

BETTER THAN GOLD.
Better than gold, better than gold.
Better than gold, better than gold.

THE HIDDEN CRIME.

On a bright June day, nearly forty years ago, a thrill of dismay ran through a quiet Canadian community. There were no clouds in the sky; the face of nature was decked in summer loveliness; no portent had presaged this terrible calamity. Yet a storm seemed to have swept over the scene, leaving silence and desolation in its track.

The day wore on. The little testimony had all been taken; the secret of the mystery unfolded; the statements of physicians recorded; and the coroner was about to address the jury, when an excited group of men burst into the room. The foreman held in his hand a deep stained clasp-knife, which he had just discovered hidden beneath the shrubs which grew in a distant corner of the garden. Near the spot were other distinct footprints, corresponding exactly with those found at the end of the veranda. The investigation was resumed. The knife was found to be the property of Claudius Fletcher. Indeed, he bore upon the silver plate that ornamented his side, his name.

At once suspicion, the angry suspicion of the crowd, fastened upon him. He acknowledged the knife to be his, and asserted that on the day before the deed he had, when on a visit to his uncle, lent it to him, and the deceased had probably unintentionally retained it. He had left home that night on business for his uncle's estate, spending one day in the city, and returning on the following night. All this was corroborated by the testimony of others; but still there remained to be accounted for the time previous to leaving home on his midnight journey. His widowed mother and his sister were compelled to acknowledge that he had not been occupied that night, and that they were not aware at what time he left the house. He had retired to his room early, with the avowed intention of sleeping for an hour or two; and they, having gone to rest as usual, did not hear him go out.

Only himself and Arnold had an interest in the old man's death; and the act had evidently not been committed by a person in search of plunder. Suspicion thickened round the young man. And when a voter suggested that his boots should be measured, and the footprints, and they were found to fit them exactly, a moan of terror burst from all present. For an instant all shrank from the unfortunate man, and he stood white and still—wonder and grief, more than fear, depicted upon his face—the centre of that angry crowd. After that momentary hush followed the fierce clamor of many voices. Claudius was arrested. The verdict of the coroner's jury fixed suspicion of the crime upon him. All processes of the law were duly followed out. He was indicted, arraigned and tried. The evidence was all circumstantial—the footprints, the clasp-knife, stained and bearing his name, his own acknowledgment to be his own, the unexplained employment of the two hours before midnight of that fatal night, were all deemed proof that fastened the crime upon him. And when it was considered that his uncle's death would, in case a will had been found, have probably made him heir to a larger portion of his estate, a sufficient motive was discovered. But there was no positive proof, and the jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter only. His sentence, therefore, was not death, but that life in legal incarceration within prison walls for thirty years.

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