

DOUBLOONS

BY EDEN PHILPOTTS AND
ARNOLD BENNETT

"The devil!" muttered Sir Anthony. Oxwich, fifty-one times one pound five and six."

"Sixty-four pounds and sixpence, Mr."

"Excuse me, sixty-five pounds and sixpence," said Philip.

"My fault entirely, sir," said Oxwich. "I should have said sixty-five."

"Don't mention it," Philip smiled. "What's your maximum stake on the suits?"

"Twenty quid," said Sir Anthony, taking notes from a breast pocket.

"I'll go maximum on spades," Philip announced. And Oxwich cut spades.

Philip counted his winnings—a hundred and twenty-six pounds six shillings, plus the original sixpence.

"What are you going to do next?" Sir Anthony inquired.

"Well, if it's all the same to you, I'm not going to do anything next," Philip responded.

"Why?"

"I'll tell you some other time," said Philip, in a strange voice.

The Baronet looked at Oxwich, who faded from the study.

"What's up old chap?" Sir Anthony asked.

"Nothing! Look here, I'll give you your revenge. I'll toss you double or quits."

"Done!" snapped the baronet, picking up a coin. "Sudden death!"

"Tails," said Philip.

It was Philip's turn to win.

"I'm not quite well," said he.

"You ought to be," said the baronet, parting with more notes.

"The fact is—" Philip began, hesitated and proceeded: "You remember I put sixpence down, to start with?"

"You did."

"It was my last in the world. I was starving when you picked me up this morning. Now I'm worth an immense fortune—two hundred and fifty pounds!"

I've gambled before in my life, and I shall never gamble again, Tony. On that you may stake your bottom dollar."

"Well, I'm dashed!" breathed the baronet, softly.

CHAPTER IV.
An Old Sea Captain.

They dined together that evening at Sir Anthony's usual table in the Louis Quatorze Restaurant on the first floor of the Devonshire mansion. It was the table between the second and third

only pillars on the left as you enter by the grand entrance—not the entrance from the suite of the Hall Moon Club. They had spent a curious but interesting day. It had rained most of the time. After Philip, in his

laconic way, had finished reciting his Odyssey to the young baronet he had announced his intention of going out to get three suits of clothes; three suits and no more—a lounge suit, a frock coat with the latest in trousers

and waistscoats, and a dress suit. Philip meant to be economical, strictly so; but with two hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket he could not deny himself the satisfaction of replacing the dress suit which he had abandoned a few days before to a pawnbroker in Grosvenor road. Sir Anthony had replied that, having regard to the weather, it was absurd to go out, and that the mountain, summoned by telephone, would certainly come to

Mahomet. The mountain did come; in fact, several mountains came, including a Mont Blanc of a tailor, and a respectable Ben Nevis of a hosier. Nor was that the only miracle. By the intervention of Oxwich and the baronet Philip had his dress suit within eight hours!

After lunch there had both, with one accord, fallen asleep, and slept for two hours.

Then there had been tea, cucumber sandwiches, trying-on, and a visit to an acquaintance of Sir Anthony's who had a flat in the mansion—Miss Kitty Sartorius, the renowned star of the Regency Theater. It was Kitty's "day," and half the genius and all the golden youth of London were there.

And then Philip had refused to dine with Sir Anthony, but had consented to remain and dine in the restaurant if Sir Anthony would be his guest. Philip had explained that all the hospitality could not be on one side. Moreover, had not Sir Anthony, on the day of five days' income, and lastly, though he meant to be strictly economical, he did not intend that the era of economy should set in with full severity until the morrow.

"Look here," said Tony suddenly, during the timbale de marmelade, "we'll go for a run in the car tomorrow if it's fine."

"No," answered Philip firmly. "To-night I sleep at my Corner House in the corner reserved for me by Mr. Hilguy. Tomorrow I begin to look for my living."

"Suppose you don't find it? Not so easy, you know. You've been trying some time."

"Ah!" said Philip. "But then I hadn't got three good suits of clothes, and money enough to keep me for a year. That frock coat I've ordered will get me a situation pretty nearly anywhere."

"Then you abandon me to my fate?"

"What fate?"

"Why, I haven't got a friend in the world, except you. I'm not in love, I'm not even in debt. I'm only bored," Sir Anthony sighed. "You don't fancy I'm happy, do you?"

"Not in love! You always used to be."

"The fact is," said the baronet, self-consciously, "I've had a serious reverse in life—er—department. It's blighted my life, my boy. I shall never be the same man again."

