

through the open window. It fell in great circle on the opposite angle of the wall, round which the marauder must instantly have dodged. The rush of retreat was distinctly heard. The master knew that it would be useless to follow. By the time he could get out of the house and round to the spot, the miscreant would, to all intents and purposes, be lost in the darkness. The master did not think it advisable to rouse the house to give chase. He had saved the plate, and it was not likely that a second attempt at robbery would be made that night. At any rate, somebody had carried off a mark which might lead to identification.

Mr. Fields bolted the pantry window and carried the basket of plate up to his bedroom, where he locked it safely in a cupboard. Then he went off quietly to the room where the footman slept, and listened at the door. Steady, sustained snores issued from within.

He did not return to his bedroom. He thought it might be as well to act the watchman down below. So he went into the hall and sat down in an arm-chair. The silence was conducive to thought. He pondered over the matter. If Hercules was not mistaken, Thomas must have been in league with someone outside, with a view to robbery of the plate. He must have left the window unfastened, and have packed and placed the basket within reach. If Hercules was mistaken — if Thomas was innocent of all complicity in the transaction — then the man that ran along the passage must have probably entered the house by some window upstairs, and have beat a retreat by the same route. He must have packed the loot, and, finding the basket too heavy when the creaking staircase warned him of danger, he left it near the open window, escaped as he entered, and went round to remove the basket. That seemed a very feasible theory.

Mr. Fields got up from the chair. He took his lantern and proceeded up the back stairs, examining the windows as he passed. He soon came to one which seemed to show that his last theory was right. A pane of glass had been carefully removed from a passage window, whereby the bolt could be turned. The window was wide open, and a burglarious-looking implement, which Mr. Fields believed to be a "jemmy," was lying on the window-sill. He noticed how the putty had been scraped away. He took up the pane of glass; it was soiled with greasy finger marks. If he had only known the value of those marks as a means of identifying a suspected person, he could have made certain whether or not Thomas had fingered that glass. But in those days that subtle method of investigation was not discovered.

Mr. Fields left these traces as he found them—it would be best to let the policeman see everything in place next day.

So the master went down to the hall once more, and again sat down in the arm-chair. He closed his eyes to assist his meditations, and as thoughts went revolving in his mind they began imperceptibly to fuse themselves into distorted

a combinations, until their tangled skeins dissolved in the mists of dreamland, and the master was asleep.

The small hours of night passed on. The clock in the hall ticked out the moments, the hands crept on slowly and surely, notifying the hours, 1—2—3—4—5, and still the master slept on. "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet," says the Wise King, and if labor of mind as well as of body entitles a man to enjoy the sweet influence "that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care"—then surely Mr. Fields had earned his reward.

He awoke before the servants came down, and went up to his room.

CHAPTER VI.

The household was early astir. The familiar sounds of drawing up blinds and cleaning grates on the ground floor hinted to sleepy wakers above that the unwelcome bell would soon summon them to turn out.

Thomas came down as usual and went to his pantry. But two minutes later he was in the kitchen, where the cook and the maids were busy with preparations for breakfast.

"Vill'ens and his Dinah!" he exclaimed. "I say, just come and have a look at the pantry!"

A chorus of voices mingled in discord: "How scared you look, Thomas! What is it? Thieves? Burglars?"

He led the way to the pantry, followed by the women-folk.

"Well," he said, "what do you see? Nothing partic'lar, eh? That's all you know! A parcel of women! There's a deal of partic'lar, I say—that's just the difference. You females take a squint round and snigger, and think you've seen everything, and all the while there's things under your very noses as would make a man stare!"

"Oh, now, don't be sarcastic, Thomas," said a giggling housemaid. "No doubt you're mighty smart, but I don't see nothing out of the way."

"Don't you then, Maria—well, I do. What do you say, Cook? You ought to have more sense than a set of trumpery maids."

"Well," said the Cook, "I say as you should mind your manners, Thomas. We don't want none of your sauce, you weren't engaged to look after our education."

"Go on, Cook, you're no better than the rest! Well, if you don't see nothing partic'lar, let me show you! What do you think of this?"

The maids stood on tip-toe to peer over the shoulders of the portly Cook. Thomas was holding a horn-handled knife with the saw open.

"Oh, my! That's hurglary all over!"

"And what do you think of this?" continued Thomas, holding up for their inspection a piece of wood with a lock imbedded in it. They looked and groaned, and wondered.

"I s'pose," said Thomas, "it would be askin' too much to expect you to see