table; "it will save us the trouble of getting evidence from Australia."

The prisoner was placed in a chair, and then the two officers went out to fetch the trap round.

"So you have turned thief catcher, have you?" he said in a sneering tone, that recalled him to Mark's memory far more than his face had done, "and you carry a Bow Street staff about with you, and pretend to belong to the force: that is a punishable offense, you know."

"Yes, it would be if I had no right to use it," Mark said quietly; "but it happens that I have a right, having been for a year and a half in the force. I joined it solely to hunt you down, and now that I have done so my resignation will be sent in tomorrow."

"And how is the worthy squire?"

Mark started to his feet, and seized one of the pistols lying before him.

"You villain!" he exclaimed, "I wonder you dare mention his name—you, his murderer."

"It was but tit for tat," the man said coolly; "he murdered me, body and soul, when he sent me to the hulks. I told him I would be even with him. I did not think I had hit him at the time, for I thought that if I had you would have stopped with him, and would not have chased me across the fields."

"You scoundrel!" Mark said. "You know well enough that you came back, stole into his room, and stabbed him."

Bastow looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said. "I fired at him through the window—I don't mind saying so to you, because there are no witnesses—and saw him jump up, but I fancied I had missed him. I saw you bolt out of the room, and thought it better to be off at once instead of taking another shot. You gave me a hard chase. It was lucky for you that you did not come up with me, for if you had done so I should have shot you; I owed you one for having killed as good a comrade as man ever had, and for that bullet you put in my shoulder before. If I had not been so out of breath that I could not feel sure of my aim I should have stopped for you, but I rode straight to town."

"A likely story," Mark said shortly. "What, you will pretend that there were two murderers hanging round the house that night—a likely tale indeed."

"I tell you that if your father was killed by a knife or dagger, I had nothing to do with it," the man said. "I am obliged to the man, whoever he was. I had intended to go down again to Reigate to finish the job myself; I should scarcely have missed a second time. So it is for that you hunted me down? Well, I don't blame you; I never forgive an injury, and I see your sentiments are mine. Whether I killed your father or not makes no difference; he was killed, that is the principal point; if I was going to be put on my trial for that I could prove that at eight o'clock I was in a coffee house in Covent Garden. I purposely kicked up a row there, and was turned out, so that if I were charged with that shooting affair I could prove that I was in London that evening."

"I can't quite believe that," Mark said; "a fast horse would have brought you up to town in an hour and a half, and another fast horse would have taken you back again as quickly; so you might have been in London at eight and back again at Crowswood by half past twelve or one, even if you stopped a couple of hours at a coffee house. However, you won't be tried for that. Those things on the table and the contents of that corn bin are enough to hang you a dozen times."

"Curse you! have you found that out?" Bastow exclaimed furiously.

"We have," Mark replied. "It would have been wiser if you had got rid of your things sooner. It was a clever hiding place, but it is always dangerous to keep such things by you, Bastow."

The man said no more, but sat quietly in his chair until they heard the vehicle stop outside the gate. Then the two constables came in, and lifting Bastow, carried him out and placed him in the bottom of the cart.

"You can loose the old woman now, Malcolm," Mark said as he took his seat and gathered the reins in his hand. "By eleven o'clock, no doubt, one of the others will be down with the gig again, and you can empty out the contents of that hole, and bring them up with you. I don't think that it will be of any use searching further. You might have a good look all round before you come away. There may be some notes stowed away, though it is likely enough that they have been sent away by post to some receiver abroad."

For some time after starting they could hear the prisoner moving about uneasily in the straw.

"I suppose there is no fear of his slipping out of those handcuffs, Chester?"

"Not a bit; they are full tight for him. I expect that that is what is making him uncomfortable."

Presently the movement ceased.

"He is still enough now, Mr. Thorndyke. I should not be at all surprised if he has dropped off to sleep. He is hardened enough to sleep while the gibbet was waiting for him."

It was four o'clock in the morning when they drove up at Bow Street. Two constables on duty came out to the cart.

"We have got a prisoner, Inspector," Chester said. "He is the man we have been looking for so long. I fancy we have got all the swag that has been stolen for the last eighteen months—bags of jewels and watches, and sacks of silver. He is handcuffed, and his legs are tied, so we must carry him in."

The officer fetched out a lantern. The other constable helped him to let down the backboard of the cart.

"Now, Bastow, wake up," Chester said. "Here we are."

But there was no movement!

"He is mighty sound asleep," the constable said.

"Well, haul him out;" and, taking the man by the shoulders, they pulled him out from the cart.

"There is something rum about him," the constable said; and as they lowered his feet to the pavement his head fell forward, and he would have sunk down if they had not supported him.

The Inspector raised the lantern to his face.

"Why, the man is dead," he said.

"Dead!" Chester repeated incredulously.

"Aye, that he is. Look here;" and he pointed to a slim steel handle some three inches long, projecting over the region of the heart. "You must have searched him very carelessly, Chester. Well, bring him in now."

They carried him into the room, where two candles were burning. Mark followed them. The inspector pulled out the dagger. It was but four inches long, with a very thin blade. The handle was little thicker than the blade itself. Mark took it and examined it.

"I have not a shadow of doubt that this is the dagger with which he murdered my father. The wound was very narrow, about this width, and the doctor said that the weapon that had been used was certainly a foreign dagger."

"I don't think this is a foreign dagger," the Inspector said on examining it, "although it may be the one that was used, as you say, Mr. Thorndyke. It has evidently been made to carry about without being observed."

He threw back the dead man's coat.

"Ah, here is where it was kept. You see, the lining has been sewn to the cloth, so as to make a sheath down by the seam under the arm. I expect that, knowing what would happen if he were caught, he had made up his mind to do it all along. Well, I don't know that you are to be so much blamed, Chester, for, passing your hand over his clothes, you might very well miss this, which is no thicker than a piece of whalebone. Well, well, he has saved us a good deal of trouble. You say you have got most of the booty he has collected?"

"I don't know that we have got all of it, sir, but we have made a very big haul, anyhow; it was a cunningly contrived place. There was a big corn bin in the stable, and when we had emptied out the corn it seemed empty. However, Mr. Thorndyke discovered that the bin was fixed. Then we found that the bottom was really a trap door, and under it was a sort of well in which were sacks and bags. One of the sacks was full of unbroken silver, two others contained silver ingots, things that he had melted down, and there was a large bag full of watches and jewels. In his pocket we found a hundred pounds in bank notes, about fifty guineas, and a couple of gold watches."

"That he must have got tonight from the Portsmouth coach; we heard half an hour ago that it had been stopped near Kingston, the coachman shot, and the passengers robbed. It will be good news to some of them that we have got hold of their valuables. Well, Mr. Thorndyke, I have to congratulate you most heartily on the skill with which you have ferreted out a man who had baffled us for so long, and had become a perfect terror to the south of London. No doubt we shall be able to trace a great portion of the property in that sack. The capture has been splendidly effected."

"You will understand," Mark said, "that I do not wish my name to appear in the matter at all. I have, as you know, been actuated by private reasons only in my search, and I see no occasion why my name should be mentioned; the evidence of Chester and Malcolm will be ample. From information received, they went down to this place, searched it in his absence, discovered the stolen goods, and captured them. Having handcuffed and bound him, one drove him up to town, the other remaining to guard the treasure. On his way he got at this hidden dagger and stabbed himself. My evidence would not strengthen the case at all."

"No, I don't see that it will be necessary to call you, Mr. Thorndyke. The discovery of this hidden booty and the proceeds of the coach robbery would be quite sufficient. Beyond the coroner's inquest there will be no inquiry. Had it been otherwise it might probably have been necessary to call you at the trial. However, as it is, it will save a lot of trouble; now we shall only need to find the owners of these bank notes. I will send off a cart for the things as early as I can get one, and will send a couple of constables round to the houses where burglaries have been committed to request the owners to come over and see if they can identify any of their property; and those who do so can attend the inquest tomorrow, though I don't suppose they will be called. The chief will be mightily pleased when he hears what has taken place, for he has been sadly worried by

these constant complaints, and I fancy that the authorities have been rather down upon him on the subject. The announcement that the career of this famous robber has been brought to an end will cause quite a sensation, and people round the commons on the south side will sleep more quietly than they have done lately. I expect that if he had not put an end to himself we should have had to send him across to Newington today, for of course it is a Surrey business, though we have had the luck to take him. I suppose we shall not see much of you in the future, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"No indeed," Mark said. "My business is done, and I shall send in my resignation this morning. I don't regret the time that I have spent over it; I have learned a great deal, and have seen a lot of the shady side of life, and have picked up experience in a good many ways."

Mark, after requesting the Inspector to find a man to go over to Streatham and bring back his horse, and writing an order to the ostler to deliver it, walked across to his lodgings. Upon the whole, he was not sorry that Bastow had taken the matter into his own hands; he had, certainly, while engaged in the search, looked forward to seeing him in the dock and witnessing his execution, but he now felt that enough had been done for vengeance, and that it was as well that the matter had ended as it had. He was wearied out with the excitement of the last forty-eight hours. It was one o'clock when he awoke, and after dressing and going into Covent Garden to lunch at one of the coffee houses, he made his way up to Islington.

"Taking a day's holiday?" Millicent asked as he came in.

"Well, not exactly, Millicent; I have left school altogether."

"Left school, Mark? Do you mean that you have decided that it is of no use going on any longer?"

"I have given it up because I have finished it. Arthur Bastow was captured last night, and committed suicide as he was being taken to the station."

An exclamation of surprise broke from Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent.

"It seems horrid to be glad that anyone has taken his own life," the latter said; "but I cannot help feeling so, for as long as he lived I should never have considered that you were safe, and besides, I suppose there is no doubt that if he had not killed himself he would have been hung."

"There is not a shadow of doubt about that," Mark replied. "We found the proceeds of a vast number of robberies at his place, and also in his pockets the money he had taken from the passengers of the Portsmouth coach an hour before we captured him. So that putting aside that Australian business altogether, his doom was sealed."

"Now, please, tell us all about it," Mrs. Cunningham said. "But first let us congratulate you most warmly not only on the success of your search, but that the work is at an end."

"Yes, I am glad it is over. At first I was very much interested; in fact, I was intensely interested all along, and should have been for however long it had continued. But, at the same time, I could do nothing else, and one does not want to spend one's whole life as a detective. At last it came about almost by chance, and the only thing I have to congratulate myself upon is that my idea of the sort of place he would have taken was exactly borne out by fact."

And Mark then gave them a full account of the manner in which the discovery had been made and the capture effected.

"You see, Millicent, I followed your injunction, and was very careful. Taking him by surprise as I did, I might have managed it single handed, but with the aid of two good men it made a certainty of it, and the whole thing was comfortably arranged."

"I think you have done splendidly, Mark," Mrs. Cunningham said. "It was certainly wonderful that you should have found him doing exactly what you had guessed, even down to the deaf servant. Well, now that is done and over, what do you think of doing next?"

"I have hardly thought about that," he replied; "but, at any rate, I shall take a few weeks' holiday, and I suppose after that I shall settle down to the search for my uncle's treasure. I am afraid that will be a much longer and a vastly more difficult business than this has been. Here there were all sorts of clues to work upon. Bastow ought to have been captured months ago, but in this other affair, so far, there is next to nothing to follow up. We don't even know whether the things are in India or in England. I believe they will be found, but that it will be by an accident. Besides, I fancy that we shall hear about them when you come of age, Millicent. There was to have been no change till that time, and I cannot help thinking that Uncle George must have made some provisions by which we should get to know about them in the event of his death without his having an opportunity of telling anyone where they are."

"He might have been killed in battle; he might have been drowned on his way home. He had thought the whole matter over so thoroughly, I do think the possibilities of this could not have escaped him. As I told you, Mr. Prendergast made inquiries of all the principal bankers and Indian agents here, and altogether without success. After he had done that, I got a list of all the leading firms in Calcutta and Madras, and wrote to them, and all the replies were in the negative. It is true that does not prove anything absolutely. Eighteen years is a long time, and the chances are that during those years almost every head of a firm would have retired and come home. Such a matter would only be likely to be known to the heads; and if, as we thought likely, the box or chest was merely forwarded by a firm there to England, the transaction would not have attracted any special attention. If, upon the other hand, it remained out there it might have been put down in a cellar or store, and have been lying there ever since, altogether forgotten."

"I don't see myself why you should bother any more about it; perhaps, as you say, it will turn up of itself when I come of age. At any rate, I should say it is certainly as well to wait till then and see if it does, especially as you acknowledge that you have no clue whatever to work on. It is only three more years, for I am eighteen next week, and it certainly seems to me that it will be very foolish to spend the next three years in searching about for a thing that may come to you without any searching at all."

"Well, I will think it over."

"You see, you really don't want the money, Mark," she went on.

"No, I don't want it particularly, Millicent; but when one knows that there is something like 50,000 pounds waiting for one somewhere, one would like to get it. Your father worked for twenty years of his life accumulating it for us, and it seems to me a sort of sacred duty to see that his labor has not all been thrown away."

Millicent was silent.

"It is very tiresome," she said presently. "Of course my father intended, as you say, that his savings should come to us, but I am sure he never meant that they should be a bother and a trouble to us."

"I don't see why they should ever be that, Millicent. As it is we have both sufficient for anything any man or woman could reasonably want, and neither of us need fret over it if the treasure is never found. Still, he wished us to have it, and it is properly ours, and I don't want it to go to enrich someone who has not a shadow of a right to it."

On the following morning Mark went to attend the inquest on Bastow. He did not go into the court, however, but remained close at hand in the event of the coroner insisting upon his being called. However, the two men only spoke casually in their evidence of their comrade Roberts, who had been also engaged in the capture. One of the jurymen suggested that he should also be called, but the coroner said:

"I really cannot see any occasion for it; we are here to consider how the deceased came by his death, and I think it must be perfectly clear that he came by it by his own act. You have heard how he was captured, that the spoils of the coach that he had just rifled were found upon him, and that the booty he had been acquiring from his deeds for months past also was seized; therefore, as the man was desperate, and knew well enough that his life was forfeited, there was ample motive for his putting an end to his wretched existence. I really do not think, gentlemen, that it is worth while to waste your time and mine by going into further evidence."

Finally, a verdict of *felo de se* was returned, with a strong expression of the jury's admiration of the conduct of constables Malcolm, Chester, and Roberts, who had so cleverly effected the capture of the man who had so long set the law at defiance.

CHAPTER XVII.

Four days later Mark, on his return from dinner, found Philip Cotter sitting in his room waiting for him. They had met on the previous evening, and Cotter had expressed his intention of calling upon him the next day.

"I am here on a matter of business, Thorndyke," the latter said as they shook hands.

"Of business!" Mark repeated.

"Yes. You might guess for a year, and I don't suppose that you would hit it. It is rather a curious thing. Nearly twenty years ago—"

"I can guess it before you go any further," Mark exclaimed, leaping up from the seat that he had just taken. "Your people received a box from India."

"That is so Mark; although how you guessed it I don't know."

"We have been searching for it for years," Mark replied. "Our lawyer, Prendergast, wrote to you about that box; at least, he wrote to you asking if you had any property belonging to Colonel Thorndyke, and your people wrote to say they hadn't."

"Yes, I remember I wrote to him myself. Of course that was before you did me that great service, and I did not know your name, and we had not the name on our books. What is in the box?"

"Jewels worth something like fifty thousand pounds."

"By Jove, I congratulate you, old fellow; that is to say, if you have the handling of it. Well, this is what happened. The box was sent to us by a firm in Calcutta, together with bills for 50,000 pounds. The instructions were that the money was to be invested in stock, and that we were to manage it and to take 100 pounds a year for so doing. The rest of the interest of the money was to be invested. The box was a very massive one, and was marked with the letters XYZ. It was very carefully sealed. Our instructions were that the owner of the box and the money might present himself at any time."

"And that the proof of his ownership was to be that he was to use the word 'Masulipatam,'" Mark broke in, "and produce a gold coin that would, probably—though of this I am not certain—correspond with the seals."

He got up and went to the cabinet which he had brought up with him from Crowswood, unlocked it, and produced the piece of paper and the coin.

"Yes, that looks like the seal, Thorndyke. At any rate, it is the same sort of thing. Why on earth didn't you come with it before, and take the things away?"

"Simply because I did not know where to go to. My uncle was dying when he came home, and told my father about the treasure, but he died suddenly, and my father did not know whether it was sent to England or committed to someone's charge in India, or buried there. We did the only thing we could, namely, inquired at all the banks and agents here and at all the principal firms in Madras and Calcutta to ask if they had in their possession any property belonging to the late Colonel Thorndyke."

"You see, we did not know," Cotter went on, "any more than Adam, to whom the box belonged. Fortunately, the agent sent in his communication a sealed letter, on the outside of which was written, 'This is to remain unopened, but if no one before that date presents himself with the token and password, it is to be read on the 18th of August, 1789.' That was yesterday, you know."

"Yes, that was my cousin's eighteenth birthday. We thought if my uncle had left the box in anyone's charge he would probably have given him some such instructions, for at that time there was hard fighting in India,

and he might have been killed any day, and would therefore naturally have made some provisions for preventing the secret dying with him."

"We did not think of it until this morning early, though we have been rather curious over it ourselves. When we opened it, inside was another letter addressed 'To be delivered to John Thorndyke, Esquire, at Crawley, near Hastings, or at Crowswood, Reigate, or in the event of his death to his executors.'"

"I am one of his executors," Mark said; "Mr. Prendergast, the lawyer, is the other. I think I had better go round to him tomorrow and open the letter there."

"Oh, I should think you might open it at once, Thorndyke. It will probably only contain instructions, and, at any rate, as you have the coin and the word, you could come round tomorrow morning and get the chest out if you want it."

"I won't do that," Mark said; "the coffer contains gems worth over 50,000 pounds, and I would very much rather it remained in your keeping until I decide what to do with it. How large is it?"

"It is a square box, about a foot each way; and it is pretty heavy, probably from the setting of the jewels. Well, anyhow, I am heartily glad, Thorndyke. I know, of course, that you are well off, still 100,000 pounds—for the money has doubled itself since we had it—to say nothing of the jewels, is a nice plum to drop into anyone's mouth."

"Very nice indeed, although only half of it comes to me under my uncle's will. To tell you the truth, I am more glad that the mystery has been solved than at getting the money; the affair was a great worry to my father, and has been so to me. I felt that I ought to search for the treasure, and yet the probability of finding it seemed so small that I felt the thing was hopeless, and that really the only chance was that my uncle would have taken just the course he did, and have fixed some date when the treasure should be handed over, if not asked for. I rather fancied that it would not have been for another three years, for that is when my cousin comes of age."

"What cousin do you mean?" Philip Cotter asked. "I did not know you had one."

"Well, that is at present a secret, Cotter—one of the mysteries connected with my uncle's will. For myself, I would tell it in the market place tomorrow, but she wishes it to be preserved at present; you shall certainly know as soon as anyone. By the way, I have not seen you at Mrs. Cunningham's for the last week, and you used to be a pretty regular visitor."

"No," the young man said gloomily; "I don't mind telling you that Miss Conyers refused me a fortnight ago. I never thought that I had much chance, but I had just a shadow of hope, and that is at an end now."

"Perhaps in the future—" Mark suggested for the sake of saying something.

"No; I said as much as that to her, and she replied that it would always be the same, and I gathered from her manner, although she did not exactly say so, that there was someone else in the case, and yet I have never met anyone often there."

"Perhaps you are mistaken," Mark said.