"No, I know you won't," Philip smiled—"until the next time. Tell me about it. You've told me nothing really exciting yet about yourself."

The tableau of the gay and irresponsible Tony ruined for eternity by a hopeless passion amused Philip.

"It was a—"

"Well, go on."

"No; I won't talk about it. I can't tell only that I had a last seventy-three nights running to see her. What do you think of that?"

"Sublime!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh—Ha! Mr. Varcoe! You here! Come and have coffee, will you?"

Sir Anthony turned quickly to a little, dark, spectacled man, who was passing the table.

Mr. Varcoe stopped and bent the gaze of his spectacles on the baronet.

"A charming ideal!" said Mr. Varcoe. "With pleasure. I'll be with you in an instant."

"And who is Mr. Varcoe?" Philip demanded, while the latter was away.

"Dashed if I know. Met him at Kitty's this afternoon. Didn't you see him? Seemed a very decent, agreeable, jolly sort of chap. A awful keen on swimming. Swims all through the year, he says, as I do. Challenged me to a race in the Serpentine on Christmas morning, but I wasn't having any. I should think he must be one of the cracks. Doesn't talk about anything else, you know."

"I suppose that's why you invited him to your dinner-party," Philip observed.

"Awfully sorry, old man; I was thinking for the moment it was my party."

However, when Mr. Varcoe returned and had been introduced to Philip, he mentioned no word of swimming. He held in his hand a copy of the special edition of the "Westminster Gazette," and for a few seconds its contents seemed to preoccupy him to such an extent as to make him nervous.

"Anything in the paper?" Philip inquired nonchalantly.

Mr. Varcoe stared hard at Philip, fixing him with those spectacles.

"Yes," said he; "the murder of that old sea captain."

"What old sea captain?" Philip asked.

Mr. Varcoe glanced around the glittering room, which was now chiefly occupied by waiters. The little trio of two young, fair Anglo-Saxons, one dandified, and the dark man who might have been any age, and of any nationality, was isolated in a sea of empty white tables.

"Captain Pollexfen," said Mr. Varcoe in a low calm voice.

He appeared to wait for the effect of his words. They had no effect.

"And who was Captain Pollexfen?" Sir Anthony idly demanded, opening his cigar case.

"He was just a sea captain. That is almost all that's known."

"Where was he murdered? How was he murdered?"

"Back of his head smashed in."

"But where?"

"It isn't ascertained."

"But I suppose they've found the corpse?" said the baronet as he set fire to an R. P. Muria.

"Yes," replied Mr. Varcoe, still in the same low voice. "It was found this morning buried next to a sewer in an open trench near Kingsway."

"Philip's heart gave a jump, and the ash of his cigarette fell.

"Nice sort of a cemetery," Tony commented before Philip could put a word in. "Any clue?"

"One. There was a scheme to get rid of the regular watchman at the trench, last night, and his place was taken by a young man."

"Yes," replied Philip, steadily in the face. "The murder was committed while the young man was in charge. The young man behaved very strangely to a policeman who happened to come up just afterwards. He then tried to get to bed at a lodging house exactly opposite to where the corpse was buried, and though he didn't succeed he ingratiated himself with the manager of the lodging house. Old Pollexfen had been staying in the house. This morning, after the gang of laborers had recommended work on the trench the young man was found hovering near the spot, and he actually suggested to the foreman that the soil had been disturbed. He then fled."

"Sort of fatal fascination that the corpse has for its murderer, eh?" said the baronet.

"Perhaps," Mr. Varcoe admitted. "Philip half stood up, then sank back.

"You're a detective, Mr. Varcoe!" he blurted out.

And Mr. Varcoe calmly said: "I am."

"A detective!" exclaimed Anthony, shocked.

"And I've been keeping an eye on you both ever since ten o'clock this morning," added Mr. Varcoe.

A staff of high tension existed at the table.

"You want me to go with you?" said Philip, frowning Tony to be silent.

"You suspect me? Appearances are against me, is that it?"

"Appearances might have been against you, my dear sir," said Mr. Varcoe, "if you had displayed the least agitation when I first mentioned a sea captain as the murderer of Pollexfen. But you did not. Thus my previous notion that you are not immediately connected with the murder is, to a certain extent, confirmed. Appearances, then, are not against you. On the other hand, they are not for you. And though I do not wish you to go with me, I shall esteem it a favor if you will keep me informed of your whereabouts. At any rate, your evidence will be valuable. I would like your version."

