

## WHO WAS HE ?

BY MISS C. A. FRASER

THE following story, it may be, labours under a great disadvantage in being a narrative of fact, and also in being Canadian, Canada not being generally supposed to have acquired as yet the nameless mystery and sense of eld, likely to result in occurrences weird or strange. Nevertheless, it is an absolutely true tale which I am about to tell, and the events befell myself, a Canadian, a good many years ago, in one of the oldest and busiest parts of Ontario.

I was travelling, by rail, from Hamilton to visit friends in the country. I suppose that my journey was, in its commencement, quite uneventful, for I have no slightest recollection of it, until at a junction *dépôt*, I suddenly loom up in my memory as an angry and slightly excited young person, vigorously upbraiding the railway officials, the government and the universe generally, regarding a matter of errant luggage. I do not in the least recall, at this date, what the difficulty really was, but I infer from my own demeanour that my conscience was entirely clear, and that the defection was owing to no heedlessness of mine. That the situation was beyond hope of immediate remedy I also infer from the same conditions. I would not have been so recklessly eloquent had there been a loophole of escape. Whether the officials were too guilty to defend themselves, or too indifferent, I cannot tell. On this point "the haunts of memory echo not," but I seem in the glimpse I get now, peering through the vista of years, to have the floor, and to be improving the occasion to the utmost of my ability, when suddenly comes an interruption.

A stranger had been carelessly regarding me. I had been aware of his

standing there, a little to my left, apart and alone ; but he was, at first glance, a very prosaic-looking individual, commonplace, I imagined, in fact, and he not being invested with badge or other token of office, I had not intentionally included him in my audience, and was only vaguely conscious of his presence, until now, when stepping forward and removing his cigar, he quietly offered a suggestion. I do not now know what it was, and it does not especially matter. I remember only the shock with which I awakened to a sense of my own volubility, and to my instant collapse.

He was of middle height, narrow-chested, and afflicted with a cough. He had a light-brown beard, not long, nor carefully trimmed. He looked tolerably well-to-do, but was not, in appearance at least, a city man. I have seen many merchants in small towns of just the same style and manner. His only pronounced characteristic was his expression, which was not the expression of such a merchant, especially while on a trip either of business or pleasure. He looked unhappy : in fact he looked bored, and at the moment of proffering me advice, he had the air of being constrained to do what cost an unwelcome effort. Apart from the look of *ennui* which he wore, and which might be readily attributed to physical weakness overcome by the discomfort of even a short journey, he had an intensely pre-occupied air. Even when a few hours later he conversed with me pleasantly enough, I remember, little interested in him as I was, being struck with this. I can see his face now distinctly with that strange absence of mind written upon it. It approached the expression of a clair-