"Well, whether or not, there is clearly no hope for me. I am very sorry, but it is no use moping over it. My father and mother like her so much, and they are anxious for me to marry and settle down; altogether, it would have been just the thing. I do not know whether she has any money, and did not care, for of course I shall have plenty. I shall be a junior partner in another six months; my father told me so the other day. He said that at one time he was afraid that I should never come into the house, for that it would not have been fair to the others to take such a reckless fellow in, but that I seemed to have reformed so thoroughly since that affair that if I continued so for another six months they should have no hesitation in giving me a share."

It was too late to go up to Islington that evening. In the morning Mark went with the still unopened letter to the solicitor's. The old lawyer congratulated him most heartily when he told him of the discovery that he had made.

"I am glad indeed, Mark; not so much for the sake of the money, but because I was afraid that that confounded treasure was going to unsettle your life. When a man once begins treasure hunting it becomes a sort of craze, and he can no more give it up than an opium smoker can the use of the drug. Thank goodness, that is over; so the capital amount is doubled, and you are accordingly worth 70,000 pounds more than you were this time yesterday—a fine windfall! Now let us see what your uncle says."

He broke the seal. The letter was a short one, and began:

"My DEAR JOHN:

"If you have not, before you receive this, got my treasure, you will get it on the 18th or 19th of August, 17?? 89. I have made a will which will give you full instructions what to do with it. I may say, though, that I have left it between a little daughter who was born six months ago, and your son Mark. My own intentions are to stop out here until I get the rank of general, and I have taken the measures that I have done in case a bullet or a sharp attack of fever carries me off suddenly. I hope that you will have carried out the provisions of my will, and I hope also that I shall have come home and talked the whole matter over with you before I go under.

"Your affectionate brother."

"A singular man," Mr. Prendergast said, as he laid the letter down on the table beside him. "What trouble these crotchety people do give! I suppose you have altogether put aside that folly of his about the jewels?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I have, Mr. Prendergast. Do you know that I have a fancy—it may only be a fancy, but if so, I cannot shake it off—that I am watched by Lascars. There was one standing at the corner of the street as I came up this morning, and again and again I have run across one. It is not always the same man, nor have I any absolute reasons for believing that they are watching me; still, somehow or other, I do come across them more frequently than seems natural."

"Pooh, nonsense, Mark! I should have thought that you were too sensible a fellow to have such ridiculous fancies in your head."

"Of course, I should never have thought of such a thing, Mr. Prendergast, if it had not been for what my

father told me, that my uncle was desperately in earnest about it, and had an intense conviction that someone watched his every movement."

"Don't let us talk of such folly any longer," the lawyer said irritably. "Now that you have got the money, the best thing you can do is to go at once and carry out what was the wish both of your father and your uncle, and ask your cousin to marry you; that will put an end to the whole business, and I can tell you that I am positively convinced that the day she gets twenty-one she will renounce the property, and that if you refuse to take it she will pass it over to some hospital or other. You cannot do better than prevent her from carrying out such an act of folly as that, and the only way that I can see is by your marrying her. I gathered from what you said when I gave you the same advice at Reigate that you liked her and should have done it had it not been for her coming into the estate instead of you. Well, you are now in a position to ask her to marry you without the possibility of its being supposed that you are a fortune hunter."

"I will think about it, Mr. Prendergast. Of course this money does make a considerable difference in my position; however, I shall do nothing until I have got the jewels off my hands."

"Well, a couple of days will manage that," the lawyer said; "you have only got to take the box to a first class jeweler, and get him to value the things and make you an offer for the whole of them."

Mark did not care to press the subject, and on leaving went to Cotter's Bank. He was at once shown into his friend's room, and the latter took him to his father.

"It is curious, Mr. Thorndyke," the latter said heartily, "that we should have been keeping your money all this time without having the slightest idea that it belonged to you. We are ready at once to pay it over to your order, for if you pronounce the word you know of, and I find that the coin you have corresponds with the seal on the box, the necessary proof will be given us that you have authority to take it away. I have had the box brought up this morning, so that we can compare the seal."

The box was taken out of the strong safe, and it was at once seen that the coin corresponded with the seals.

"I will leave it with you for the present, Mr. Cotter; it contains a large amount of jewels, and until I have decided what to do with them I would rather leave them; it would be madness to have 50,000 pounds worth of gems in a London lodging, even for a single night. As to the money, that also had better remain as it is at present invested. As I told your son—that and the jewels are the joint property of myself and another. I dare say that in a few days half of the money will be transferred to the name of the other legatee; that can be easily done. I shall get my lawyer, Mr. Prendergast, to call upon you, Mr. Cotter. I suppose it would be better that some legal proof that we are entitled to the money should be given."

"I shall be glad to see him and to take his instructions," the banker said; "but in point of fact I regard the property as yours; I have nothing to do with wills or other arrangements. I simply received the box and the cash with an order that they should be delivered to whomsoever should come with the word 'Masulipatam' and a coin to match the seals. That you have done, and with subsequent dispositions I have no concern. I shall be happy to keep this box for you as long as you should think proper; and I have also written out an acknowledgement that I hold securities of the value, at the closing prices yesterday, of 103,000 pounds 16 shillings," and he handed the paper to Mark.

As the latter left the bank he looked up and down the street, and muttered an angry exclamation as he caught sight of a rough looking fellow just turning a corner into a side street. The glance was so momentary a one that he could not say whether the man was a colored seaman; but he certainly thought that he was a Lascar.

"I am going to have trouble about that bracelet," he said to himself, as he hailed a hackney coach and told him to drive to Islington. "I am convinced that the Colonel was right, and that there are some men over in this country with the fixed purpose of seeing what is done with those jewels, and obtaining them if possible. How they could tell that they were deposited at Cotter's beats me altogether. It may be indeed that they really knew nothing about it, and have simply been watching me. They can hardly have been watching me for the last nine months, and yet, curiously enough, though I have never given the matter a thought since, Charley Gibbons said that it was a dark colored man who brought the news that took them to my rescue and saved my life. I have often run against Lascars, and if they have taken this trouble all along, now that they have seen me come out of the bank, I shall be watched night and day.

"It is a creepy sort of idea. I should not be afraid of any number of them if they attacked me openly; but there is no saying what they might do. I wish Ramoo had been here. I would have consulted him about it; but as I got a letter from him only last week saying that he had, on the day of writing it, arrived in Calcutta, it is of no use wishing that. At any rate, I cannot do better than stick to the plan that my uncle sketched out, and take them across to Amsterdam. It would be very unfair to take them to any jeweler here. He might have them in his possession for a week or ten days before he made me any definite offer for them, and during that time I would not give a fig for his life. If I distribute the stones at Amsterdam they would hardly set about attacking twelve diamond merchants one after another. Well, at any rate, I must say nothing about the affair to Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham. It was bad enough my running risks in the pursuit of Bastow; but this would be ten times worse, and I know Millicent would be for letting the things remain for good at the banker's. But I have no idea of allowing myself to be frightened by two or three black scoundrels into throwing away 50,000 pounds."

Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent were sitting in their bonnets in the parlor.

"Here you are at last, sir," the girl said. "Another five minutes, and we should have gone out. You told us that you would come early, and now it is twelve o'clock; and you are generally so punctual in your appointments. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"A good many things have happened since then, Millicent. Last night your friend Mr. Cotter called upon me."

"Why do you say my friend? He was your friend, and it was entirely through you that we knew him at all."

"Well, we will say 'our friend,' Millicent; and he made a communication to me that this morning I had to go to Mr. Prendergast and make a communication to him."

"What do you mean by your communications?" Millicent asked, laughing. "You are quite mysterious, Mark."

"And then I had to go," he went on, without heeding her interruption, "to Cotter's Bank, where I saw both our friend and his father, and there is the result of these communications and that interview;" and he threw the paper to her.

"What does it mean?" she asked in astonishment, after glancing through it.

"It means, dear, that your father took exactly the precautions I thought he would take, and after sending his money and jewels home, he sent a sealed letter to the firm with whom he deposited them, which happened to be Cotter's, with instructions that should no one present himself with the word and coin by the 18th of August, 1789—that is to say, on your eighteenth birthday—the envelope should be opened; it was so opened, and it contained a letter that was to be sent to my father, or, in the case of his death before that date, to his executors."

"How wonderful!" the girl said. "I had quite given up all idea of it. But how is it that it came to be so much? Have they sold the jewels?"

"No, you see it is the compound interest going on for seventeen years, and perhaps some rise in the value of the securities, that has doubled the original sum invested. As for the jewels, I have left them at the bank; I should not care about having 50,000 pounds worth of such things in my rooms and I should not think that you would like to have them here, either."

"Certainly not," Mrs. Cunningham said emphatically; "you did quite right, Mark. I don't think I could sleep, even if you had half a dozen of your detective friends posted round the house."

"Still I suppose we shall have a chance of seeing them?" Millicent said.

"Certainly. I can make an appointment with Philip Cotter for you to see them at the bank; or if I take them to a jeweler to value, you could see them there. But I should think that the bank would be the best. I am sure that Cotter would put his room at your disposal, and, of course, if you would like to have some of them for yourself you could select any you liked, but I expect that they won't look much in their present settings; the Indian jewelers have not the knack of setting off gems. However, there is no hurry about them one way or another. The money, I have told Cotter's father, shall, for the present, remain as it is invested; it is all in the Funds, Cotter said, for although the instructions were that it was to be put into good securities, he did not feel justified under the peculiar circumstances in going outside Government stock. Mr. Prendergast is quite of opinion that it would be better to make no change until you come of age. I did not know whether you would wait till then, for some purpose or other you might want to use some of it."

Millicent shrugged her shoulders.

"I think I would much rather have had just the money I had before, Mark; all this will be a great nuisance, I am sure. I think there ought to be a law against women having more than 20,000 pounds, whether in money or in land."

Mark laughed.

"It would be a bad thing for spendthrift young noblemen, Millicent. How are they to pay off their debts and mortgages if there were no heiresses ready to do so in exchange for a title?"

"It would be a good thing for them, I consider," the girl said indignantly. "In the first place, they would not impoverish themselves if they knew that there was no way of building up their fortune again, and in the next place, if they did ruin themselves they would have to either set to work to earn an honest living or blow out their brains, if they have any to blow out. I can assure you that I don't feel at all exultant at getting all this money, and I think that my father was quite right in wishing that I should know nothing about it until I married; but, on the other hand, I am heartily glad, more glad than I can say, Mark, that you have come into your share."

"I am glad for one reason, Millicent; that is, that this must put an end to the ridiculous idea you have of giving up Crowswood. Your father has made me rich beyond anything I could possibly have expected from him. I suddenly find myself a wealthy man, and I can buy another estate for myself worth more than Crowswood if inclined to settle down as a squire; therefore your theory that I have been disappointed in not inheriting what I thought was my father's estate falls to the ground altogether. In no case would I ever have accepted your sacrifice. If you had liked to hand it over to St. Bartholomew's or Guy's Hospital, or to give it away to any other charity, I would not have prevented you, but I would never have accepted it for myself. Now, thank goodness, the question cannot arise; for you must see that, even looking at the matter from a purely business point of view, I have benefited to an enormous and altogether unexpected extent by your father's will, and if any contest between us could arise it should be on the ground that he has acted unfairly to you by giving me so large a proportion of the money that, in the course of nature, you should have inherited. It was not even as if he had known and liked me, for I was but four years old at the time he wrote the letter saying that I was to share the money and jewels with you."

"You are very obstinate and very disagreeable, Mark," she said, with tears in her eyes.

"I think the obstinacy has been principally on your side, Millicent; though certainly I should not think of saying that you have been disagreeable. It has been an excess of kindheartedness on your part, and you have resolutely closed your eyes to the fact that, had I been willing to take advantage of your generosity, I should have lacked the courage to do so, for I should have been pointed at wherever I went, as a mean fellow who took advantage of his little cousin's romantic generosity. Pray, dear, let us say no more about it. We are two rich young people; we have both an estate; yours, I grant, is the larger, but if I choose I can increase mine, until it is quite as large as Crowswood. We can be better friends than we have been for the last year, because this point of dispute has always stood between us and made us uncomfortable. Now you will have to think over what you would like done, and whether you wish any change made in your manner of living."

"Did you tell Mr. Cotter," Millicent laughed, after a pause, "that I had a half share in the money?"

"No, that was a matter for you to decide, not for me. I told him that I was only a half shareholder, but there was no necessity to say who it was who had the other half. When I was talking to Philip Cotter, the words 'my cousin' slipped out, but he did not associate it in any way with you. It might have been the son of another

brother or of a sister of my father's."

"In that case, then, we will certainly make no change, will we, Mrs. Cunningham?"

"I think, Millicent, that Mr. Prendergast and Mark will probably be of opinion that you ought now to be introduced regularly into society. The fact that you are a rich heiress might, as your father so much wished, remain a secret. But it is one thing having this blazoned about and quite another for you to be living quietly here, where, with the exception of Mr. Cotter and a few other friends, you have no society whatever. Certainly it was not the wish of your father that you should remain unmarried. You are quite pretty and nice enough to be sought for yourself alone, and I must say that I think, now that you have finished with your various masters, it would be well that you should go out a good deal more, and that as a first step we should go down to Bath this year instead of paying another visit to Weymouth, as we had arranged."

"I don't want any change at all, Mrs. Cunningham. If I am to get married I shall be married; if I am not I shall not fret about it."

"But for all that, Millicent," Mark said, "Mrs. Cunningham is right. We quite agree that there is no occasion whatever for you to go about labeled 'A good estate and over 70,000 pounds in cash,' but I do think that it is right that you should go into society. With the exception of Philip Cotter, Dick Chetwynd, and two or three other of my friends, you really know very few people. You have now gone out of mourning, and I think that Mrs. Cunningham's proposal that you should go down to Bath is a very good one. I shall not be sorry for a change myself, for I have been engrossed in my work for a long time now. I can go down a day or two before you, and get you comfortable lodgings, and will myself stay at a hotel. Although I have no intimate friends beyond those from Reigate, I know a large number of men of fashion from meeting them at the boxing schools and other places, and could introduce you both, and get you into society."

"I am altogether opposed to the idea," Millicent said decidedly. "You want to trot me out like a horse for sale."

"No, Millicent," Mark said calmly. "I only want you to have the same advantages that other girls have, neither more nor less, and for you to enjoy yourself as others do. There is nothing undignified or objectionable about that, especially as we are agreed that nothing shall be said about your fortune. Well, we will think it over. Mr. Prendergast and I certainly do not wish to act as tyrants, and there is no occasion to come to a decision in a hurry. We have only discovered our good fortune today, and can scarcely appreciate the difference that it will make to us. We can think over what will be for the best at our leisure, and see if we cannot hit upon some plan that will be agreeable to you."

"Thank you, Mark," she said gratefully. "I am afraid that you must think me very disagreeable and cross; but though you, as a man, have not the same sort of feelings, I can assure you that I feel all this money and so on to be a heavy burden; and were it not for your sake I could wish heartily that this treasure had never been discovered at all."

"I can quite understand that," he said quietly. "At the present moment, even, I do not see that it will be of much advantage to me; but it may be that some day I shall see it in a different light. It has come upon me almost as suddenly as it has upon you. I thought that after I had finished with the Bastow affair I should set to work to find out this treasure, and that it would probably take me out to India, occupy me there for some time, and that afterwards I might travel through other places, and be away from England three or four years. Now the matter is altogether altered, and I shall be some time before I form any fresh plans. In fact, these must depend upon circumstances."

Mrs. Cunningham had left the room two or three minutes before, thinking that Mark might be able to talk her charge into a more reasonable state of mind were he alone with her, and he added:

"Of one circumstance in particular."

She looked up inquiringly.

"Well, Millicent, it depends a great deal upon you. I know you think that all that has happened during the past year has been a little hard upon you, and I thoroughly agree with you; you were fond of Crowswood, and were very happy there, and the change to this somewhat dull house, just at a time when you are of an age to enjoy pleasure, has been a trial. Then, too, there has been this question of the estate upon your mind. But you must remember it has been somewhat of a trial to me also. I grant that I have had plenty of occupation which has been in every way beneficial to me, and have not at all lamented leaving the country, but in one respect it has been a trial. I don't know whether it ever entered your mind, before that sad time at home, that I was getting to care for you in a very different way to that in which I had done before."

"My father, I think, observed it, for he threw out a very plain hint once that he would very gladly see us coming together. However, I never spoke of it to you. I was young and you were young. It seemed to me that there was plenty of time, and that, moreover, it would not be fair for me to speak to you until you had had the opportunity of going out and of seeing other men. Then came the evening before his death, when my father told me how matters really stood, and he again said that there was a way by which all trouble could be obviated. But I saw that it was not so, and that the hope I had entertained must be put aside. I had never told you I loved you when I seemed to be the heir of the property and you only the daughter of an old comrade of his, and I saw that were I to speak now, when you were the heiress, it could not but appear to you that it was the estate and not you that I wanted, and I felt my lips were sealed forever. Mr. Prendergast said that day when he came down to the funeral, and you told him that you would not take the property, that it might be managed in another way, and you said that you did not want to be married for your money; so you see you saw it in exactly the same light as I did."

"My first thought this morning, when Mr. Cotter told me that the money had mounted up to over 100,000 pounds, was that it would unseal my lips. You were still better off than I was, but the difference was now immaterial. I was a rich man, and had not the smallest occasion to marry for money. Whether I married a girl without a penny, or an heiress, could make but little difference to me, as I have certainly no ambition to become a great landowner. I still think that it would have been more fair to you to give you the opportunity of seeing more of the society of the world before speaking to you, but you see you are opposed to that, and therefore it would be the same did I wait patiently another year, which I don't think I should be able to do. I

love you, Millicent. It is only during the past eighteen months, when I have thought that I had lost you, that I have known how much I love you, and how much my happiness depends upon you. I can truly say that were you penniless, it would make no shadow of difference to me. It is no longer a question of arranging matters comfortably: it is a question of love. The estate is nothing to me. It never has been anything, and it does not count at all in the scale. I hope that you will put it altogether out of your mind in giving me an answer; and that if you cannot say as truly and wholly as I do, 'I love you,' that you will say as frankly as you have always spoken to me, 'I love you very much as a cousin, Mark, but not in that way.'

The girl had sat perfectly quiet while he was speaking.

He was standing before her now, and he took one of her hands.

"I love you, dear; I love you with all my heart. Do you love me?"

Then she looked up and rose to her feet, and placed both hands upon his shoulders.

"As you love me, so I love you, Mark."

After that, conversation languished till Mrs. Cunningham came into the room, five minutes later.

"We have come to the conclusion, Mrs. Cunningham," he said, "that there will be no necessity for the visit to Bath. Millicent is otherwise provided for; she has promised to be my wife."

"I am glad, Mark, glad indeed!" and she took Millicent in her arms and kissed her tenderly. "I have all along hoped for it, but I began to be afraid that you were both such obstinate young people that it would never come about. I know that your father wished it, Mark, and he told me that his brother had said that it would be a good arrangement if some day you should come to like each other. I have guessed for the last year, and, indeed, before then, that Millicent would not say 'No' if you ever asked her; but this stupid estate seemed to stand in the way. Of late, I have even come to hope that the obstinate girl would keep to her intention, and that if, as I knew would be the case, you refused to take the estate, she would give it away to some charity. In that case, there could be nothing to prevent your speaking; and even then you would have been between you very fairly equipped with this world's goods. However, the present is a far better solution, and the discovery of the treasure has saved you from three years' waiting before things were straightened out. I feel as if I were her mother, Mark, having had her in my charge since she was a baby; and as she grew up it became my fondest hope to see you united some day, and I think that I am almost as pleased that my hope has been fulfilled as you are yourselves."