"At once?"

"Why not?" said Mr. Varcoe, sipping his coffee. "If Sir Anthony does not object."

"Better come up to my rooms," Sir Anthony suggested. He was perplexed and unnerved by these revelations, for Philip had not mentioned to him the trench and the watchman.

And up there, in the "den," after Philip had related everything he knew of the detective, a rather strange piece of conversation ensued.

"What about Pollexfen's relatives?" Tony asked. "Didn't he any?"

Mr. Varcoe seemed to pierce into Tony's soul with a swift glance.

"Do you know," said he, "I was expecting that question from you."

"Why from me?"

"Because you are Sir Anthony's

friend, that's all. Yes, Captain Pollexfen had relatives—a brother and a daughter. And the highly curious thing is that they have both disappeared."

"Since the murder?"

"No. Several days ago."

CHAPTER V.
Giralda.

In a large chamber of irregular shape, with glass peep-holes in strange positions, a chamber that looked as if it had been originally designed by a child

out of a box of bricks and subsequently enlarged by a pavement artist under the influence of wine, a chamber all whitewash and cement and concrete, and full of a strange odor, a shabby, self-conscious crowd of some twenty men and three women were wandering

lumpishly about from peep-hole to peep-hole, spying, crying, grinning, whispering, wedging. And a universal instinct made them tread as softly as they could on the hard floor. Through one peep-hole was to be seen the corpse of a young child that had been overlaid by its parents, through a second the corpse of another young child that had been overlaid by its parents, through a third the corpse of an old sea captain of whom little was known except that his name was Pollexfen and some one had buried him in a sewer, with the back of his head smashed in. This was the mortuary of a central London district. The audience whom the law had invited to the spectacle consisted of sundry witnesses whose consciences were more or less easy and a jury of

his subpoena at the door, and he was told curtly to sit on a certain bench. Near him he noticed a negro. The room was pretty full. A constable was taking the names of the jury who, officious and timid, sat in two rows on either side of the court opposite to the witnesses; at the back were a handful of persons who, being out of a job, were representing the great and enlightened British public. Two policemen, who struck the eye unfamiliarly because they were without their helmets, dominated the scene.

Then there was a movement; every body rose; and the coroner, the celebrated Mr. Acrefair, known by name to all newspaper readers, entered. He was a thin, active man of forty-five or so, dressed like a stock broker, and he carried a brown bag. In a fraction of time he had doffed his overcoat, sat at the knee-hole desk, which served as the judicial stall. And almost before Philip could realize the fact the inquest on one of the overlaid children had begun.

Mr. Acrefair did nothing but hold inquests. He passed his days in an atmosphere of sudden, violent and mysterious death. He was impassionate, disillusioned, unobscurable, and his methods were very rapid because he invariably had rather more work than he could do. In an hour and a quar-

terly at a chromograph of the Prince of Wales which ornamented the wall in front of him.

Then came a doctor, a portly and pompous man, in a blue melton overcoat. He had a long gray beard and a big white nose; his beard was in some sort an ideal that he had to live up to, mination of the body of the man described by the last witness?

"Yesterday afternoon."

"What was the cause of death?"

"Concussion and compression of the brain, caused by a violent blow at the base of the skull."

"Compression of the brain?" asked the foreman of the jury, seemingly resolved at all costs to protect the jury from mystification. He had a long gray beard, and a kind of rivalry was established. "Will the gentleman kindly tell us what compression of the brain is?"

"In the pathological sense?"

"In sense."

"Compression of the brain occurs whenever its structure is so squeezed that its functions are in any degree interfered with."

"Thank you," said the foreman.

"There were punctiform hemorrhages," continued the doctor, taking his ravens, "in the pons varoli and in the floor of the fourth ventricle. The whole surface of the brain was intense-

doctor, was the first of the witnesses who wept. The respectability of the Corner House had been shaken to its very basis by the murder. The coroner eyed him sharply.

"Your lodging-house is a philanthropic undertaking, Mr. Hilguy?" he asked, after the preliminary questions.

"My boarding-house—"

"You need not trouble to correct my phraseology," interrupted the coroner.

"I said lodging-house."

"What do you charge?"

"Sixpence or a shilling a night."

"And that pays? Rent? Interest on capital? Managerial expenses? Deterioration?"

"There is no rent. I am the manager, I accept no salary. I make a present of my capital to the concern. I haven't had time yet to think of deterioration."

"When you say it pays its way, then you mean that it pays for cleaning and service and that the meals are not served at an actual loss?"

