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to his having led, since his return to the property, the life of a recluse, many of those present had never seen him; but all wished to pay a last token of respect to the victim of an appalling catastrophe; and all turned pitying eyes on the bereaved son as he stood with bowed head by the open grave.

When the last solemn words had been said, and the mourners had returned sorrowfully home, Dick sank into a chair on the verandah with a sigh, the heavy sigh of a man who feels that he has progressed one stage on a long and wearisome journey. He closed his burning eyes, and a feeling of restfulness and something akin to peace came over him. But he was not long undisturbed. The man-servant came out through the dining-room, a visiting card in his hand.

"The gentleman would like to see you, sir," he said. "I told him it was unlikely you would see anyone just now." Dick took the card mechanically; it bore the name of "Mr. Albert Screed," and in the corner of the card was the significant inscription, "Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Screed Explains Himself.

WITH the first glance as he entered the library, Dick Emberson recognized in Mr. Albert Screed the stranger who had made himself conspicuous at the inquest, short in stature, about forty years of age and generally insignificant in physique; rather gloomy-looking about the legs, dark-complexioned and clean-shaven; a long-pointed nose, and slightly prominent grey eyes. Such was the outward appearance of the man who rose to his feet as the library door opened.

The young man advanced, holding the card in his hand and, without greeting of any sort, said icily—

"Will you kindly state your business, Mr. Screed, as briefly as possible; it must surely be of a pressing nature, since it brings you to me an hour after I have laid my poor father in his grave. I had imagined, erroneously, it seems, that on this day, at least, I should be free from intrusion."

The visitor gave a little deprecatory bow whilst his prominent grey eyes noted every detail of the other's appearance. There was nothing in Mr. Screed's manner to betray the fact that he had of malice prepense forced an interview at a moment when he might reasonably expect to find the person he wished to interrogate least master of himself—least capable of fencing with an astute antagonist.

"If he is not a cold-blooded monster, he must be pretty well shaken by yesterday's and to-day's work; and when a man's nerves are out of gear, it is uncommonly difficult for him not to give himself away."

Such had been his calculations; and after that first quick, keen survey he had mentally summed up his impressions—first impressions—to an habitual observer of mankind generally the most valuable—thus:

"Looks pale and ill; that's no more than might be expected. Shows a certain hostility in his manner; but that might also be explained by a natural indignation at my untimely visit; his eyes meet mine firmly and steadily enough—there's a steely gleam in them which suggests to me that Mr. Richard Emberson could be a nasty antagonist if once fairly roused—but his right hand opens and shuts convulsively over what looks like my bit of paste-board; that shows that the young gentleman is not quite as calm as he would wish to appear—that my coming fills him with nervous apprehension—of what, I wonder?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Emberson, to appear intrusive," he replied quietly. "Perhaps it would have been better had I deferred my visit. I am a business man, and I don't myself allow sentiment to interfere with necessary work; but it was certainly thoughtless of me not to remember that you might be of a different way of thinking. I will call again tomorrow if you prefer it."

"I should prefer, as I said before, your telling me at once the object of your visit."

Mr. Screed shrugged his shoulders. "As you wish. With your permission I will take a seat; the day is warm, and I have been on my feet a good many hours."

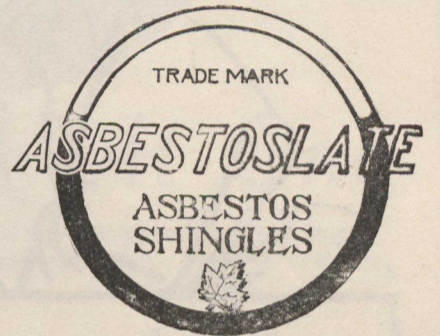
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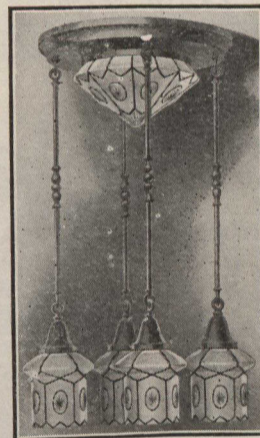


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