CHAPTER XVIII.

After thinking over the best way in which to set about the work of carrying the diamonds to Amsterdam, Mark decided upon asking the advice of his late chief. The latter said, as Mark entered his room:

"I did not expect to see you here again, Mr. Thorndyke."

"Well, sir, I have come to ask your' advice about another matter altogether."

"What is it now?"

"I have to convey a diamond bracelet of very great value across to Amsterdam. I have reasons to believe that there is a plot to seize it on the way, and that the men engaged will hesitate at nothing to achieve their object. Under these circumstances I should be very much obliged if you will tell me what would be the best course to pursue. I must say that the bracelet is, with many other jewels, in a strong teak box of about a foot square, at present in the possession of our bankers; they were brought from India by my uncle. I imagine that the rest of the jewels are of comparatively little importance in the eyes of these men, though doubtless they would take them also if they lay their hands on them. The bracelet, however, is of special interest to them, not so much for its intrinsic value, as because it was stolen from one of their sacred idols.

"This was about twenty years ago; but I have reason to believe that the search for it on the part of some Hindoos connected with the temple has never ceased. The soldier who took it was murdered; his comrade, into whose hands they next passed, was also murdered. They next came to my uncle, who forwarded it at once to England. His bungalows were searched again and again, until probably the fellows came to the conclusion that he must have either buried it or sent it away. Nevertheless, to the day of his death he was firmly convinced that he was closely followed, and every movement watched. He warned my father solemnly that he too would be watched, but as far as we know it was not so; at any rate, we had no reason to suppose that the house was ever entered. On the other hand, I am convinced I have been watched more or less closely ever since I came up to town, and as I came out from the bank yesterday I saw a man—a colored fellow, I believe—on the watch.

"My uncle said that my life would not be worth an hour's purchase so long as I had the bracelet in my possession, and advised that it should be taken straight over to Amsterdam, broken up, and the diamonds sold singly to the merchants there."

"It is a curious story, Mr. Thorndyke. I own to ignorance of these Indian thieves and their ways, but it certainly seems extraordinary that so hopeless a quest should be kept up for so long a time. You are sure that it is not fancy on your part that you have been watched? I know you are not the sort of man to take fancies in your head, but as you have had the matter so strongly impressed upon you, you might naturally have been inclined to think this would be the case when it was not so."

"No, I don't think there is any chance of my being mistaken. It is only of late that I have thought about it, but when I did so and thought over what had passed since I came to London, I recalled the fact that I had very often come across foreign seamen; sometimes they were Lascars, at others they might have been Italian or Spanish seamen; and you see, sir, it was, as I told you at the time, some foreign sailor who came and informed Gibbons that I had fallen into the hands of a gang of criminals, and that I should certainly be killed

if I was not rescued immediately. Gibbons at once got together half a dozen fighting men, and, as you know, rescued me just in time. It was extraordinary that the man never came forward to obtain any reward."

"That was a friendly act, Mr. Thorndyke."

"Yes, I have no reason to suppose that these men would be hostile to me personally. I was not the thief, I was simply the person who happened to be in possession, or rather, might come into possession of the bracelet. From the close watch they had kept, they were, I imagine, well aware that I had not got it, but may have thought, and doubtless did think, that I had some clew to its hiding place, and should sooner or later get it. With my death the clew might be finally lost, and my life was consequently of extreme importance to them, and therefore they took steps to have me rescued, and the fact that they learned this and knew how friendly I was with Gibbons shows how close was the watch kept over me. No doubt, had Gibbons refused to help them, they would have come here at once."

"Certainly, after what you say it would seem that your conjecture is right, and in this case, if I were you, I should take the bracelet out of the case and conceal it about me. I would not fetch it myself from the bank."

"I don't think I should be much safer so," Mark said thoughtfully. "In the first place, I must go to the bank to get them, and I might be murdered merely on the supposition that I had brought the bracelet away. In the next place, even if I got to Amsterdam safely and got rid of the bracelet and returned unnoticed by them, a fresh danger would arise when I got the other gems into my possession, for they could not be certain whether the diamonds were still among them or not."

"I should hardly think that would be the case if they watch you as strictly as you believe. Even if none of them accompanied you, they would soon find out what diamond merchants you went to, and the leader might call upon these men, stating that he was commissioned to purchase some diamonds of exceptional value for an Eastern Prince, in which case he would be sure to obtain sight of them."

"If I had your business to perform, I would not go near the bank again, but would send some friend I could trust to go and open the box, and take out the bracelet, and make it into a small parcel. He should hand it to you privately, as you are on your way to embark for Amsterdam. Then I would take with me one or two of my men, and, say, a couple of your prize fighters, and with such a guard you ought to be fairly safe."

"I think that is a capital plan," Mark said, "and if I don't go to the bank there will be nothing to lead them to suppose that I have taken them out, or that I am just going across to Holland."

Mark then went straight to Dick Chetwynd's lodgings.

"I want you to do me a service, Dick," he said.

"With pleasure, Mark. What sort of service is it? If it is anything in my power, you know that you can absolutely rely upon me. You are not going to fight a duel, are you, and want a second?"

"No; quite another sort of business. I will tell you shortly what it is. I have to convey an extremely valuable diamond bracelet to Amsterdam, and I have reason to believe that there will be an attempt to murder me, and to carry off the jewels before I can dispose of them. It happened in this way;" and he then related the history of the diamonds, the reason he was followed, and the suggestions that the Chief of the Bow Street detectives had given him.

"That is all right," Dick said, when he concluded. "It is a rum business, but certainly I will do what you ask me; and, what is more, I will go over with you to Amsterdam, and see the thing through. It is an interesting business, if it is a queer one."

"You know Philip Cotter?"

"Of course, Mark; why, I have met him with you several times."

"I will give you a note to ask him to allow you to open the case, and to take from it the bracelet; I don't know whether it is a regular gold mounted bracelet, or simply some diamonds that have been fastened together as a necklace; however, I suppose you are sure to recognize them; they are altogether exceptional stones, and will certainly be done up in a packet by themselves, whatever the others may be. Say that you will call in and take them away some other time, of which I will give him notice by letter. I will write the note now, and if you can spare time to go there today, all the better, for I shall be glad to get the business over; then I will come again tomorrow morning, and we will arrange the details of the plan. I will look in the shipping list, and see what vessels are sailing for Amsterdam. When we have fixed on one, it will be best for you to take our passages under any names you like, so that they are not our own. The detectives will take their passages separately, and so will Gibbons and whoever else goes with us."

"I will go at once, Mark."

"Don't go straight there, Dick; if these fellows are dogging my footsteps everywhere, and saw me coming here, they might take it into their heads to follow you."

"Oh, they can never be doing all that sort of thing; that's too much to believe. However, to please you, I will go into my club for a quarter of an hour. Shall I come round to your rooms this evening, or will you come here?"

"I think I will put off our meeting altogether until tomorrow morning. I have an engagement this evening that I cannot very well get out of."

"All right, Mark, just as you please. What time will you come round in the morning?"

"About the time you have finished breakfast. I will go now, and have a look at the shipping list."

They parted at the door, and Mark went to the coffee house where shipping matters were specially attended to, and where master mariners might often be met, conversing together, or with ship owners or merchants. On going through the list, he found that the fast sailing brig, Essex, of 204 tons, and mounting eight guns, would sail for Amsterdam in three days' time, and would take in goods for that place, and, should sufficient freight be obtained, for any other Dutch port. It was also announced that she had good accommodation for passengers. Information as to cargo could be obtained from her owners, on Tower Hill, or from the captain on board, between the hours of ten and twelve. Then, in small type, it was stated that the Essex was at present lying in the outside tier nearly opposite Anderson's wharf.

Mark made a note of all these particulars in his pocketbook, and then went to Ingleston's public house.

"Morning, Mr. Thorndyke," the man said; "haven't seen yer for the last month or so."

"No; I have been out of town. Do you expect Gibbons in here this morning?"

"It is about his time, sir, when he has nothing in particular to see about. Like a turn with the mauleys this morning?"

"Not this morning, Ingleston. I have got some engagements for the next day or two where I could not very well show myself with a black eye or a swelled nose; you have given me a good many of both."

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, when one stands up against a man who is as strong as one's self, and a mighty quick and hard hitter, you have got to hit sharp and quick too. You know my opinion, that there aint half a dozen men in the country could lick you if you had a proper training."

"I suppose you couldn't get away for a week, or maybe two?" he said.

"Lor' bless you, no, sir. Who would there be to keep order here at night? When I first came here I had not given up the ring, and I fought once or twice afterwards. But, Lor' bless you, I soon found that I had got either to give up the pub or the ring, and as I was doing a tidy business here, I thought it best to retire; since then business has grown. You see, boxing is more fashionable than it used to be, and there are very few nights when one don't have a dozen Corinthians in here—sometimes there are twice as many—either to see some of the new hands put on the mauleys, and judge for themselves how they are going to turn out, or maybe to arrange for a bout between some novice they fancy and one of the west countrymen. No, sir, I could not do it anyhow; I should not like to be away even for one night, though I know Gibbons would look after things for me; as for being away for a week, I could not do it for any money. No, sir, my fight with Jackson last year was the last time I shall ever go into the ring. I was a fool to go in for that, but I got taunted into it. I never thought that I should lick him, though, as you know, sir, I have licked a good many good men in my time, but Jackson is an out and out man, and he has got a lot more science than I ever had; my only chance was that I could knock him out of time or wear him down; but he was too quick on his pins for me to do the former. Ah, Gibbons, here is Mr. Thorndyke. He wants to see you; you had best go into my room behind the bar."

"Want to get hold of a fresh hand, Mr. Thorndyke?" Gibbons asked when they had sat down by the fire.

"No, Gibbons, it is another business altogether. Have you got anything particular to keep you in town for the next fortnight? It may not be over a week, but it may be over a fortnight."

"No, sir," the man said, after taking three or four draws at his long pipe. "No, sir; they won't want the ropes and stakes for another three weeks, so I am your man if you want me. What, is it for, sir?"

"Well, it is rather a curious affair, Gibbons. I have to take a very valuable bracelet over to Amsterdam, to sell there, and I have very strong reasons for believing that if some fellows get an inkling of it they will try to put me out of the way, and get hold of the diamonds. I want a couple of good men to go with me."

"Well sir, I should say you and me could lick a dozen ordinary chaps, without thinking anything of it."

"I dare say we could, Gibbons, in a stand up fight without weapons, but I fancy these fellows will not try that. They are foreigners, and the first thing they would try would be to put a dagger between my shoulders as I walked up and down on deck at night, or, more likely still, creep into my cabin and stab me while I was asleep. If the voyage were only to last one night I might sit up, pistol in hand, but if the wind is foul we might be a week. We are a pretty strong party. Mr. Chetwynd—you know him—is going with me; there will also be two runners from Bow Street, and I want you to take another good man with you. Of course, on board we shall separate. The Bow Street men will watch the passengers, and you and your mate will smoke your pipes and keep yourselves ready to join in if you see there is going to be a row. But I rather think that the passage will be a quiet one. At Amsterdam, until I have got rid of the diamonds I certainly should not care about going out into the street after nightfall without having you close behind me."

"All right, sir. I should say Tom Tring would be as good a man as one could get at the job. What is the money to be, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"Well, what do you think yourself, Gibbons?"

"I take it you pay all expenses, sir?"

"Yes, everything."

"Would five and twenty guineas a head be too much?"

"No; I will do better than that. I will give you five and twenty guineas each when we get to Amsterdam, and I will give you another twenty-five each if I come back here safe and sound."

"Well, I call that handsome. One could not want more, and you can rely on it that Tring will jump at the offer. He has not been able to get a fight on lately, and he is rather in low water."

"Well, you will both get up as quiet traders. I don't know what other passengers there may be, but I don't want them to know that you belong to the fancy."

"I twig, sir. We will get up quiet like."

"Then I want you tomorrow morning, Gibbons, to go down to Holmes & Moore, No. 67 Tower Street, and take two first class tickets to Amsterdam on board the Essex, which sails on Saturday. I don't know what the passage money will be, but this is sure to be enough; and we can settle accounts afterwards. You will find out what time of day she will start."

"All right, governor. I suppose you will be here again before that?"

"No, I don't suppose I shall, unless there is some change in the arrangements. If for any reasons Tring cannot go with you, you will get somebody else instead. You are sure that you quite understand your instructions? Here is the name and address of the people in Tower Street."

"All right, sir. You may make sure that when you go down to the ship you will see the two of us on board."

It needed but a few minutes at Bow Street to inform the chief of the arrangements that had been made.

"I have told off Chester and Malcolm; one of them shall go down and take their tickets. Of course, they will

take their passages in the fore cabin, as the danger, if there is danger, may come from there, and you will have your other two men with you aft. I fancy myself that there is hardly any chance of your being in any way troubled while on board. It will be considered that there will be a vastly greater chance of carrying out any plan they may have formed at Amsterdam than there would be on board a ship; you see, if there were any struggle whatever on board there would be no escape for them.

"For myself, of course I cannot give any opinion worth having in a matter so different from anything we have to do with here, and I should have unhesitatingly scoffed at the idea of anyone watching the movements of people for a long number of years in order to obtain the possession of jewels, however valuable. However, your uncle was well acquainted with the habits of Hindoos, and was not a man to be lightly alarmed; you yourself, after your year with us, should not be deceived in such a matter as being yourself followed; under these circumstances you are quite right to take every precaution, and as you pay well for the services of our two men, even if I had no belief whatever in the existence of danger to you, I should not feel justified in refusing to let you have them."

Having arranged these matters, Mark spent the rest of his time that day and the next at Islington.

"I am going across to Amsterdam on Saturday with a diamond bracelet to sell there."

Millicent looked at him in reproachful surprise.

"Why, surely, Mark, there can be no hurry about that. I think you might have stayed a little longer before running away."

"I should do so, you may be quite sure, Millicent, if I consulted my own inclinations, but I am bearing out your father's wishes. This bracelet is the most valuable of all the things he had, and I believe that it has some sort of history attached to it. He told my father that he had sent all the gems home principally to get these diamonds out of his possession; he said that as soon as my father got hold of the things, he was to take the diamonds straight over to Amsterdam and sell them there, for he considered that they were much too valuable to be kept in the house, and that it was possible that some of the Hindoos might endeavor to get possession of them. At the time he spoke he believed that my father would, at his death, go to the bank and get the jewels, as of course he would have done if he had known where to find them. My father promised him that they should be taken to Amsterdam at once; and although so many years have passed since his death, I think I am bound to carry out that promise."

"I have never been able to understand, Mark, how it was that my father, when he gave all these instructions about me and these jewels and so on, did not at the same time tell uncle where to find them."

"It was a fancy of his; he was in very bad health, and he thought so much over these diamonds that it had become almost a sort of mania with him that not only was there danger in their possession, but that he was watched night and day wherever he went. He thought, even, if he whispered where the hiding place was to be discovered it might be heard; therefore he deferred telling it until too late. Of course all this was but a fancy on his part, although it is probable enough that the possession of the diamonds was a source of danger in India, and might have been a source of danger here had any thieves known that such valuable gems were kept in a private house or carried about. At any rate, I shall be glad to be free of the responsibility; and although, naturally, I don't like leaving you at the present time, I think it best to carry out your father's instructions at once, and to get them off my mind altogether. Dick Chetwynd is going with me, so it will be a pleasant little trip."

"Well, I am glad he is going with you, Mark; for although I know well enough that they could never be watching for those diamonds to turn up all these years, I feel sure I should fidget and worry if you were alone. You are not going to take the others with you?"

"No, only this particular bracelet. None of the others are exceptionally valuable, so far as I know. At any rate, your father did not specially allude to them. I have no doubt that there are some really valuable jewels among them, for my uncle prided himself on being a judge of precious stones, and as he invested a large amount of money in them, they are, no doubt, worth a great deal. Still, I don't suppose there will be any difficulty in selling them here, and, at any rate, I don't want to be delayed at Amsterdam by having to sell perhaps fifty or a hundred pieces of jewelry; any time will do for that. I fancy that I ought to be able to dispose of the bracelet in three or four days at the outside. I have got from Bow Street a list of all the principal diamond merchants in Amsterdam. That is a matter of great interest to the force, as almost all precious stones stolen in this country are sent across there, and if there is any special jewel robbery we send over a list of all the articles taken to the merchants there. As a rule, that would not prevent their dealing in them, but there are some who will not touch things that have been dishonestly come by, and we occasionally get hints that enable us to lay hands upon thieves over there."

"I hate to hear you say 'the force,' Mark, just as if you were still a detective; it is bad enough that you should have belonged to it, even for the purpose you did; but you have done with it now."

"Yes; but, you see, it is rather difficult to get out of the habit when one has been for over a year constantly at work at a thing. This will be my last absence on business, Millicent; henceforward I shall be able to be always with you."

"Well, now that I know what you have been doing all this time, Mark, I must admit that you have been very good to have been with us as much as you have. I often used to wonder how you passed your time. Of course I knew that you were trying to find that man out, but it did not seem to me that you could be always at that, and I never dreamt that you had become a regular detective. I am very glad I did not know it till a short time before you gave it up. In the first place, I should have been horrified, and, in the second place, I should have been constantly uneasy about you. However, as this is to be the last time, I will let you go without grumbling."

"By the way, Millicent, what do you wish me to say about our engagement? I don't see that there is the slightest occasion for us to keep up the farce of your being Miss Conyers any longer. You cannot be married under a false name, you know, and now that you have escaped what your father was so afraid of, and are going to be married for love and not for money, I don't see why there should be any more mystery about it."

"But how would you account for my having been called Conyers all this time?"

"I should simply tell the truth; that your father, having a great fear that you might be married for money, left the estate to my father, to be held by him until you came of age, and that it was at his particular request that you were brought up simply as his ward, and dropped the family name and passed by your two Christian names. I should say that we have all been aware for a long time of the facts of the case, and I should also say that your father had left a very large fortune in addition to the estate between us, and had expressed a hope that we should, when the time came, marry each other."

"Then people will think that we have only married to keep the fortune together, Mark."

"Well, my dear, I don't suppose there are a great many people who will be interested in the matter, and those who get to know you will see at once that as far as I am concerned, there was no great difficulty in falling in with your father's ideas, while, on the other hand, they may consider that you made a noble sacrifice of yourself in agreeing to the plan."

"Nonsense, sir. I am not going to flatter you, as no doubt you expect; but, at any rate, I am perfectly content with my share of the bargain."

"Well, there is one thing, Millicent; all who knew us down at Reigate will say that it is a very sensible arrangement, and will be glad to know that I shall retain the estate they have hitherto considered to be mine. Well, then, you agree to my mentioning to my intimate friends that you are my cousin, and that we are engaged?"

"Yes, I suppose it is the best thing, Mark, and, as you say, I must marry under my proper name, and it is just as well to get the talk over down at Reigate now, as for it all to come as a wonder when we are married."

"When is that going to be, Millicent?"

"Oh, I don't know; of course it will be a long time before we even think of that."

"I beg your pardon, I am thinking of it now, and I can see no reason whatever why it should be delayed. We know each other well enough, I should think, and there is no probability of our changing our minds on discovering all sorts of faults, that we never dreamt, in each other. I may be away for a fortnight, and I would suggest that you had better make your preparations at once, so that we can be married a fortnight after I come back."