"Yes."

"You are new to philanthropy?"

"We must all begin," said Mr. Hilguy. "Just so," said the coroner. "You think you are alleviating the poverty of London by your venture?"

"Certainly."

"Ah! What is your age, Mr. Hilguy?"

"I do not see—"

"How old are you, sir?"

"Twenty-six."

"You have identified the body of the deceased?"

"Yes; it is the body of Captain Pollexfen, who took a room in my house about ten days ago."

"The exact date?"

"The tenth October, I am nearly sure."

"What was his Christian name?"

"I do not know."

"Of what ship was the Captain?"

"I do not know."

"He had retired from service?"

"I believe so."

"What were his habits?"

"For a week past he had been unwell and stayed in his room, except occasionally for meals."

"Did he strike you as being poor—in reduced circumstances?"

"I imagined him to be like most of my boarders—hard put to it, but respectable."

"He did not talk much?"

"He didn't talk at all."

"Never chatted with you?"

"Never, except about the weather. He would usually mention the precise direction of the wind."

"At meals did he join in the conversation?"

"Very little."

"And he had no friends, no acquaintances?"

"There was a negro named Coco, who came to see him sometimes."

"In his room?"

"Yes."

"Do you know if he had just come from a voyage?"

"I do not."

"When did you last see him?"

"On Tuesday evening about eight o'clock. It was at this point Mr. Hilguy wept."

"Where?"

"He came into the house and went upstairs. His room was on the first floor."

"You said he had not been out for a week?"

"That was the first day he had been out. He had been out twice. Once in the afternoon about five, and again in the evening after our dinner."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw him come in each time."

"Where were you?"

"In my office to the left of the hall. The door of my office is of glass, and from my desk I can see everyone who comes in or goes out."

"How long did he remain the second time?"

"About half an hour."

"You saw him leave?"

"Yes. I went into my office after dinner, about seven, and I was sitting in my office or my office until four o'clock the next morning—Wednesday."

"Did you receive any new lodgers that day?"

"No. The house was full."

"And your old lodgers behaved as usual?"

"Absolutely."

"How many went out after Captain Pollexfen came in at eight o'clock?"

"None."

"Now mind what you are saying, Mr. Hilguy. You told us that no one could leave your house without your knowledge and that you saw no one leave it after the Captain came in. Here he is in the house, presumably in his room, at eight o'clock at night, and yet early the next morning his body is found in the sewer trench. How do you account for that?"

"I cannot account for it."

"Either he was murdered in your house—"

"Impossible, sir! Impossible!" protested Mr. Hilguy.

"Nothing is impossible, sir," said the coroner. "Either he was murdered in your house and his body carried out, or he left your house alive and was murdered outside. You think no one could have crept past your office door unseen by you?"

"I think not."

"Where are the stairs?"

"They begin at my office door, and are in line with the hall."

"There are no other stairs in the house?"

"There are the back stairs," said Mr. Hilguy. "Used exclusively by the household staff."

"Ah! There are the back stairs. What is the household staff?"

"Five boys and two female cooks."

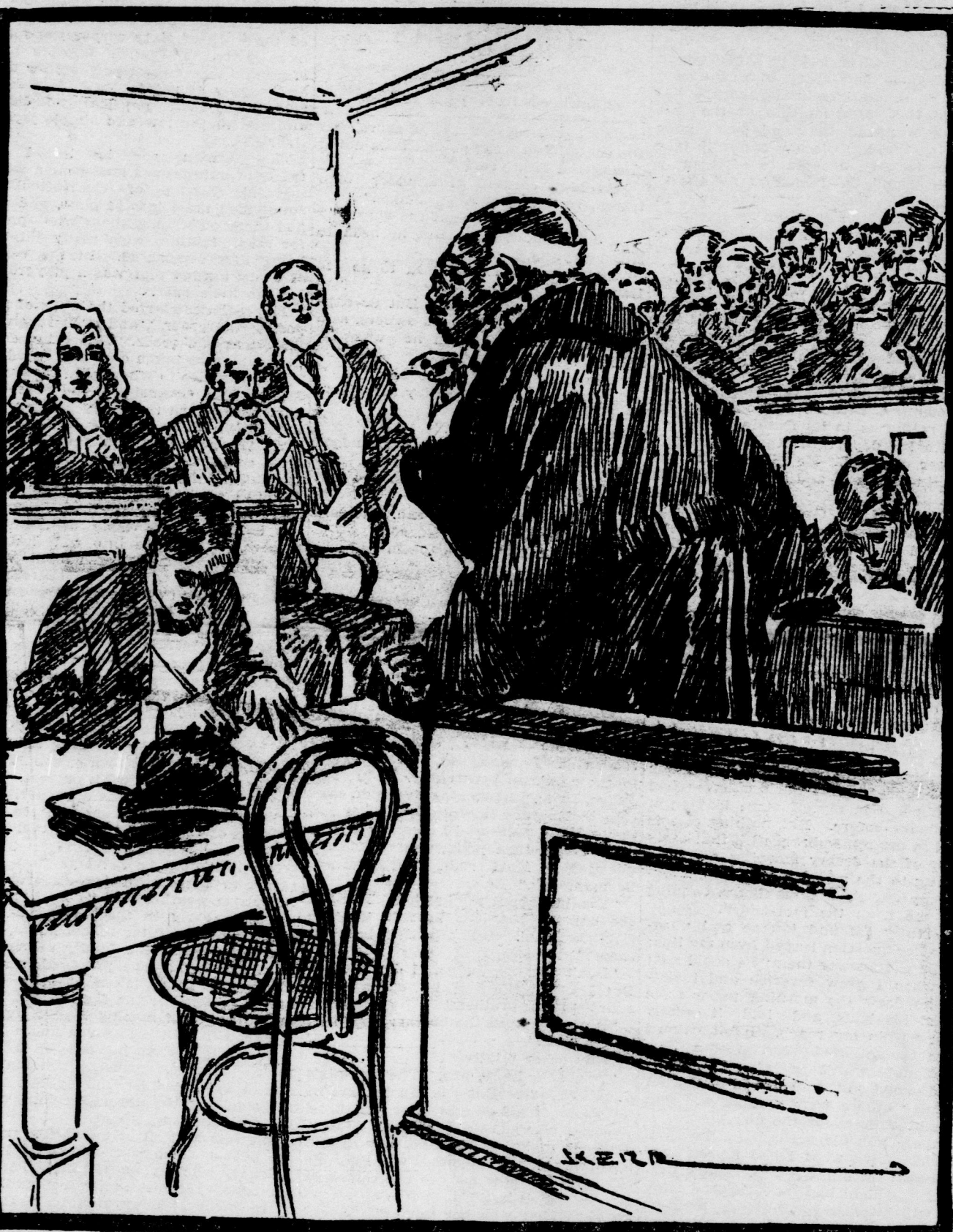
"Where do the back stairs lead to?"

"To the back of the house. The kitchen. There is a back yard."

"Any door to the back yard?"

"Here the policeman, with an air of apology to the coroner, lighted the gas, after having struck two matches."

"Yes," Mr. Hilguy answered, blinking in the new glare. "It gives on the Girdler's Alley. It is bolted at night."



"What was her name?" "Giralda, sah."

small tradesmen and employees wrenched from their work, whose feelings were divided between annoyance, self-importance and curiosity.

The three corpses, waste product of one day's history in a single quarter of London, defied the scene and the crowd to rob them of their icy and majestic dignity. They reposed there in those compartments with the indestructible proud calm, at once impressive and pathetic that death alone can give.

The policeman directed Philip to the peep-hole of Rollexfen, and Philip beheld a typical sailor's face, an old gray beard that curved outward from under the chin, and a long smooth up- per lip; the hair was awry. The hands were gnarled and pale. It seemed impossible that Captain Pollexfen was dead; he had the look of having dropped off to sleep for a few moments in his bunk. It seemed impossible that those simple eyes had but recently glimpsed murder in the eyes of another, and that that existence had survived the seas of half a century in order to end in a sewer and furnish copy for evening papers. It seemed horrible; it seemed uncanny. It seemed unreal.

Philip shivered in his spirit as he thought of himself asleep in the watchman's cabin while, within a few yards of him, quick, ruthless hands had packed the unresisting limbs of the old sailor close to a common drain pipe in a common open space.

The policeman touched his shoulder. The mortuary had emptied; the private view was over; and the inquiry was to begin. It was already half-past two in the afternoon. In the wake of the policeman Philip crossed the street to the coroner's court, a nondescript room that might have been a creche, a soup-kitchen, a workshop, a school—anything but temple of justice. He had to show

ter he had dealt with the two infants lying and censured the parents of one child. lesion; merely a very slight abrasion of the epidermis over a circular area of about five square inches."

"Not five inches square