"You say that there is no fear of our discovering faults in each other. I can assure you that I have just discovered a very serious fault, namely, that you are altogether too masterful, too bent upon having your own way. I know you always were so when you were a boy, but I hoped you had grown out of it; now I see that I was altogether mistaken. Seriously, Mark, your proposal is absurd."

"Where does the absurdity come in, Millicent?"

"Well, everywhere," she said gravely.

"Which in the present case means nowhere," he said. "Do you mean to tell me, Millicent, that in this town there are not a hundred dressmakers, each of whom could turn you out a wedding dress and as many other garments as you can possibly require in the course of a month, or even if that effort were too stupendous, that you could not divide the work among a dozen of them?"

"Well, I don't say that could not be done," Millicent admitted reluctantly.

"Well, what other objection is there?"

"Well, you see, one does not, like to be hustled in such a matter as this, Mark. One likes to think it all over and to realize it to one's self."

"Well, dear, you will have a fortnight while I am away to think and to realize as much as you like. I can see no advantage myself in waiting a single day longer than there is a necessity for; I have been for the last year coming here merely as a visitor, and I want to take possession of you and have you all to myself. I suppose Mrs. Cunningham will be coming in presently, and I will put the matter to her. If she says you cannot be ready in a month I must give you another week, but I don't think that she will say so. By the way, how about her?"

"I was thinking of that last night, Mark. It would be very lonely for her to live by herself now, and you see she has always been as a mother to me."

"Quite so, dear; and I am sure that I should have no objection to her coming back to Crowswood, and living there as a friend, and helping you in the housekeeping."

"Thank you very much, Mark; I should like that in every way. You see, I know nothing whatever about housekeeping; and besides, when you are out, it would be a great thing to have her with me, for it would be very lonely by myself in that big house."

"Well, we will have her there, by all means, dear, if she likes to come; you had better talk it over with her. Ah! here she is."

"We were just talking over the time it will take Millicent to get ready," he said, "and I shall be glad of your opinion. I have been telling her that I am going away for a fortnight, and have proposed that the marriage should come off a fortnight later. I cannot see any use in delay, and she does not either; at least, I suppose not, for the only objection she has advanced is that there will be but a short time in which to get her things ready. That strikes me as being all nonsense. I could get things ready for ten weddings in that time. What do you think?"

"I see no reason for delay," Mrs. Cunningham said; "and assuredly a month ought to be sufficient to get everything made."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cunningham; then we can consider that settled, Millicent!"

"I call this tyranny, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent protested. "He says he proposes that we shall be married in a month; it is not a proposal at all, it is an order. If he had wanted me in such a hurry he might have said so a year ago, and now that he has made up his mind at last, he wants everything done in a hurry."

"It is the nature of men, my dear; they are all alike in that respect. I think you had better make up your

mind to it, especially as I have no doubt in this case the order is not a very unpleasant one."

"You are too bad, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent said. "I made sure that I should find you on my side, and it seems you have gone over altogether to the enemy."

"Where are you going to?" asked Mrs. Cunningham of Mark.

"I am going across to Amsterdam to sell that bracelet. My uncle expressed a particular wish to my father that he should do so immediately it came into his possession. Dick Chetwynd is going over with me, and if the weather is fair it will be a pleasant trip."

"Where are you thinking of going after the marriage?"

"We have not talked it over yet. My own idea is that, as neither of us has been abroad, we might as well take this opportunity for seeing something of the Continent. Of course we cannot go to France, things are in too disturbed a state there; but we might go to Brussels, and then into Germany, and perhaps as far as Vienna, and then down into Italy; but of course, if Millicent prefers it, we will simply take a tour through England and Scotland."

"Oh, I am glad that I am to have some voice in the matter," Millicent said. "However, I should like the tour you propose very much, Mark. I have often thought that I should like to see Italy above all places."

"Well, then, we will consider that settled. And now, what are you going to do for today?"

CHAPTER XIX.

The Essex was to sail at eleven o'clock. Half an hour before that time Mark's hackney coach drew up at the wharf. Ten minutes later Dick Chetwynd, who had, like Mark, driven by a circuitous route, and had made several stoppages, joined him, and as they shook hands slipped a parcel into his hand, and this Mark at once pocketed, and buttoned his coat up tightly; then hailing a boat, they went on board together; they had sent their luggage on the previous evening. On getting on board Mark saw the two prize fighters walking up and down the deck aft. They were quietly dressed, and save for their size would have attracted no attention, and would have been taken for two countrymen on their way to Holland on business.

The two detectives were seated forward, their appearance being that of two quiet business men, commercial travelers or small traders. The two friends first went below, and saw to the cabin which they were to share, and found their luggage was all there. Then they returned on deck. Four or five other passengers were standing watching the last bales of goods coming on board. The tide was just on the turn, and a quarter of an hour later the warps were thrown off, and some of the sails hoisted, and the Essex began to move through the water.

"Look there, Dick!" Mark exclaimed. "Do you see that boat lying on its oars in the middle of the stream? That man sitting in the stern is a foreigner, either from Southern Europe or from India."

"He is certainly a dark man, Mark. Still, that may be only a coincidence."

"It is rather a curious one," Mark said. "We are too far off to see his features, but he is apparently watching us off. There, the oars are dipping into the water, now he sees that we are fairly under way."

"Well, Mark, I shall begin to think that you are right. I am bound to say that hitherto I thought that it was ridiculous to suppose that you could have been watched as you thought, and that you had got these diamonds on your brain till you had really become fanciful. However, it certainly looks as if you were right; but even if you were, how on earth could they have found out that we were going by this ship?"

"That is more than I can tell; if they have been watching me they must have known that I was intimate with you; they have seen me come out of Cotter's Bank, and afterwards enter your lodgings; they would feel sure that I had heard that there would be danger connected with the diamonds, and might suppose that I should get some friend to take them from the bank, and may have followed your movements as well as mine. In that case they would have found out that you also went to Cotter's Bank; may have followed you to Tower Street, and found out that you had taken a passage for two to Amsterdam. They may again have seen you go to the bank this morning and have guessed that you had the diamonds about you, and then seeing us together on the wharf would feel pretty certain that it was so. One of them may have hired that boat and watched the Essex to see that neither of us went on shore again."

"Now they see that we are off they will know that their game is up," Chetwynd said.

"I am not so sure of that, Dick; there are craft going every day to Antwerp and Flushing, and for anything we know some of them may be on board a craft already dropping down like ourselves by this tide. But even if we had twelve hours' start, by landing, say at Flushing, they would have time to cross by land to Amsterdam and get there before us."

"Yes, I suppose they would; anyhow, it is pretty certain that we shall not be troubled on the voyage."

"Yes, I never thought there was much danger of that, because even if they were on board they would see that you and I, being always together, could not be got rid of without an alarm being given."

Not until they were passing Greenwich did either of the detectives come near Mark, then as he and Dick were standing by the bulwarks, looking at the hospital, Chester strolled across the deck and, pointing to the building as if asking him some question about it, said:

"There is a colored man forward, dressed as a sailor."

"Is that so?" Mark said. "I see no one aft here who looks suspicious, and I don't think they will try anything till we get to Amsterdam. There was a colored man in a boat watching us as we set sail."

"I saw him, sir. Can he get to Amsterdam before us?"

"Yes, I have no doubt he can; if he lands at Flushing or Antwerp, and takes a post chaise or a diligence, I

should say he could get there twenty-four hours before us. Certainly he could do so if he landed at The Hague, as we have to go a long way round to get into the Zuyder Zee. That is where the real danger will be; still you had better keep a sharp lookout on the man forward."

No more was said. Mark was not long in getting into conversation with the other passengers aft, and later on strolled forward with Dick, asking the sailors some questions as to what sort of passage they were likely to have, and how the wind suited. The men agreed that unless the wind shifted they would not be likely to make a quick passage.

"The wind is northeasterly," one of them said. "We can only just lay our course now, and it will be dead against us in some of the reaches. Still, I think we shall manage to make down to sea with only a tack or two, but when we are once fairly out of the river it will be a long leg and a short one, and going up round the Texel it will be dead against us. Except that it would be a bit worse if it had a little more east in it, it is about as foul a wind as we could have, and I don't see any sign of a change, worse luck."

Presently, moving about among them, he got next to Gibbons.

"I don't think we shall have any trouble on board," he said; "if there is any, it will be after we have landed. But you can keep an eye on that foreign sailor standing alone there up in the bows."

"All right, sir; if you like, I can manage to get into a quarrel with him, and can warrant that he won't get out of his berth before it is time to go ashore."

"No, I would leave him alone, Gibbons; as long as he is forward he can do no harm; but if you see him working his way aft, after it gets dark, it will do him no harm if you manage to stumble against him and give him a clout on the head."

"All right, sir; if I hit him once he won't want another. The fellow seems quiet enough, and as far as strength goes he don't look stronger than a girl."

After chatting for some time longer Mark and Dick Chetwynd went aft again. The Essex did not put into any intermediate port, and it was only on the sixth day after sailing that she approached Amsterdam. The voyage had passed off without any incident except that at nine o'clock one evening there had been a slight noise on deck and the sound of a fall. The friends went up at once. Several of the sailors had run aft, and Gibbons was explaining matters to them.

"I was walking up and down the deck," he said, "when I saw this chap staring down through the skylight, and I said to him, 'I don't call it good manners to be prying down into your betters' cabin.' He did not answer or move, so I gave him a push, when he turned upon me like a wild cat, and drew his knife from his girdle. There it is, on the other side of the deck. As I did not want daylight put into me, I just knocked him down."

"Served him right," one of the sailors said. "He had no right to come aft at all, and if he drew his knife on you, you were quite right in laying him out. But you must have hit him mighty hard, for you have knocked the life pretty near out of him. Well, we may as well carry him forward and throw a bucket of water over him. That is the worst of these foreign chaps; they are always so ready with their knives. However, I don't think he will be likely to try his hand on an Englishman again."

Mark and his friend went below again. In the morning Mark asked one of the sailors if the foreigner was much hurt.

"Well, he is a good bit hurt, sir. That big chap looks as strong as a bullock, and his blow has flattened the foreign chap's nose. He cannot see out of his eyes this morning, and is keeping his bunk. They cannot stand a blow, those foreign chaps; but I don't suppose that any of us would have stood such a blow as that, without feeling it pretty heavy. The man who hit him is quite sorry this morning that he hit him quite so hot, but, as he says, when a fellow draws a knife on you, you have not got much time for thinking it over, and you have got to hit quick and hard. I told him he needn't be sorry about it. I consider when a fellow draws a knife that hanging aint too bad for him, whether he gets it into a man or not."

There was a growl of assent from two or three sailors standing round, for in those days the use of the knife was almost unknown in England, and was abhorrent to Englishmen, both as being cowardly and unfair, and as being a purely foreign crime.

"It will be dark before we get alongside," Mark said to the two detectives. "Do you two walk first; we will keep just behind you, and the others shall follow as close as they can keep to us. If anyone is looking out for us they will see that we are a strong party, and that it would be no good to attack us, for even if they were to stab me it would not be possible to search me for the diamonds when I am with a party like this."

It was indeed quite dark when the brig brought up outside a tier of vessels lying by the wharf. A few oil lamps burning by the quay showed that there were a good many people still sauntering about. The party waited until the rest of the passengers had landed. They learned from one of those who knew the place that the hotel to which they were going was but three or four hundred yards away, and obtained directions how to find it.

"Now we will go," Mark said. "Gibbons, you had better keep a sharp lookout on your own account. That fellow you knocked down may try to put a knife into you."

"I will keep a sharp lookout, sir, never you fear."

"I think, Tring, you had better watch Gibbons; he is more in danger than I am. Have you seen the man go on shore?"

"Yes, he was the very first to cross onto the next vessel," Tring said.

The loungers on the quay had gathered together to watch the passengers as they left the ship, and by the dim light from one of the oil lamps it could be seen that the majority of them were of the roughest class. As they were passing through them a man with a cry of rage sprang at Gibbons with an uplifted knife. Tring's fist struck him under the ear as he was in the act of striking, and he fell like a log. There was a cry of "Down with them!" and a rush of a score of men, most of whom were armed with heavy bludgeons.

The party was at once broken up, heavy blows were exchanged, the two pugilists rolling their assailants over like ninepins, but receiving several heavy blows from their assailants' clubs. A rush of five or six men

separated Mark from the others. Those in front of him he struck down, but a moment later received a tremendous blow on the back of the head which struck him to the ground unconscious. His companions were all too busy defending themselves against their assailants to notice what had been done, and as the attack had taken place in the center of the roadway behind the quay, there was no lamp, and the fight was taking place in almost total darkness.

By this time many people had run up at the sound of the fray. A minute later there was a cry that the watch were coming, and four or five men with lanterns emerged from one of the streets leading down to the quays, and hurried towards the spot. The fight at once ceased, the men who had attacked mingled with the crowd, and when the watch came up they found the five Englishmen clustered together and ten or twelve men lying on the ground.

The instant that the fight had ceased Dick Chetwynd asked, "Where is Mr. Thorndyke?"

No answer was given. The other four men simultaneously uttered exclamations of alarm. The crowd was thinning fast as the watch came up.

"What is all this about?" one of them asked in Dutch.

"Do any of you speak English?" Dick asked.

"I do," one of them said.

"We landed five minutes ago from that craft," continued Dick, "and as we came across we were attacked by a band of ruffians. An Englishman, one of our party, is missing."

"Whose bodies are these?" the watchman asked, raising his lantern and pointing to them.

"Perhaps Mr. Thorndyke is among them," Dick Chetwynd said.

The fallen figures were examined by the light of the lanterns. Mark was not among them. The watchmen uttered an exclamation of astonishment as they looked at the men's faces.

"What did you strike them with?" the one who spoke first asked.

"Struck them with our fists, of course," Gibbons replied. "They will do well enough; you need not bother about them, they will come round again presently. The question is, Where is Mr. Thorndyke?"

The whole of the lookers on had dispersed, each fearing that he might be charged with taking part in the outrage.

"This is a very serious matter," Chetwynd said. "We have every reason to believe that the attack was premeditated, for the gentleman who is missing was known to have some valuables on him; all these fellows ought to be taken and locked up and made to give an account of themselves. We are going to the Hotel d'Hollande where you can find us at any time. I dare say some of these scoundrels are known to you, and that may give you a clew as to where Mr. Thorndyke is.

"I have but little hope that he will be found alive; no doubt he has been stabbed and his body carried off so that they can search his clothes at their leisure. We came in a strong party to prevent the risk of an attack upon Mr. Thorndyke. Here is my card. It is of no use our attempting to search by ourselves, but if you will get these fellows taken to the watch house, and will call at the hotel, we will join your party and help you to search the places you think he has most likely been taken to."

"I think, sir, you had better come with me to the watch house, and see the Lieutenant, and tell him what has happened."

"I will just take my friends to the hotel, and shall be back from there before you have got men to take these fellows away. If you go to one of those ships and borrow a bucket, empty it over each of them; you will find that will bring them to!"

As soon as they arrived at the hotel Dick ordered a private sitting room and five bedrooms.

"We have made a terrible mess of this, lads," he said gloomily. "I don't say that it is any of our faults, but it is a horrible affair. I have not the least doubt that Mr. Thorndyke has been killed, and it is no satisfaction to us that we have pretty nearly done for a dozen of those scoundrels."

"I would not have had it happen for a hundred pounds, nor a thousand, sir. If there had been daylight we could have licked a score of them in spite of their bludgeons, but they came with such a rush at us that we got separated before we knew where we were. I don't think that it was our fault. I feel as much ashamed as if I had thrown up the sponge in the ring at the end of the first round. To think that we came over here, four of us, and yourself, sir, on purpose to take care of Mr. Thorndyke, all well save a few knocks with those sticks, and Mr. Thorndyke killed and carried off before we have been on shore five minutes. A better young fellow I never put on the gloves with;" and Gibbons passed the back of his hand across his eyes.

"Well, I must be off now," Chetwynd said. "I feel heartbroken over it. I have known him since we were boys together; and what makes it worse is that only three days ago he became engaged to be married. How we are going to take the news back God only knows!"

As he hurried down the street towards the wharf he saw a number of lanterns coming towards him, and ten or twelve watchmen came along escorting the prisoners, many of whose faces were covered with blood; then came four other watchmen carrying a body on a stretcher.

"One of them is dead," the watchman who had before spoken said to Dick. "A foreign seaman, a Lascar I should say, from his color; we found an open knife by his side."

"That is the man who began the fray," Chetwynd said. "He was on the point of stabbing one of my companions when another hit him under the ear."

"What!" the watchman said. "He must have been hit like the kick of a horse. All these prisoners seem to have been struck but once; two of them cannot speak. I think their jaws are broken; four of them have broken noses, and another has had all his front teeth knocked out, while the others are nearly as bad."

"I see you have brought with you some of their bludgeons," Dick said, pointing to one of the watchmen carrying a great bundle of sticks over his shoulder.

"Yes, sir, twenty-three of them; it certainly seems to show that it was a planned thing. Most of these fellows'

faces are so bruised that I cannot say who they are at present, but two or three are known as the worst ruffians in the city, and I have no doubt we shall find that they all belong to the same gang."

By this time they had arrived at the watch house, a building of considerable size; the prisoners were first lodged in a strong room with barred windows and very heavy doors, and then the watchman went with Chetwynd to the Lieutenant's room. The officer had just returned, having hurried down with a reinforcement to the wharf as soon as he had heard of the fray, and tried to obtain some information from the people who had gathered round, attracted by the lanterns of the watch. He had already learned from the watchmen all they knew about the affair. As he spoke English well, he at once addressed Dick:

"This is a serious affair, sir."

"A very serious affair, for, indeed, I am afraid that my dearest friend has been murdered."

"Will you kindly give me the particulars?" the officer said, sitting down to the table with a pen in his hand.

Dick Chetwynd told him the story of how Mr. Thorndyke, having some very valuable jewels that he wished to dispose of, and believing that he would be attacked by a band of robbers, had asked him to accompany him, and had brought four detective officers and pugilists to protect him against any sudden attack.

"Ah, that accounts for the terrible blows that these fellows received," the officer said. "And your friend; was he a strong man?"

"He was a man exceptionally strong, and a match for either of the pugilists that he brought over. I have no doubt that he was stabbed, though of course he might have been brought down by a blow from one of the bludgeons. He must have been completely insensible when carried off.

"The watchman here tells me that three or four of these ruffians are known, and perhaps if you will give orders for the blood to be washed off the others' faces some more may be recognized and prove an aid in enabling you to form an idea where Mr. Thorndyke has been carried. I trust that you will send out a party to search for him. I and the four men with me will gladly join them, and may be of use if any resistance is offered."

The Lieutenant at once gave orders to the watchman to go down and see that the prisoners all washed their faces. As soon as he returned with the report that this was done the officer went down with Dick Chetwynd to examine them. Three or four of the men with lanterns also went in. Eight out of eleven men were recognized; the other three, whose features were so swollen that they could not see out of their eyes, could not be made out, but their companions, on being questioned, gave their names.

"They all belong to a gang of wharf thieves and plunderers. They live in a slum near the water. I will have men posted in the lanes leading to it, and will myself go with you to see that a search is made of every house; but first I will try to find out from these fellows where he was to be taken.

"Now, my men," he said, "anyone of you who will tell me where one of the party you attacked was to be taken to will find things made easy for him at his trial."

None of the men spoke for a minute, and then one said:

"We know nothing about it; how should we, when we were all knocked stupid?"

"No, but you might know where he was to be taken."

"I know nothing about that. We all got word to mind we were on the wharf when a brig, that was seen coming up, came alongside, and that we were to have a hundred francs each for attacking some passengers as they landed. Six of them came along together, and one said, 'These are the men.' A black sailor came up first and spoke to two or three men in some foreign language. I don't know who the men were; it was too dark to see their faces. It was one of them who gave the order. It seemed an easy job enough when there were twenty-five of us with heavy sticks, but it didn't turn out so. I only know that I hit one big fellow a blow that ought to have knocked him down, and the next moment there was a crash, and I don't know anything more about it until a lot of water was thrown over me and one of the watch helped me to my feet. I don't know whether the others know more than I do, but I don't think they do."

All the others protested at once that they were equally ignorant. They had gone to earn a hundred francs. They had been told that the money was all right, but who found it or who were the men to be attacked they had not the least idea.

"How was it that you all had these bludgeons—there were no knives found on any of you?"

The man who spoke before said:

"The order was 'No knives,' and before we went down to the wharf each of us was searched and a stick given to us. I suppose from that, that whoever paid for the job didn't want blood to be shed; it suited us well enough, for it was a job there was sure to be a row over, and I don't suppose any of us wanted to put his head in a noose. I know that we all said to each other as we went out that it did not want such sticks as we had to give a man a thrashing, but the man who hired us, whoever he was, knew his customers better than we did."

The officer translated the man's words as they were spoken to Dick, and on hearing the last speech, the latter said:

"Then there is still hope that Thorndyke may only have been stunned; that is a greater reason for our losing no time in looking for him, for I am afraid that they won't hesitate to kill him when they have got him hidden away."

"I expect," the Lieutenant said, "they thought that if any of the watch came upon them as they were carrying him off, they might be at once arrested if it was found that they were carrying a dead man, whilst if he were only stunned they would say that it was a drunken comrade who had fallen and knocked his head against something. I agree with you, sir; we had better start on our search at once."

"Will you pass the Hotel d'Hollande? If not, I will run and bring my men."

"Yes, I will go that way; it will be no further."

Dick walked on fast.

"We have no news of him," he said, as he entered the room where the four men were anxiously awaiting

him, "but we and the watch are now going to search the slums where the men who were taken prisoners all live; come down now, and I will tell you what I have learned, before the others come up.

"There is reason for believing that he was not stabbed," he went on, as they reached the street, "for the men all say that they were armed only with clubs, and that the strictest orders were given that none were to carry knives, therefore there is little doubt that he was at the time only stunned. But I am bound to say that this gives me very small ground for hoping that we may find him alive. I fear they only stunned him, so that they might carry him safely to their haunts, for if stopped they could say that it was a drunken comrade, who had fallen and hurt himself. I fear that when they get him into one of their dens they will make short work of him, therefore it is clear that there is not a moment to be lost. Ah, here comes the watch."

There were eight men with the Lieutenant.

"I have already sent off ten others," he said as he joined Chetwynd, "to watch the lanes, and let no one go in or out. I thought it best not to lose a moment about that, for when the men see that we have learned from the others where the gang came from, and have closed the avenues of escape, they will hesitate about murdering their prisoner if he was still alive when my men got there."

In a quarter of an hour they arrived at the end of a narrow lane, where two watchmen were standing with lanterns.

"You have seen nor heard nothing?" the Lieutenant asked him.

"No, sir, we have not seen a man moving in the lane."

"There is just one hope that we might be in time," the Lieutenant said, as he went on down the lane, "and that is, that the fellows when they gather will be so dismayed at finding that nearly half their number are missing, and knowing that some of them are pretty sure to make a clean breast of it, they will hesitate to complete their crime. It is one thing to rob a man in the streets, quite another to murder him in cold blood. There is likely to be a good deal of difference of opinion among them, some of the more desperate being in favor of carrying the thing through, but others are sure to be against it, and nothing may have been done. You may be sure that the sight of my men at the end of the lanes will still further alarm them. I have no doubt the news that we have surrounded the district has already been circulated, and that if alive now he is safe, for they will think it is better to suffer a year or two's imprisonment than to be tried for murder. We are sure to make some captures, for it is probable that several of the others will bear marks of the fight. Each man we take we will question separately; one or other of them is pretty safe to be ready to say where your friend was taken to if I promise him that he shan't be prosecuted."

Every house in the district was searched from top to bottom. Six men; with cut and bruised faces, were found shamming sleep, and were separately questioned closely; all declared that they knew nothing whatever of anyone being carried there.

"It is of no use your denying your share in the affair," the Lieutenant said. "Your comrades have confessed that there were twenty-five of you hired to carry out this, and that you received a hundred francs each. Now, if this gentleman is not found, it will be a hanging matter for some of you, and you had better tell all you know. If you will tell us where he is, I will promise that you shan't be included in the list of those who will be prosecuted."

The reply, although put in different words, was identical with that of the prisoners.

"We had nothing to do with carrying him off; we were hired only to knock the men down who were pointed out to us; not a word was said about carrying them off. He may have been carried off, that we cannot say, but he has certainly not been brought here, and none of us had anything to do with it."

Morning was breaking before the search was concluded. The detectives, accustomed as they were to visit the worst slums of London, were horrified at the crowding, the squalor, and the misery of the places they entered.

"My opinion. Mr. Chetwynd," Gibbons growled, "is that the best thing to do would be to put a score of soldiers at the end of all these lanes, and then to burn the whole place down, and make a clean sweep of it. I never saw such a villainous looking crew in all my life. I have been in hopes all along that some of them would resist; it would have been a real pleasure to have let fly at them."

"They are a villainous set of wretches, Gibbons, but they may not be all criminals."

"Well; I don't know, sir; but I know that if I were on a jury, and any of the lot were in the dock, I should not want to hear any evidence against them; their faces are enough to hang them."

At last the search was over, and they were glad indeed when they emerged from the lanes and breathed the pure air outside, for all the Englishmen felt sick at the poisonous air of the dens they had entered. The prisoners, as they were taken, had been sent off to the watch house.

"I begin to think that the story these fellows tell is a true one, Mr. Chetwynd," the Lieutenant said, "and that they had nothing to do with carrying your friend off. In the first place, they all tell the same story: that in itself would not be much, as that might have been settled beforehand; but it is hardly likely that one of the lot would not have been ready to purchase his life by turning on the others. There is very little honor among thieves; and as they know that we have taken their mates—for no doubt we were watched as we marched them up the town—they would make sure that someone would turn traitor, and would think they might as well be beforehand. I fancy that the men, whoever they are, who hired this gang to attack you, carried out that part of the business themselves."

"I am afraid that is so," Dick agreed; "and I fear in that case that he is in even worse hands than if these ruffians here had taken him."

"Well, sir, can you furnish us with any clew?"

"The only clew is that they were most probably dark men. That man who was killed was undoubtedly one of them. I should say that they would probably be got up as foreign sailors."

"Well, that is something to go upon, at any rate. I will send round men at once to all the places by the quays where sailors board, and if three or four of them have been together at any place we are sure to hear of it,

and the moment I have news I will send to your hotel."

"Thank you; I don't see that we can be of any use at present, but you will find us ready to turn out again the moment we hear that you have news."

When the party returned to the hotel they sat talking the matter over for upwards of an hour. All were greatly discouraged, for they had little hope indeed of ever learning what had become of Mark. As they had started out Dick had told the night porter that he could not say what time they might return, but that before the house closed he must have a couple of bottles of spirits and some tumblers sent up to their sitting room, together with some bread and cold meat, for that they might not return until morning, and would need something before they went to bed, as they had had nothing since their dinner, at one o'clock.

"It wants something to take the taste of that place out of one's mouth," Tring said to Dick, as, directly they entered, he poured some spirits into the glasses. "I feel as queer as if I had been hocused."

All, indeed, were feeling the same, and it was not until they had eaten their supper and considerably lowered the spirits in the two bottles that they began to talk. The two detectives were the principal speakers, and both of these were of opinion that the only shadow of hope remaining rested upon Mark himself.

"Unless they finished him before he came round," Malcolm said, "they would find him an awkward customer to deal with. Mr. Thorndyke has got his head screwed on right, and if, as you say, they are Indians, Mr. Chetwynd, I should think that if he once comes fairly round, unless he is tied up, he will be a match for them, even with their knives. That is the only chance I see. Even if the watch do find out that three or four foreign sailors have been at one of the boarding houses and did not turn up last night, I don't think we shall be much nearer. They will probably only have carried him some distance along the wharf, got to some quiet place where there is a big pile of wood, or something of that sort, then put a knife into him, searched for the diamonds, which you may be sure they would find easily enough wherever he had hidden them, and then make off, most likely for Rotterdam or The Hague; they could be at either of these places by this time, and will mostly likely divide the diamonds and get on board different craft, bound for London or Hull, or indeed any other port, and then ship for India. From what Mr. Thorndyke said they did not want the diamonds to sell, but only to carry back to some temple from which they were stolen twenty years ago."

Chester was of precisely the same opinion.

"I am afraid, Mr. Chetwynd," he added, as they rose to go to their rooms for two or three hours' sleep, "the only news that we shall get in the morning is that Mr. Thorndyke's body has been found."

CHAPTER XX.

At ten o'clock a constable came with a message from the Lieutenant to Mr. Chetwynd that he would be glad if he would come down to the watch house. Dick did not wake the others, but freshening himself up by pouring a jug of water over his head, went at once with the constable.

"Have you news?" he asked eagerly as he entered.

"Yes, the men returned an hour ago. At four of the houses they went to a foreign sailor had been lodging there for the last day or so, but yesterday afternoon all had paid their reckoning and left. Then the idea struck me that it would be as well to ask if they had been seen on the quays, and I sent off a fresh batch of men to make inquiries. A quarter of an hour ago one of them came back with the news that he had learned from a sailor that he had noticed a dark colored foreigner, whom he took to be a Lascar sailor, talking to a boatman, and that they had rowed off together to a barge anchored a short way out; he did not notice anything more about him.

"Now, I should not be at all surprised if the fellow went off to arrange with the bargeman for a passage for himself and four or five comrades to some port or other, it might be anywhere. It would make no difference to them where the barge was bound for. No doubt he saw the man again after the brig was sighted, and told him that they should come on board soon after it got dark, and told him to have the boat at the stairs. You see, in that case they might not have carried Mr. Thorndyke above fifty yards. They would probably get him on board as one of their party who had been drunk. The barge, no doubt, got under way about nine o'clock, which is the hour when the tide was high last night, and during the night the Indians could easily drop your friend overboard—and may even have done so before they got under way, which would have been the easiest thing to do. There would have been no one at the helm, and they could have chosen a moment when the crew, probably only three, were below. I am afraid that this is not a cheering lookout, but I have little doubt that it is the correct one.

"I have told my men to find out what barge was lying at the spot the sailor pointed out, and if we discover her name, which we are likely to be able to do, there will be no difficulty in finding out to whom she belongs and where she was bound for. Then we can follow it up; though there is little likelihood of our finding the murderers still on board."

"Thank you very much for the pains that you are taking, sir," Dick said. "I am afraid that there is no shadow of hope of finding my poor friend alive. I have no doubt that the thing has happened exactly as you suggest; the whole course of the affair shows how carefully it was planned, and I have no hope that any scruple about taking life would be felt by them for a moment. I will go back to the hotel, and I shall be obliged if you will let me know as soon as you obtain any clew as to the barge."

An hour and a half later the officer himself came round to the room where Dick Chetwynd and the two pugilists were sitting. The detectives had started out to make inquiries on their own account, taking with them a hanger on at the hotel who spoke English.

"The barge's name was the Julie," he said; "she has a cargo on board for Rotterdam."

"I think the best thing would be to take a carriage, and drive there at once," Dick said.

"You can do that, sir, but I don't think you will be there before the barge; they have something like eighteen hours' start for you, and the wind has been all the time in the east. I should say that they would be there by eight o'clock this morning."

"No, I don't know that it would be of any use, but at least it would be doing something. I suppose we could be there in four hours?"

"From that to five; but even if the barge were delayed, and you got there first, which is very unlikely, I do not think that there would be the remotest chance of finding those villains on board. I reckon they would, as we agreed, launch the body overboard even before they got under way here, and they may either have landed again before the craft got under way, pretending that they had changed their minds, and then walked across to The Hague or to Haarlem, or have gone on with the barge for two hours, or even until daybreak. If by that time they were near Rotterdam, they may have stayed on board till they got there; if not, they may have landed, and finished the journey on foot, but they would certainly not have stopped on board after six or seven o'clock this morning. They would calculate that possibly we might get on their track at an early hour this morning, and set out in pursuit at once.

"However, it will doubtless be a satisfaction to you to be moving, and at least you will be able to overhaul the barge when you get to Rotterdam, and to hear what the boatmen say. The chances are they will not even have noticed that one of the men who came on board was missing. The men may very well have made up a long bundle, carried it on shore with them, or three of them may have carried a fourth ashore; and in the dark the bargemen were unlikely to have noticed that the number was less than when they came on board. However, it will be something for you to find out when and where the fellows landed."

"Yes; I should certainly like to lay hands on them, though I am afraid we should find it very hard to prove that they had anything to do with this affair."

"I think that also, Mr. Chetwynd. Morally, we may feel absolutely certain; but, unless the boatmen noticed that one of their number was missing when they landed, we have at present no evidence to connect them with it."

"We will set out as soon as my other two men return. I told them to be back soon after twelve. I will write to you this evening from Rotterdam. Ah! here are the men."

The door opened, and, to the stupefaction of the party, Mark Thorndyke entered the room.

"Good Heavens, Mark!" Dick exclaimed, springing forward and seizing his hand, "is it really you alive in the flesh? We had given you up for dead. We have been searching the town for you all night, and were just going to set out for Rotterdam in search of a barge on which we believed you were carried. Why, it seems almost a miracle!"

The two prize fighters also came forward, and shook hands with a pressure that would have made most men shrink.

"I am as glad, Mr. Thorndyke," Gibbons said, "as if anyone had given me a thousand pounds. I have never quite given up hope, for, as I said to Mr. Chetwynd, if you got but a shadow of a chance, you would polish off those nigger fellows in no time; but I was afraid that they never would give you a chance. Well, I am glad, sir."

"Mark, this is the Lieutenant of the watch here," Dick said. "He has been most kind, and has himself headed the search that has been made for you all night. Now tell us all about it."

"First of all give me something to drink, for, except some water, I have had nothing since dinner yesterday. You are right, Dick; it is almost a miracle, even to me, that I am here. I would not have given a penny for my chance of life, and I can no more account for the fact that I am here than you can."

Mark drank off a tumbler of weak spirits and water that Gibbons poured out for him. Chetwynd rang the bell, and ordered lunch to be brought up at once. Just at this moment the two detectives came in, and were astonished and delighted at finding Mark there.

"Now," he said, "I will tell you as much as I know, which is little enough. When I came to my senses I found myself lying on the deck of a craft of some sort; it was a long time before I could at all understand how I got there. I think it was the pain from the back of my head that brought it to my mind that I must have been knocked down and stunned in that fight; for some time I was very vague in my brain as to that, but it all came back suddenly, and I recalled that we had all got separated. I was hitting out, and then there was a crash. Yes, I must have been knocked down and stunned, and I could only suppose that in the darkness and confusion I had been carried off and taken on board without any of you missing me; my hands and feet were tied, and there was something shoved into my mouth that prevented me from speaking.

"I should think that it must have been an hour before I quite recovered my senses, and got the thing fairly into my mind. Then a man with a knife leant over me, and made signs that if I spoke he would stab me, and another took the gag out of my mouth and poured some water down my throat, and then put it in again. I saw that he was a dark colored man, and I then understood it all; it was those Hindoos who had got up the attack upon us and had carried me off. I had no doubt they had got the diamonds I had sewn up in the waistband of my trousers.

"I wondered why they were keeping me, but was sure they would stab me presently and throw me overboard. I knew that they had killed two soldiers for the sake of the diamonds, and if it hadn't been that they had given me the water, I should not have had a shadow of doubt about my fate."

"I puzzled over why they should have done so, and came to the conclusion that they dared not do it on board, because of the crew, and that they intended to take me on shore somewhere, and there dispose of me. I made many attempts to loosen my ropes, but they would not give the slightest. At last I think I dozed off for a time. After I had had the water they drew a blanket or something of that sort over me. It had been there before, but it had only been pulled up as high as my nose, and I felt sure that it was only done to prevent the Dutchmen on the boat seeing that I was bound and gagged; this time they pulled it right over my face. When they took it off again I could see it was nearly morning, for there was a faint light in the sky. They were

moving about on the deck, and presently I saw one of the sailors get into the boat and pull it along, hand over hand, by the rail, until he was close to me. Then four Lascar sort of chaps—I could scarcely make out their features—lifted me and lowered me into the boat and got in themselves.

“I did not attempt to struggle. No doubt they had made up some tale that I was mad or something of that sort, and I thought that I had best pretend to be quiet and peaceable till I could see some sort of chance of making a fight for it. It was but a few yards from the shore. The man lifted me out onto the bank, and the sailor then started to row back to the barge; they carried me a few yards away, and then laid me face downwards on some grass. Now, I thought to myself, it is all over; they are going to stab me and make off. To my surprise I felt they were doing something—I could not make out what—to the ropes; then there was quiet. I lay there I should think for half an hour, wondering why on earth they did not finish me. At last I made up my mind to move, and turned round onto my back. As I lay there I could see no one, and, raising my head, looked round. To my amazement I found that I was alone. It was now almost light, and as I craned my head in all directions I assured myself that they had gone; then I began to try again at the ropes.

“To my surprise I found that they were much looser than they were before, although still tight enough to give me nearly an hour's work before I got my hands free. Then it took me almost as long to get the ropes off my legs, for they had knotted them in such a fearfully intricate way that it was a long time before I could even discover where the ends were. At last I finished the job, stood up, and looked round. A quarter of a mile off there was a good sized town, but not a soul could I see.

“Till now I had hardly thought of the diamonds; I put my hands to my waistband and found, as I expected, that they were gone. I think I felt nothing but pleasure: the confounded things had given trouble enough, and I was well rid of them. Why they should have spared my life I could not imagine. If they had finished me, which they could have done without any risk to themselves when they got me ashore, they could have gone off with the diamonds without the slightest fear of pursuit, while now there was, of course, a chance that I might follow and recognize them.”

“Would you know them again?” the Lieutenant interrupted.

“Not in the slightest; it was light enough to see that they were dark, but from the time the boat came along the blanket was over my head, and except when they gave me the water I had no chance of seeing any of their features. Still, if I had gone straight to the town I saw and reported the matter to the authorities and sent mounted men to all the ports to warn them not to let any colored men embark, I might have given them a lot of trouble, but I don't suppose any of them would ever have been caught. After the craft they had shown in the whole matter, it is certain that they would have laid their plans for escape so well that the law would never have laid hands upon them. I put my hand mechanically to my watch to see the time, and to my astonishment discovered that I still had it in my pocket, and was equally surprised to find that the money in my trousers' pockets was also untouched. The watch had, of course, stopped. I first of all went down to the water and had a good wash; then I proceeded to the town, and, going to a hotel, ordered breakfast.”

“Why, I thought you said that you had had nothing to eat, Mark.”

“Yes? Well, I had forgotten all about that breakfast. The people looked a good deal surprised at an Englishman walking in in that way. While I was eating my breakfast two men—who were, I suppose, authorities of some kind—who spoke English, came and questioned me. As I had made up my mind to say nothing more about the affair, I merely told them that I had come for a sail from Amsterdam, and that I wanted a carriage to take me back. They were evidently astonished at my choosing a dark night for such a trip, but I said that I had some curiosity to see how the boatmen navigated their vessel when there were no lighthouses or anything to steer by. They asked a few more questions, and then went away, evidently thinking that I was a little mad. However, they must have spoken to the landlord, who in a short time made signs that the carriage was at the door.

“I had avoided asking the men either the name of the place or how far it was from any big town, because that would have made the whole affair more singular. It was a quarter past eight when I started, and beyond the fact that I know by the sun we came pretty nearly due east, I have not the slightest idea of the road. The coachman could not speak a word of English. I should say we came about seven miles an hour and stopped once to bait the horses, so I suppose that it must have been between four and five miles from Rotterdam when I landed.”

Lunch had by this time been laid on the table, and at Dick's invitation the Lieutenant joined them.

“It is an extraordinary story!” he said. “That your life should have been spared is altogether beyond my comprehension, still more so why they should have left you your money and watch.”

“The whole story is extraordinary,” Dick Chetwynd said; “for we have every reason to believe that those fellows, or at least one or two of them, have been patiently watching for a chance of carrying off those diamonds for twenty years. When my friend told me of it ten days ago I did not believe that it could be possible; but he has certainly shown that he was correct in his opinion.”

Mark then related the history of the jewels, surprising the pugilists and detectives as much as the Lieutenant.

“It is extraordinary indeed,” the latter said. “I should not have believed it possible that men would devote so many years to such a purpose, nor that they could have succeeded in tracing the diamonds in spite of the precaution taken by your uncle, and afterwards by yourself. It would seem that from the time he landed in England he, and after him your father and yourself, must have been watched almost night and day. I can understand now why they did not take your watch and money. They evidently acted from a sort of religious enthusiasm, and were no ordinary thieves, but as evidently they did not hesitate to kill, I cannot understand why they should have added to their risks by sparing you.”

“No, that is what puzzles me,” Mark agreed. “I was thinking it over while we were driving here. Now let me hear about the fight, Dick. How did you all come out of it?”

“As well as could be expected. Gibbons and Tring both got some heavy blows with the cudgels, as indeed we all did more or less, but they did great execution. Eleven fellows were left senseless on the ground, and

one of them, that black fellow who came over with us, was killed. The other ten are all in prison. All of us did our best, and managed to leave our mark on eight others, who were in consequence picked out, and are also in jail."

Dick went on to relate the particulars of the search.

"You see, our friend here had traced you to the barge and found out her destination, and if you had come ten minutes later you would have found that we had all just started for Rotterdam. I was only waiting for Chester and Malcolm to return to set out. I am sorry, Mark, that you have lost your diamonds; not so much because they are gone, for I can well understand you to be thoroughly glad to be rid of such dangerous articles, but because they have carried them off in our teeth, after we have been specially retained to protect you. I certainly thought that with such a bodyguard you were absolutely safe from any number of Hindoos."

"Yes, we made a regular mess of it, Mr. Thorndyke," Gibbons said. "I never felt so certain of winning a battle as I did that you would not be touched as long as we were looking after you. Tring and I, if we had been asked, would have said that we could each have taken on a dozen foreigners easily. Mr. Chetwynd is handy with his fists too, though he hasn't your weight and reach, and your two other friends are both pretty well accustomed to deal with rough customers. As for Tring and me, it makes one feel small to know that we have been bested by a handful of niggers, or Hindoos, or whatever the chaps are, whom a good sized boy of twelve ought to be able to polish off."

"Now, Mark, what is to be done next?" Dick Chetwynd asked.

"The next thing will be to get back as soon as we can, Dick. I, for one, have had enough of Holland to last me for a lifetime."

"I am afraid, gentlemen," the Lieutenant said, "you will have to wait a day or two before you can leave. I have nineteen men in prison, and there will be a meeting of magistrates this afternoon. Now you have come back, Mr. Thorndyke, the charge against them won't be as serious as it would have been before, but they are guilty of a desperate and premeditated assault upon six passengers on their arrival here; they have already admitted that they were paid for their work; and as among them are some of the worst characters in the city, you may be sure that now we have got them fairly in our hands we shall not let them go. It is so simple an affair that the investigation ought not to take long, but we shall want to find out, if we can, who acted as the intermediary between the Hindoos and the prisoners. I should think that two meetings ought to be sufficient for the present, but I am afraid that there may then be a long remand, and that you will either have to remain here or to come over again."

"It would be a horrible nuisance," Dick said; "still it would be better to come back again than to wait here indefinitely, and anyhow I don't suppose it would be necessary for all of us to come back again."

"I should not mind if it could be arranged for me to be here again in a month's time," Mark agreed, "for, to tell you the truth, I am going to be married in less than three weeks, and as I had intended to come to Brussels, and afterwards to travel for a while, I could make a visit here without greatly putting myself out."

"I will try and arrange that, Mr. Thorndyke."

"I shall be glad," Mark said, "if you can manage to get the men sentenced without going into the question of the diamonds at all, and treat the matter as a mere attempt at robbery. It surely would not be necessary to bring the question of my being carried away into the matter at all; I can give evidence that I was knocked down and stunned, and that I was robbed of some jewels that I had about me, which were the object of the attack."

"I think we should have to admit that," the Lieutenant said; "it must come out that the attack was an organized one."

"Well, if it must, it must," Mark said reluctantly; "but then, you see, no end of questions would be asked, and the thing might be delayed while a search is being made for the men who stole the bracelet."

"Well, we will keep it out of the inquiry if we can," the Lieutenant said. "The meeting will be at three o'clock. I will send a man to take you to the Town Hall."

At the appointed hour the party proceeded to the court, and the eighteen prisoners, under a strong guard, having been brought in, six magistrates took their places on the bench; the rest of the court was crowded, the fray on the wharf and the number of captures having created quite a stir in the city. They had arranged that Tring should first give his evidence, which he did, the Lieutenant of the watch acting as interpreter, though most of the magistrates understood English. The appearance of the prisoners created quite a sensation in the court, for the injuries that they had received were now even more conspicuous than they had been when they were first captured; some of them had to be led into court, their eyes being completely closed, others had their heads bandaged, and all showed signs of tremendous punishment. Tring related that he, with five others, had come ashore together; one of his companions had a row on board a ship they had crossed in, with a Lascar sailor, who was a passenger, and they kept together as they were crossing the wharf, thinking that possibly the man might attempt to stab his companion.

"I was walking behind him," Tring went on, "when the Lascar jumped suddenly out from among the men standing about, and was about to stab my companion, when I hit him just in time, and he went down; then there was a rush, and we all got separated, and did as well as we could until the watch came up; that is all that I know about it."

"Is the Lascar among the prisoners?" one of the magistrates asked the Lieutenant of the watch.

"No, sir, when picked up by one of my men he was found to be dead; the blow had apparently killed him instantly."

The other five then gave their evidence; it was similar to that of Tring, save that being in front of him they knew nothing of the attack by the Lascar. All they knew about it was that there was a sudden rush upon them by a number of men armed with bludgeons, that they were separated, and that each defended himself until the guard came up.

Some of the watch then gave evidence, and told how on arriving at the spot eleven of the prisoners were found lying senseless; how, on recovering, they were all taken to the watch house, where several of them

were recognized as notoriously bad characters; they had admitted that they were paid to make the attack, which was apparently the result of the private enmity of some person or persons unknown to one or more of those attacked.

The Lieutenant then related the steps that he had taken to capture others connected with the attack, and that he found eight men bearing marks of the fray, and that all these were also notorious characters, and associates of the prisoners first taken. The first witnesses were again questioned; five of them said that, so far as they knew, they had no personal enemies. Mark, who was the last to get into the witness box, said that he himself had no enemies, but that an uncle of his, who was in the British Indian service, had a sort of feud with some members of a sect there on account of some jewels that he had purchased, and which had, they declared, been stolen from a temple. Two soldiers through whose hands these things had passed, had been successively killed by them, and his uncle had to the day of his death believed that their vengeance would one day fall upon him.

"I can only suppose," continued Mark, "that I have inherited the enmity they bore him, as I inherited the jewels, and that the attack was really designed solely against me, and the consequences might have been fatal to me had it not been for the strength and courage of my fellow passengers."

"Did they come with you for your protection, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"To some extent, yes. The fact is, that I have for some time been convinced that I was followed about by natives of India, and remembering what my uncle had said on the subject, I became to some degree apprehensive, and thought it as well to leave London for a short time. That this attack was really instigated by the men I have no doubt whatever, since, as you have heard, it was begun by a Lascar, who tried to stab one of my companions and who received a knockdown blow that caused his death from one of the others. It is a well known fact that these people will cherish for many years a determination to avenge any injury. However, I hope that after the failure of this attempt upon my life I shall hear no more of them."

"Were any knives found on the prisoners?" the magistrates asked the Lieutenant of the watch.

"No, sir; all carried clubs. And they told me that they had been especially ordered not to take knives, and had indeed been searched before they came out."

"What impression do you gather from that, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"My impression is, sir, that they desired to overpower those with me and to beat them down, in order to carry out their revenge upon me."

After some consultation the magistrate who had before spoken said:

"The prisoners will be remanded. It is necessary that we should find out who was the chief culprit who bribed this gang."

As soon as the prisoners were taken out of court Mark slipped across to the magistrates, accompanied by the Lieutenant as interpreter.

"I hope, gentlemen, that our presence here will not be necessary, for it would be a matter of extreme inconvenience. I may say that my marriage is fixed for today three weeks, hence you can well imagine that I want to return as soon as possible. Two of the men are, as you have heard, Bow Street officers, whose presence could not well be spared."

The magistrates again consulted together.

"Your evidence has all been taken down by the clerk of the court. Certainly we should not require your presence at the remand; but whether we should do so at the trial would, of course, depend upon whether these men all own their guilt, which, having been taken red handed, it is likely enough they will do. We will consent, therefore, to your leaving, if you will give us an undertaking to return for the trial if your presence is necessary, and that you will bring with you the man who struck down the Lascar who commenced the fray, and one of the others."

"That I will do willingly," Mark replied. "We are much obliged to you for your consideration. I shall be traveling for a time after my marriage; but I will as I pass through Belgium after my marriage give you the route I intend to take and the address at which letters will find me, and if you send me a sufficiently long notice I will at once return for the trial."

CHAPTER XXI.

"You managed that very well, Mark," Dick said. "You kept well within the limits of truth without bringing the real facts of the attack upon us into the case."

"Well, you see, Dick, after working as a detective, one gets into the way of telling stories with the smallest amount of deviation possible from the truth. What will these fellows get done to them, Lieutenant?"

"I should say that they will get two or three years imprisonment; the only charge now is rioting and assault. It is lucky for them that they had clubs instead of knives, for that would have brought the matter under the head of attempted murder. The matter of the gems was not important in the case, but there is sure to be a great fuss and search for the missing Indians. I suppose you will soon be off home now?"

"Yes, I shall find out tonight what vessel leaves for England tomorrow, and take a berth in the first that sails for London. It is too late to think of starting this evening, and indeed I feel that I want a long night's rest, for I did not sleep much last night, and have not quite recovered from that crack on my head."

On his return to the hotel Mark sent out a man to inquire at the shipping offices, and finding that a bark would sail at nine o'clock the next morning, they went down and took berths, and sailed in her next day. The voyage home was a rapid one, for the wind blew steadily from the east, and the vessel made the passage to

the mouth of the river in two days, and the next took them up to London.

"I will call round tomorrow or next day, Gibbons, with the checks for you both," Mark said as he prepared to go ashore.

"No, sir. We are both of one mind that we could not take them. We went over to prevent you being robbed of those sparklers, and to see that you came to no harm. Well, the things are lost, and you got knocked down and carried away. It is no thanks to us that you are alive now. It is a mortifying job, that with two detectives to watch over things and with us to fight we should have been fairly beat by a few black niggers."

"If there had been any bungling on your part, Gibbons, there might be something in what you say, but no one could have foreseen that before we had been on shore two minutes we should have been attacked in that way. You both did all that men could do, as was shown by the condition of the fellows who were taken. I was just as much separated from you as you were from me, and the fact that we were surprised as we were is really due to my not determining to stay on board until the morning, which I could no doubt have done with the captain's permission. It never struck me for a moment that we should be attacked in force. I thought it probable that an attempt at assassination would be made, but it certainly did not seem probable that it would be attempted while you were all with me. You are not in the slightest degree to blame, for your part of the agreement was carried out to my satisfaction. I shall certainly carry out mine, as I have arrived home safe and sound."

"Well, governor, it is very good of you; but I tell you it will go against the grain for us to take your money."

On landing, Mark parted with Dick Chetwynd, who had arranged to drop Mark's bag at his lodgings on his way home, and at once took a hackney coach to Islington. Millicent gave a cry of delight as he entered the room.

"You are back earlier than I expected, Mark. You told me before you started that the wind was in the east, and that you might be a long time getting to Amsterdam unless it changed. I have been watching the vane on the church, and it has been pointing east ever since.

"Well, you have sold the diamonds, I hope?" she said, after the first greeting was over.

"No; I have bad news for you, Millicent; the jewels have been stolen."

"Well it does not make much difference, Mark. We have much more than enough without them, so don't bother yourself in the least. How did it happen?"

"Well, it is rather a long story. I will tell it you when Mrs. Cunningham is here, so as not to have to go over it twice. How are the dresses getting on?"

"I suppose they are getting on all right," she said. "I have done nothing for the last two days but try them on. You see, we put them out to three milliners, and they all three seem to reach the same point together, and I start after breakfast, and it takes about two hours at each place. You don't know what trouble you have given me by hurrying things on so unreasonably."

"Well, it is better to have it all done and over," he said, "than to have the thing hanging over you for a couple of months."

"That is what Mrs. Cunningham says. Now I want to hear about your adventures, and I will call her down."

"Only think, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent said presently, with a laugh, after she had returned with her, "this silly boy has actually let the diamonds be stolen from him."

"No, really, Millicent!"

"Yes, indeed. Fancy his not being fit to be trusted to look after them! However, I tell him it is of no consequence. I don't know how they went. He would not tell me the story until you came down."

"I am sorry to say it is true, Mrs. Cunningham, although I can assure you that I really cannot blame myself for either carelessness or stupidity. I knew when I started that there was a very great risk, and took what seemed to me every possible precaution, for in addition to Dick Chetwynd going with me, I took two detectives from Bow Street and two prize fighters."

Exclamations of surprise broke from both ladies.

"And yet, in spite of all that, these things were stolen," Millicent said. "How on earth did they do it? I should have sewn them up in my pockets inside my dress."

"I sewed them up in the waistband of my trousers, Millicent, and yet they managed, in spite of us, to steal them. And now I must begin by telling you the whole history of those diamonds, and you will understand why I thought it necessary to take a strong party with me."

He then told them, repeating the history the Colonel had given his father of the diamonds, and the conviction that he had, that he had been followed by Hindoos, and the instructions he had given for the disposal of the bracelet.

"As you know," he said, "nothing happened to confirm my uncle's belief that there were men over here in search of the diamonds during my father's life, but since then I have come to the same conclusion that he had, and felt positive that I was being constantly followed wherever I went. As soon as I heard where the treasure was I began to take every precaution in my power. I avoided going to the bank after my first visit there, and, as you know, would not bring the things for you to look at. I got Dick Chetwynd to go there, open the case, and take out these diamonds. He did not bring them away with him, but fetched them from there the morning we started. He went down and took the passage for us both at the shipping office, and the pugilists and the detectives each took passages for themselves, so that I hoped, however closely I was followed, they would not learn that I was taking them to Amsterdam."

"It was very wrong, Mark; very wrong indeed," Millicent broke in. "You had no right to run such a terrible risk; it would have been better for you to have taken the diamonds and thrown them into the Thames."

"That would not have improved matters," he said; "the Indians would not have known that I had got rid of them, and would have continued their efforts to find them, and I should always have been in danger instead of getting it over once for all. However, I did not think that there was any danger, going over as I did, with two of the best prize fighters in England, to say nothing of the detectives, who were the men who were with

me when I caught Bastow. The only danger was that I might be stabbed; but, as they would know, it was no use their stabbing me unless they could search me quietly, and that they could not do unless I was alone and in some lonely neighborhood, and I had made up my mind not to stir out unless the whole party were with me. I found out, when we got on board that in spite of all the precautions I had taken, they had discovered that I was going to sail for Amsterdam, which they could only have done by following Dick as well as myself. There was a dark faced foreign sailor, who, I had no doubt, was a Hindoo, already on board, and I saw another in a boat watching us start; this was unpleasant, but as I felt sure that they could not have known that I had with me detectives and pugilists, I still felt that they would be able to do nothing when I got to Amsterdam."

Then he told them the whole story of the attack, of his being carried away, and of his unexpected release; of the search that had been made for him and the arrest of eighteen of his assailants. Millicent grew pale as he continued, and burst into tears when she heard of his being a prisoner in the hands of the Hindoos.

"I shall never let you go out of my sight again, Mark!" she exclaimed when he had finished. "It was bad enough before when you were searching for that man here, and I used to be terribly anxious; but that was nothing to this."

"Well, there is an end of it now, Millicent; the men have got the diamonds, and will soon be on their way to India, if they have not started already."

"Nasty things!" she said; "I shall never like diamonds again: they will always remind me of the terrible danger that you have run. Isn't it extraordinary that for twenty years four or five men should be spending their lives waiting for a chance of getting them back!"

"I do not expect there were so many as that; probably there was only one. He would have no difficulty in learning that my father had not received any extraordinary gems from my uncle, and probably supposed that they would not be taken out from wherever they might be until you came of age. After the death of my father he might suppose that I should take them out, or that, at any rate, I should go to whoever had them, and see that they were all right, and he then, perhaps, engaged half a dozen Lascars—there are plenty of them at the docks—and had me watched wherever I went; and, do you know, that I believe I once owed my life to them."

"How was that, Mark?"

"Well, I was captured by some fellows who suspected me to be a Bow Street runner, and I think that it would have gone very hard with me if a party of five or six prize fighters had not broken into the house, pretty nearly killed the men in whose hands I was, and rescued me. They said that they had heard of my danger from a foreign sailor who called at Gibbons', with whom I was in the habit of boxing, and told him about it. You see, until they learned where the jewels were, my life was valuable to them, for possibly I was the only person who knew where they were hidden; so really I don't think I have any reason for bearing a grudge against them. They saved my life in the first place, and spared it at what was a distinct risk to themselves. On the other hand, they were content with regaining the bracelet, not even, as I told you, taking my watch or purse. You see, with them it was a matter of religion. They had no animosity against me personally, but I have no doubt they would have stabbed me without the slightest compunction had there been no other way of getting the things. Still, I think that I owe a debt of gratitude to them rather than the reverse, and, after all, the loss of the bracelet is not a serious one to us."

"I am glad it is gone," Millicent said. "You say it had already caused the death of two men, and if you had succeeded in selling it I can't help thinking that the money would have brought ill fortune to us. I am heartily glad that the diamonds are gone, Mark. I suppose they were very handsome?"

"They were magnificent," he said. "Dick and Cotter both agreed that they had never seen their equal, and I fancy that they must have been worth a great deal more than your father valued them at."

"Well, it does not matter at all. There is no history attached to the others, I hope, Mark?"

"Not in any way, dear. They were bought, as the Colonel told my father, in the ordinary course of things, and some, no doubt, were obtained at the capture of some of the native princes' treasuries; but it was solely on account of this bracelet that he had any anxiety. You can wear all the others, if you have a fancy for keeping them, without a shadow of risk."

"No, Mark, we will sell them every one. I don't think that I shall ever care to wear any jewels again; and if I am ever presented at court and have to do so, I would rather that you should buy some new ones fresh from a jeweler's shop than wear anything that has come from India."

"To-morrow you shall both go to the bank with me to see them, and then I will take them to some first-class jeweler's and get him to value them."

The visit was paid next day. Both Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham were somewhat disappointed at the jewels.

"It is hardly fair to see them like this," Philip Cotter said. "They would look very different if reset. No Indian jewels I have ever seen show to advantage in their native settings; but many of the stones are very large, and without knowing anything about them I should say that they are worth the 50,000 pounds at which you say Colonel Thorndyke valued them. He was not likely to be mistaken. He was evidently a judge of these matters, and would hardly be likely to be far wrong."

"We will go with you to the jeweler's, Mark," Millicent said. "In the first place, I shall not feel quite comfortable until I know that they are out of your hands, and in the next place I should like to hear what he thinks of them."

"I have a number of Indian jewels that I wish you to value for me," Mark said, as, carrying the case, he entered the jeweler's shop. "They were collected by Colonel Thorndyke, an uncle of mine, during service in India."

The jeweler took them with him into a room behind the shop. The case was opened, and the man took out sixty-eight small parcels it contained, and opened them one after the other.

"I shall need a very careful examination of these before I can form any estimate of their value," he said, after inspecting some of the more important pieces of jewelry carefully. "They are a most magnificent

collection, and had they been properly cut in the first place they would have been worth a very large sum. Unfortunately, the Indian princes think more of size than of lustre, and have their stones cut very much too flat to show off their full brilliancy. Some of these large ones I should certainly advise to be recut, for what they will lose in weight they will gain in beauty and value. However, sir, I will go through them and give you an estimate of the selling value of each piece. I need not say that they ought all to be reset in the prevailing fashion; but the gold, which is in some cases unnecessarily massive, will go some distance towards defraying the expense."

"When shall I call again?" Mark asked.

"I should be glad if you can give me a week," the jeweler said. "Some of the things, for instance that great pearl necklace, I could appraise without much difficulty, but all the gems must be taken out of their settings before I could form a fair idea of their value."

"Then I will call in a week's time," Mark said. "I am in no particular hurry about them, but I would rather that they were in your care than mine."

"Yes, if the cracksmen got word that there was such a collection as this in any private house it would need a couple of men with pistols to keep guard over them."

A week later Mark again called.

"I have the list ready for you, sir; you will see that they are not marked according to their setting, but according to their size and value. Thus, you see, the largest stones are priced separately; the smaller ones are in groups according to their weight. The total comes to 42,000 pounds. I do not know whether that at all equals your expectations. I may say that I have shown the stones to two or three of our principal diamond merchants, and that the prices I have put down are those at which they would be willing to buy them; possibly some would be worth more. I had the merchants here together, and they spent some hours going through them, and the sums put down are those at which one or other were willing to purchase."

"It quite answers my expectations," Mark said. "My uncle's estimate, indeed, was somewhat higher, but doubtless he judged them at the price which they would fetch in India. Well, sir, I authorize you to close with the offers, and to dispose of them for me. I will give you a written authority to do so. In the meantime, I wish to buy a suite of jewels as a wedding present, a tiara, necklace, and bracelets; but I do not want any diamonds to be among them."

"I am afraid I have nothing in stock without diamonds; of course, I have both necklaces and bracelets of almost any stones that you might select, but I have no complete set without diamonds; the effect would be somber, and few ladies would like them."

"We have some unpleasant associations with diamonds," Mark said, "and on that point I am quite determined; but if you used pearls instead of diamonds the effect might be as good. I don't care whether the stones are emeralds or rubies; at any rate, I should like to see some, and then perhaps you might be able to make me a set on the same model."

Several superb sets were brought in; Mark selected one of emeralds and diamonds.

"What would be the price of this set?" he asked.

"That set is 6000 pounds, sir; the stones are exceptionally fine ones; but if you substituted pearls of equal size for the diamonds, it would cost considerably less; I could not give you the exact price until it is made, but I should say that it would be about 4500 pounds."

"Very well, then, I will take that. How long will it be making?"

"I should not like to say less than three months at the earliest; it will require some time to collect as fine a set of emeralds as these. Indeed, I think that most probably I shall use these emeralds, or the greater part of them, and collect others to take their places at my leisure. I do not know whether the best plan would not be to take the diamonds out and substitute pearls; there would be no difficulty in getting them, and in that case I might have it ready for you in a month."

"I think that will be the best plan; but you need not be in any particular hurry about them. My marriage will take place in less than a fortnight, and after that I shall probably be three or four months before I return to London. I will get you to keep the things until I come back."

"I have sold the jewels, Millicent," he said, when he returned to Islington; "the jeweler has found purchasers for them all, and the total comes to 42,000 pounds."

"Whatever shall we do with all our money, Mark?"

"I rather wonder myself, dear. However, there is one thing, there are always plenty of people who will be glad to relieve us of anything that we don't want. I can tell you that in the course of my search for Bastow I have seen an amount of poverty and misery such as I never dreamt of, and I certainly should like to do something to relieve it. The best thing that I know of would be to give a handsome sum to three or four of the great hospitals. I don't know of any better means of helping the very poor."

"Suppose, Mark," the girl said, putting her hand on his arm, "we give this 42,000 pounds as a thank offering. We never expected to get it, and my father's jewels have nearly cost you your life. We have such an abundance without that, I should like, above all things, to give this money away."

"I think that is an excellent plan, Millicent, and a very happy thought on your part. We cannot do it now, as we have not yet got the money, but as soon as we do we will send off checks for 10,000 guineas each to St. Bartholomew's, Guy's, and St. Thomas'—those are the three principal ones; the others we can settle afterwards. But I should say that the Foundling would be as good as any, and I believe that they are rather short of funds at present; then there is the London Mendicity Society, and many other good charities. Perhaps it would be better to divide the whole among eight of them instead of four; but we need not settle that until we return."

"Do you think we shall have to go to this horrid Amsterdam, Mark?"

"I hope not, dear; but I shall no doubt hear from the Lieutenant of the watch during the next week or ten days."

When the letter came it was satisfactory. The prisoners, seeing the hopelessness of any defense, had all admitted their guilt, and the name of the man who had dealt with them had also been given up. Except in his case there would be no trial. The others would have sentences passed on them at once, and three, who had been promised comparatively slight punishment, would go into the box to give evidence against the man who had engaged them. Before starting for Holland Mark had consulted Millicent as to whether she would prefer being married in London or at Crowswood. She had replied:

"I should greatly prefer Crowswood, Mark. Here we know no one, there we should be among all our friends; certainly if we don't go we must get Mr. Greg to come up and marry us here. I am sure he would feel very disappointed if anyone else were asked. At the same time I should not like to go home. When we come back from our trip it will be different; but it would be a great trial now, and however happy we might be, I should feel there was a gloom over the house."

"I quite agree with you, Millicent. When we come back we can see about entirely refurnishing it, and, perhaps, adding some rooms to it, and we need not go down until a complete change has been made. We shall be able to manage it somehow or other, and I quite agree with you that anything will be better than going back to the house for a day or two before the wedding."

On the voyage back from Holland Mark had talked the matter over with Dick Chetwynd, and said that he thought of taking rooms for Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent at Reigate, and stopping at the hotel himself, and having the wedding breakfast there.

"Of course, Dick, you will be my best man."

"I should think so," Dick laughed. "Why, if you had asked anyone else I should have made a personal matter of it with him, and have given him the option of resigning the position or going out with me. But your other plans are foolish, and I shall take the matter into my own hands; I shall insist upon the two ladies coming down to the Park, and I will get my aunt to come and preside generally over things. I shall fill up the house with bridesmaids, and shall have a dance the evening before. You can put up at the hotel if you like, but you know very well that there are a dozen houses where they will be delighted to have you; there is no doubt that when they know what is coming off you will get a dozen invitations, and then after church all those invited will drive off to the Park to the wedding breakfast. After that is over you can start in a post chaise to Canterbury or Dover, wherever you may decide to make your first halt."

"But, my dear Dick, I could not put you to all this trouble!"

"Nonsense, man. I should enjoy it immensely; besides, I shall be really glad of a good reason to try and open the doors of the Park again. I have been there very little since my father's death, and I think I shall make it my headquarters in future. I am getting rather tired of bachelor life in London, and must look out for a wife; so nothing could be more appropriate than this idea. Don't bother yourself any further about it. I shall ride down and establish myself there tomorrow, and spend a couple of days in driving round to our friends and in sending out invitations. I shall still have nearly a fortnight for making all preparations. Why, it will cause quite an excitement in the neighborhood! I shall be hailed as a benefactor, and I shall let everyone know that your father's ward was really your cousin, but that by the will of her father she was to drop her surname until she came of age; and that until that time your father was to have the entire control of the property. I shall add that although the estate, of course, is hers, your uncle has left you a very big fortune, and that nothing could be more suitable in all respects than the marriage."

"That will do excellently, Dick; that will be quite enough, without going into details at all. You can mention that we intend to have the house entirely refurnished, and on the return from our wedding trip abroad to settle there. I am sure I am extremely obliged to you for your offer, which will certainly clear away all sorts of small difficulties."

A day or two after his return Mark wrote to Mr. Greg telling him the relations in which Millicent and he stood to each other, and of the near approach of their marriage. He said that Millicent would be married from Dick Chetwynd's, but that it would be at Crowswood church. In return he received a warm letter of congratulation from the Rector, telling him that the news was in every respect delightful, and that his wife and the children were in a state of the highest excitement, not only at the marriage, but at their coming down to reside again at Crowswood.

"The village," he said, "will be scarcely less pleased than I am, for though everything goes on as you ordered, and the people get their milk, broths, and jellies as before, they don't look at it as the same thing as it was in the old days. I cannot say that the news of your engagement to Miss Conyers—I ought to say Miss Thorndyke—is surprising, for I had thought that it would be quite the natural thing for you to fall in love with each other, and, indeed, my wife declares that she saw it coming on distinctly during the last few months before you left here. Your postscript saying that Bastow had been captured and had committed suicide gave me a distinct feeling of relief, for no one could tell whether the deadly enmity that he felt for your father might not extend to you. I have cut this note rather short, but I have just heard the door shut, and I am quite sure that my wife has gone down to tell the good news in the village, and I really cannot deny myself the pleasure of telling some of the people myself, and seeing their faces brighten up at the news."

As Dick had foretold would be the case, Mark received a very warm letter from Sir Charles Harris, congratulating him upon his approaching marriage, and insisting upon his taking up his quarters with him.

"I am sending a man down with this to hand it to the guard as the up coach goes through the town. Chetwynd told me that his call on me was the first he had paid, so I feel fairly confident that I shall forestall the rest of your friends, and that you will give me the pleasure of your company."

Mark wrote back accepting the invitation at once, which enabled him to decline half a dozen others without the necessity of making a choice. Everything turned out as arranged. Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham went down in a post chaise, two days before the wedding, and Mark drove down in his gig with them. Dick Chetwynd met them on horseback just outside Reigate, and escorted the ladies to his house, Mark driving on to that of Sir Charles Harris. Millicent found the house full of her special friends, whom she had asked to be her bridesmaids. She was almost bewildered by the warmth of their welcome, and overpowered by the questions poured upon her.

"The news quite took all our breath away, Millicent," one of them said. "It seems extraordinary that you should have been Miss Thorndyke all the time, though I don't think that any of us were at all surprised that you should take the name now; you must have been surprised when you heard that you were the heiress of Crowswood."

"I was a great deal more disgusted than surprised," she said rather indignantly. "I did not think that it was fair at all that I should step into Mark's shoes."

"Well, it has all come right now, Millicent, and I dare say you thought that it would, even then."

"I can assure you that I did not; quite the contrary, I thought that it never would come right. I was very unhappy about it for a time."

"Now, young ladies," Dick Chetwynd laughed, "will you please take Mrs. Cunningham and Miss Thorndyke up to their rooms? I don't suppose I shall see any more of you before dinner time; there are those trunks to be opened and examined, talked over, and admired. Mind, I have fifteen more, for the most part men, coming to dinner, so those of you who aspire to follow Miss Thorndyke's example had best prepare yourselves for conquest."

The ball on the following evening was a great success. Dick had determined that it should be a memorable one, and there was a consensus of opinion that it was the most brilliant that had taken place in that part of the country for many years.

Crowswood church and village presented a most festive appearance on the following day; there was not a cottage that had not great posies of flowers in its windows, and that had not made some sort of attempt at decoration with flags or flowers. A huge arch of evergreens, with sheaves of wheat and flowers, had been erected on the top of the hill, and every man, woman, and child turned out in their best, and cheered lustily, first, when Mark drove up in his gig, and equally lustily when the Chetwynd carriage, drawn by four gray horses, dashed up, preceded by a large number of others with the bridesmaids and friends. The church was already crowded, and Mr. Greg was visibly moved at seeing the son and niece of the man to whom he owed his living made man and wife. When the wedding breakfast, at which more than fifty sat down, and the necessary toasts were over, Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke started for Canterbury.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was not until Easter that Mark Thorndyke and his wife returned to England. They had spent the greater portion of that time in Italy, lingering for a month at Venice, and had then journeyed quietly homewards through Bavaria and Saxony; They were in no hurry, as before starting on their honeymoon Mark had consulted an architect, had told him exactly what he wanted, and had left the matter in his hands. Mrs. Cunningham had from time to time kept them informed how things were going on. The part of the house in which the Squire's room had been situated was entirely pulled down, and a new wing built in its stead. Millicent had been specially wishful that this should be done.

"I don't know that I am superstitious, Mark," she had said, "but I do think that when a murder has taken place in a house it is better to make a complete change. The servants always think they see or hear something. That part of the house is avoided, and it is difficult to get anyone to stay there. I think it is very much more important to do that than it is to get the house refurnished; we can do anything in that way you like when we get back, but I should certainly like very much to have the great alteration made before we return."

The architect was a clever one, and the house, which was some two hundred years old, was greatly improved in appearance by the new wing, which was made to harmonize well with the rest, but was specially designed to give as much variety as possible to the general outline. Millicent uttered an exclamation of pleasure when they first caught a glimpse of the house. As they rode through the village they were again welcomed as heartily as they were on their wedding day. Mrs. Cunningham received them; she had been established there for a month, and had placed the house entirely on its old footing. They first examined the new portion of the house, and Millicent was greatly pleased with the rooms that had been prepared for them, Mark having requested Mrs. Cunningham to put the furnishing into the hands of the best known firm of the day.

"I have asked," Mrs. Cunningham said, "the Rector and his wife and Mr. Chetwynd to dine with us this evening; they can scarcely be termed company, and I thought that you might find it pleasant to have these old friends here the first evening. There is a letter for you on the library table, Mark; it may almost be called a packet; it has been here nearly a month."

In our days a newly married couple would find on their return from foreign travel basketfuls of letters, circulars, and catalogues from tradesmen of all kinds; happily, our forefathers were saved from these inflictions, and Mark at once went to the library with almost a feeling of surprise as to who could have written to him. He saw at once that it was a ship's letter, for on the top was written, "Favored by the Surinam."

"Why, it is Ramoo's writing. I suppose he gave it to someone he knew, and that instead of its being put in the mail bag in India, he brought it on with him. What a tremendously long epistle!" he exclaimed, glancing his eye down the first page, and then a puzzled expression came across his face; he sat down and began to read from the first slowly and carefully.

"HONORED SAHIB:

"I do not know why I should write to tell you the true history of all these matters. I have thought it over many times, but I feel that it is right that you should know clearly what has happened, and how it has come about, and more especially that you should know that you need never fear any troubles such as those that have taken place. I am beginning to write this while we are yet sailing, and shall send it to you by ship from

the Cape, or if it chanced that we meet any ship on her way to England, our letters may be put on board her."

"Why, this letter must be more than a year old," Mark said to himself. There was no date to the letter, but, turning to the last sheet, he saw as a postscript after the signature the words, "January 26th.—A ship, the Surinam, is lying a short distance from us, and will take our letters to England."

"Yes, it must be a year old; but what he means by the way he begins is more than I can imagine;" and he turned back to the point at which he had broken off.

"I would tell it you in order as it happened. I, Ramoo, am a Brahmin. Twenty years ago I was the head priest of a great temple. I shall not say where the temple was; it matters not in any way. There was fighting, as there is always fighting in India. There were Company's Sepoys and white troops, and one night the most sacred bracelet of the great god of our temple was stolen."

"Good Heavens!" Mark exclaimed, laying down the letter. "Then it has been Ramoo who has all this time been in pursuit of the diamonds; and to think that my uncle never even suspected him!"

Then suddenly he continued, "now I understand why it was my life was spared by those fellows. By Jove, this is astounding!" Then he took up the letter again.

"Two of the Brahmins under me had observed, at a festival the day before the bracelet was lost, a white soldier staring at it with covetous eyes. One of them was in charge of the temple on the night when it was stolen, and on the day following he came to me, and said, 'I desire to devote my life to the recovery of the jewels of the god. Bondah will go with me; we will return no more until we bring them back.' 'It is good,' I said; 'the god must be appeased, or terrible misfortunes may happen.' Then we held a solemn service in the temple. The two men removed the caste marks from their foreheads, prostrated themselves before the god, and went out from amongst us as outcasts until the day of their death. Two months later a messenger came from the one who had spoken to me, saying that they had found the man, but had for a long time had no opportunity of finding the bracelet. Then Bondah had met him in a lonely place, and had attacked him. Bondah had lost his life, but the soldier was, though sorely wounded, able to get back to his regiment. He had died, but he had, the writer was convinced, passed the jewels on to a comrade, whom he would watch. Then I saw that one man was not sufficient for such a task. Then I, too, the Chief Brahmin of the temple, saw that it was my duty to go forth also.

"I laid the matter before the others, and they said, 'You are right; it is you who, as the chief in the service of the god, should bring back his jewels.' So again there was a service, and I went forth as an outcast and a wanderer, knowing that I must do many things that were forbidden to my caste; that I must touch unclean things, must eat forbidden food, and must take life if needs be. You, sahib, cannot understand how terrible was the degradation to me, who was of the purest blood of the Brahmins. I had taken the most solemn vows to devote my life to this. I knew that, whether successful or not, although I might be forgiven my offense by the god, yet that never again could I recover my caste, even though the heaviest penances were performed. Henceforth, I must stand alone in the world, without kindred, without friends, without help, save such as the god might give me in the search.

"I was rich. The greater part of my goods I gave to the temple, and yet retained a considerable sum, for I should need money to carry out my quest, and after I had accomplished it I should hand over what remained for the benefit of the poor. I should myself become a fakir. I want you to understand, sahib, that henceforth I had but one object in life, a supreme one, to accomplish, in which nothing must stand in my way, and that what would be in others a crime was but a sacrifice on my part, most acceptable to the god. I journeyed down to the place where my comrade was, dressed as one of the lowest class, even as a sweeper, and he and I strove by all the means in our power to discover what this man had done with the jewels. Night after night we crawled into his tent. We searched his bed and his clothes. With sharp rods we tried every inch of the soil, believing that he had hidden the diamonds underground, but we failed.

"There my comrade said, 'I must give my life to find out where he hides these things. I will watch night after night by the door of his tent, and if he comes out I will stab him; it shall be a mortal wound, but I will not kill him outright. Before he dies he will doubtless, as the other did, pass the jewels on to some comrade, and then it will be for you to follow him up.' 'It is good,' I said. 'This man may have hidden them away somewhere during the time they have marched through the country. In spite of the watch you have kept he may have said to himself, "I will return, though it be years hence." Your plan is good,' I said. 'I envy you. 'Tis better to die thus than to live in sin as we are doing.'

"That evening the man was stabbed, but an officer running up killed my comrade. The soldier was taken to the hospital, and I lay down beside the tent with my eye to a slit that I had cut, and watched till morning.

"Then I took my broom and swept the ground. I had not been hired as one of the camp sweepers, and so could move about and sweep where I chose. No one ever asked me any questions. The soldiers heeded me no more than if I had been a dog, and, of course, supposed that I was acting by the order of the head of the sweepers. Presently I saw one of the servants of the hospital go across to the tent of the officer who had killed my comrade. He came over and went into the hospital tent. I felt sure that it was the wounded man who had sent for him. He was in there some time. Presently a soldier came out and went to the tent of the wounded man, and returned bringing a musket. Then I said to myself, 'The god has blinded us. He wills that we shall go through many more toils before we regain the bracelet.' Doubtless the man had carried the bracelet in his musket all the time, and we, blind that we were, had never thought of it.

"Presently the officer came out again. I noticed that as he did so he looked round on all sides as if to see if he were watched. Then I knew that it was as I had thought: the soldier had given the bracelet to him. At this I was pleased; it would be far more easy to search the tent of an officer than of a soldier, who sleeps surrounded by his comrades. I thought that there was no hurry now; it would need but patience, and I should be sure to find them. I had not calculated that he would have better opportunities than the soldier for going about, and that, doubtless, the soldier had warned him of his danger. Two hours later the officer mounted his horse and rode towards the camp of another regiment, a mile and a quarter away. There was nothing in that; but I watched for his return all that day and all that night, and when he did not come back, I felt that he was doing something to get rid of the diamonds.

"He was away three days, and when he returned I was almost sure that he had not the diamonds about him. As he had ridden off he had looked about just as he had when he left the hospital: he was uneasy, just as if he was watched; now he was uneasy no longer. Then I knew that my search would be a long one, and might fail altogether. I went away, and for three months I prayed and fasted; then I returned. I bought different clothes, I painted my forehead with another caste mark, then I bought from the servant of an officer in another regiment his papers of service: recommendations from former masters. Then I went to the officer—you will guess, sahib, that it was the Major, your uncle—and I paid his servant to leave his service, and to present me as a brother of his who had been accustomed to serve white sahibs, and was, like himself, a good servant; so I took his place.

"He was a good master, and I came to love him, though I knew that I might yet have to kill him. You have heard that I saved his life three times; I did so partly because I loved him, but chiefly because his life was most precious to me, for if he had died I should have lost all clew to the bracelet. I had, of course, made sure that he had not got them with him; over and over again I searched every article in his possession. I ripped open his saddle lest they might be sewn up in its stuffing. All that could be done I did, until I was quite sure that he had not got them. He, on his part, came to like me. He thought that I was the most faithful of servants, and after the last time I saved his life he took me with him everywhere. He went down to Madras, and was married there. I watched his every movement. After that he went down frequently. Then a child was born, and six months afterwards his wife died.

"The regiment was stationed at the fort. At that time he was at many places—the governor's, the other officer sahibs', the merchants', and others'. I could not follow him, but I was sure by his manner that he had not taken back the bracelet from whoever he had sent it to. I knew him so well by this time that I should have noticed any change in his manner in a moment. At last the child went away in the charge of Mrs. Cunningham. I bribed the child's ayah, and she searched Mrs. Cunningham's boxes and every garment she had, and found no small sealed parcel or box amongst them. Three years more passed. By this time the Colonel treated me more as a friend than as a servant. He said one day, laughing, 'It is a long time since my things have been turned topsy turvy, Ramoo. I think the thieves have come to the conclusion that I have not got what they are looking for.' 'What is that, sahib?' I asked. 'Some special jewels,' he said. 'They are extremely valuable. But I have got them and a lot of other things so safely stowed that no one will ever find them unless I give them the clew.' 'But suppose you are killed, sahib,' I said; 'your little daughter will never get the things.' 'I have provided for that,' he answered. 'If I am killed I have arranged that she shall know all about it either when she comes to the age of eighteen or twenty-one.'

"A few weeks after that he was wounded very badly. I nursed him night and day for weeks, and when he came to England he brought me with him. As you know, sahib, he died. When he was in London he went to see Mrs. Cunningham and the child, and several times to the office of the lawyer who attended your father's funeral. Then he came down to your father, and I know he had long and earnest conversations with him. I did all I could to listen, but the Colonel always had the windows and doors shut before he began to speak. I could see that your father was troubled. Then the Colonel died. After his death I could never find his snuff box; he had carried it about with him for some years; once or twice I had examined it, but it was too small for the diamonds to be hidden in. I suppose that he had given it to the sahib, your father, but as I could never find it I guessed that there was some mystery attached to it, though what I could not tell.

"Then your father took me down to Crowswood with him, and Mrs. Cunningham and the little girl came down. I was surprised to find that your father seemed to be master of the estate, and that no one thought anything of the child, whose name had been changed. I spoke one day to Mrs. Cunningham about it; your father seemed to me a just and good man, and I could not believe that he was robbing his brother's daughter. Mrs. Cunningham told me that the Colonel did not wish her to be known as an heiress, and that he had left the estate to his brother until she came of age. Your father was as good a master as the Colonel had been. I watched and watched, and once or twice I overheard him talking to himself in the library, and discovered that your father himself was altogether ignorant of the hiding place of the property that the Colonel had mentioned in his will. I knew then that I should have to wait until the child was either eighteen or twenty-one.

"It was a long time, but I had learnt to be patient. I was not unhappy; I loved your father, I loved the Colonel's little daughter; and I was very fond of you. All these things were small to me in comparison to my vow and the finding the jewels of the god, but they shortened the years of waiting. Then a year before the young mistress was eighteen came the shot through the window. I did not know who had fired it, but I saw that your father's life was in danger, and I said to myself, 'He will tell the young sahib what he knows about the bracelet.' After you had gone into the library I opened the door quietly, and listened. I could hear much that was said, but not all. I heard him say something about a snuff box, and some means of finding the lost things being hidden in it, and that he had kept them all these years in a secret hiding place, which he described. You were to search for the diamonds, and I guessed from that that he did not know what he was to be told when the young memsahib came of age, or perhaps when she was eighteen. It was not until I had thought over what I heard that I came to the conclusion that if I could find the things he spoke of I might be able to find the jewels. By that time your father had gone to bed. I was foolish not to have been patient, but my blood boiled after waiting for eighteen or nineteen years. The god seemed to have sent me the chance, and it seemed to me that I should take it at once. I knew that he generally slept with his window open, and it seemed to me that it would be easy to slip in there and to get those things from the cabinet. I knew where the ladder was kept. I took a file from the tool chest and cut the chain."

Here Mark dropped the letter in horror.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Then Bastow spoke truly, and he was not my father's murderer! Never did a single suspicion of Ramoo enter my head. This is appalling; but I cannot read any more now. It is time for me to go and dress for dinner."

"Is anything the matter with you, Mark?" Millicent asked anxiously, as she met him in the drawing room; "you look as white as a sheet."

"I have been reading Ramoo's letter, and he has told me some things that have surprised and shocked me. I will tell you about them after dinner, dear. It is a long story, but you won't have to wait until Dick and the

Gregs are gone. They are interested in all that interests us, and shall hear the letter read. No; I think I will ask them and Dick to come in the morning. I should not like anything to sadden the first evening of our coming home."

"Then it is something sad."

"Yes, but it does not affect us, though it does affect Ramoo. Now clear your brow, dear, and dismiss the subject from your mind, else our guests will fancy that our marriage has not been altogether so satisfactory as they had hoped."

"As if they could think such a thing as that, Mark," she said indignantly. "But there is the sound of wheels; it is Mr. Chetwynd's gig."

The three visitors all came in together, having met at the door. Mark, with a great effort, put aside the letter from his mind, and a cheerful evening was spent. They had much to tell of their travels, many questions to ask about the parish and their mutual friends and the neighborhood generally, and when they rose to go Mark said:

"Would you mind riding over again tomorrow morning, Dick? I have a letter to read to you that will interest you greatly."

"Certainly. What time shall I be here?"

"Say at eleven o'clock. It is a long epistle, and will take us an hour to get through; after that we can stroll round, and, of course, you will stop to lunch."

"I should be glad if you and Mrs. Greg can come over too," he added, turning to the Rector; "you will be much interested also in the matter."

The next day the party met in the library at the hour named. "I may tell you, Mr. Greg, that I specially asked you and your wife here because this letter throws some light on Arthur Bastow's connection with my father's murder; you were friends with his father, and I think you ought to know. As to you, Dick, the letter will interest you from beginning to end, and will surprise as much as it will interest you."

"Even I don't know what it is, Mrs. Greg," Millicent said. "I know it quite upset Mark yesterday, but he said he would sooner I did not know anything about it until today, as he did not want me to be saddened on the first evening of our return home. Now, please go on, Mark; you have said quite enough to excite us all."

Mark had read but a short distance when Dick Chetwynd exclaimed:

"Then Ramoo was at the bottom of that Indian business, after all. I almost wonder you never suspected it, Mark."

"Well, I hardly could do so," Mark said, "when my uncle was so fond of him, and he had served him so faithfully."

As he approached the point at which he had laid down the letter on the previous evening, Millicent's color faded.

Suddenly an exclamation of horror broke from her when he read the last line.

"Oh, Mark," she said, with quivering lips, "don't say it was Ramoo. He always seemed so kind and good."

"It was here I stopped last night," he said, "but I fear there can be no doubt about it. I must say that it is evident from this letter, that no thought of doing my father harm was in his mind when he placed that ladder against the window. Now I will go on."

The letter continued as follows:

"Having placed the ladder, I clambered to the window and quietly entered the room. It was quite dark, but I knew the place of every piece of furniture so well that I was able to go without hesitation to the cabinet. Your father was speaking very slowly and distinctly when he told you how it was to be opened, and I was able to do it easily, but I did not know that the back opened with a sharp click, and the noise startled me and woke your father. In an instant he was out of bed and seized me by the throat. Now, he was a much stronger man than I was. I struggled in vain. I felt that in a moment I should become insensible; my vow and my duty to the god flashed across me, and scarce knowing what I did, I drew a little dagger I always carried, and struck blindly. He fell, and I fell beside him. For a time I was insensible. When I recovered I was seized with the bitterest remorse that I had killed one I loved, but I seemed to hear the voice of the god saying, 'You have done well, Ramoo. I am your great master, and you are bound to my service.'

"I got up almost blindly, felt in the cabinet, and found a coin and a piece of paper, and a feeling of exultation came over me that, after nearly twenty years, I should succeed in carrying out my vow and taking his bracelet back to the god. I descended the ladder, crept in the back door by which I had come out, went up to my room, where I had kept a light burning, and examined my treasures. Then I saw that all had been in vain. They were doubtless a key to the mystery, but until a clue was given they were absolutely useless. I sat for hours staring at them. I would have gone back and replaced them in the cabinet and left all as it had been before, but I dared not enter the room again. The next day I heard you say that you suspected that the talk with your father had been overheard, and that the man who had earlier in the evening before shot at him had returned, and while listening had heard something said about the hiding place, and thought that he would find some sort of treasure there. I thought that in the talk your father might have told you how to use these things, though I had not caught it, and it was therefore important that you should have them back again, so I went into the room after the inquest was over, and placed the things in their hiding place again.

"Then, thinking it over, I determined to leave your service. You would be trying to find the treasure, and I must watch you, and this I could not do as long as I was a house servant; so I came up to London, and you thought I had sailed for India, but I did not go. I hired four Lascars, men of my own religion, and paid them to watch every movement that you made, to see where you visited and where you went. I paid them well, and they served me well; it was so that I was able to bring those men to your help when but for that you would have lost your life. It was for this to some extent that I had you followed; for I soon found out that you were on the search for the man who had fired through the window, and who you believed had killed your father, rather than for the jewels. I knew that you might run into danger, and partly because I loved you, and partly

because it was possible that it would be essential for that coin and piece of paper to be produced in order that the treasure might be obtained, I kept guard over you.

"When the 18th of August approached we were all on the watch. I felt sure that you would take every possible precaution while you had the bracelet in your possession. We knew who were your principal friends, the banker's son and Mr. Chetwynd. On the 18th of August everything went on as usual. On the following day the banker's son came to you, and as soon as he left you, you went to the lawyer's, and afterwards to the banker's. I felt sure now that it was at that bank that the jewels had been placed, and that you had been waiting till the young memsahib's birthday for the news that they might be taken out; then you went to Mr. Chetwynd's, and he went to the bank. I had no doubt that he was to take them out for you, and after that one of the men never took his eyes off him when he was outside of his house. Afterwards you went to the place where the men used to fight, and the man who was watching you went in, and had beer, and saw you talking with the big man you used to fight with, in the parlor behind the bar. The watcher went out to follow you, but left another to watch this man. We found that both Mr. Chetwynd and he went to a shipping office in Tower Street, and we then guessed that you intended to take the bracelet at once across the sea.

"I went myself and found out that a vessel was sailing in two days to Amsterdam. I took a passage for a man in the cheap cabin, and asked to look at the list of passengers, as I believed that some friend would be sailing by her; there were two men's names down together in one handwriting among the first class passengers, and I guessed that these were you and Mr. Chetwynd. I also saw the name of the big man, which I had heard long before, down in the list of passengers, and another name next to his in the same handwriting. I did not know his name, but guessed that it was another of the fighting men, and that they were going to look after you until you had got rid of the diamonds. On the morning that she was to sail one of the Lascars was on board; I thought it possible that in order to throw anyone who might be following you off your scent you might at the last moment go ashore, and that Mr. Chetwynd might take the diamonds over, so I watched, and saw you on the deck with your friend.

"I and the other three Lascars then took passage that evening in a craft for Rotterdam, and got to Amsterdam two days before your ship arrived; we went to different houses, and going separately into the worst parts of the town, soon found a man who kept a gambling den, and who was a man who could be trusted. I offered him a thousand francs to collect twenty-five men, who were to be paid a hundred francs each, and to be ready, if your ship arrived after dark, to attack two passengers I would point out to them. I did not want you to be hurt, so bargained that all knives were to be left behind, and that he was to supply the men only with clubs. If the ship came in in daylight you were to be attacked the first time you went out after dark. You know how that was carried out. You had two more men with you than I had expected; but I thought that with a sudden rush you might all be separated. You know the rest. The moment you were knocked down I and three others carried you to a boat. It had been lying near the stairs, and we took you off to the barge in which I had arranged you should be taken to Rotterdam.

"We told them that you were a drunken man who had been stunned in a fight in a public house. As soon as we were off, I searched you and found the diamonds. Then, as you know, we put you ashore. We all crossed to England that night. Two days later I sailed in this ship, the Brahmapootra. I am not afraid of telling you this, because I know that the diamonds will not shine on the god's arm until all fear of search and inquiry are over. My task will be done when I hand them over to the man who holds the office I once held; then I shall bear the penances imposed on me for having broken my caste in every way, and for having taken life, and for the rest of my days I shall wander as a fakir through India. I shall be supported by the knowledge that I have done my duty to my god, and have sacrificed all in his service, but it will ever be a grief to me that in so doing it was necessary to sacrifice the life of one who had ever shown me kindness. You may wonder why I have written this, but I felt that I must own the truth to you, and that you should know that if in the course of my duty to the god it was my misfortune to slay your father, I have twice saved your life, just as three times I saved that of the Colonel Sahib, your uncle."

There was silence for some little time after Mark had finished reading.

"It is a strange story indeed," Mr. Greg said, "but it is not for us to judge the man. He has acted according to his lights, and none can do more. He sacrificed himself and his life solely to the service of his god, well knowing that even were he successful, his reward would be penance and suffering, and a life of what cannot but be misery to a man brought up, as he has been, to consider himself of the highest and holiest rank of the people. I think, Mark, we need neither say nor think anything harshly of him."

"Certainly not," Mark agreed. "I can understand that according to his view of the matter anything that stood between him and his goal was but an obstacle to be swept aside; assuredly there was no premeditation in the killing of my father. I have no doubt that the man was attached to him, and that he killed him not to save his own life, but in order that his mission might be carried out."

"Quite so, Mark; it was done in the same spirit, if I may say so, that Abraham would have sacrificed his son at the order of his God. What years of devotion that man has passed through! Accustomed, as you see, to a lofty position, to the respect and veneration of those around him, he became a servant, and performed duties that were in his opinion not only humiliating, but polluting and destructive to his caste, and which rendered him an outcast even among the lowest of his people. Do you not think so, Mrs. Thorndyke?"

Millicent, who was crying quietly, looked up.

"I can only think of him as the man who twice saved Mark's life," she said.

"I understand why you have wished to tell me this story," the Rector went on to Mark. "You wish me to know that Arthur Bastow did not add this to his other crimes; that he was spared from being the murderer of your father, but from no want of will on his part; and, as we know, he killed many others, the last but an hour or two before he put an end to his own life; still I am glad that this terrible crime is not his. It seemed to be so revolting and unnatural. It was the Squire's father who had given the living to his father, and the Squire himself had been his friend in the greatest of his trials, and had given him a shelter and a home in his old age. I am glad, at least, that the man, evil as he was, was spared this last crime of the grossest ingratitude."

"Well, Mark," Dick Chetwynd said cheerfully, in order to turn the subject, "I am heartily glad that we have

got to the bottom of this jewel mystery. I have been puzzling over it all the time that you have been away, and I have never been able to understand how, in spite of the precautions that we took, they should have found out that the jewels were at Cotter's, and that you had them on board with you, and, above all, why they spared your life when they could so easily and safely have put you out of the way. It is certainly strange that while you were thinking over everything connected with the jewels, the idea that Ramoo was the leading spirit in the whole business should never once have occurred to you."

A month later, when Mark went up to town, he called at Leadenhall Street.

"Of course, you have not heard of the arrival of the Brahmapootra at Madras yet. May I ask when she left the Cape?"

"She never left the Cape, sir," the clerk replied, "and there are very grave fears for her safety. She spoke the Surinam and gave her mails for England when the latter was eight days out from the Cape, and the Surinam reported that a day later she encountered a terrible gale, lost several spars, and narrowly escaped being blown onto the African coast. Since then we have had no news of the Brahmapootra. A number of Indiamen have arrived since; the latest came in only yesterday, and up to the time when she left no news had been received of the ship. Three small craft had been sent up the coast weeks before to make inquiries for her, but had returned without being able to obtain any intelligence, and had seen no wreckage on the coast, although they had gone several hundred miles beyond where she had spoken the Surinam, therefore there can be little doubt that she foundered with all hands during the gale. You had no near relatives on board, I hope, sir?"

"No near relatives, but there was one on board in whom I was greatly interested. Here is my card; I should feel greatly obliged if you would write me a line should you hear anything of her."

"I will do so, sir. We have had innumerable inquiries from friends and relatives of those on board, and although of late we have been obliged to say that there can no longer be any hope that she will ever be heard of, not a day passes but many persons still come in to inquire."

No letter ever came to Mark; no news was ever heard of the Brahmapootra. Ramoo's sacrifice was in vain, and never again did the diamond bracelet glisten on the arm of the idol in the unknown temple.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK COLONEL THORNDYKE'S SECRET ***

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