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Dr. Jennings came later in the day. He told the inspector that the young man was undoubtedly mad; that his obstinacy in adhering to a story so utterly disproved by all other evidence took the case out of the ordinary course of "alcoholism." He believed, he said, that Marshall was suffering from a permanent brain affection—paranoia, he thought it—and he questioned whether his duty was not to take the necessary steps to put the unhappy patient where he could do no more harm.

He might have burnt down the tower," he said. "He might try it again. At any rate, with the cunning and persistence of people suffering from monomania, he will certainly make statements that will involve the whole neighbourhood in a most sensational notoriety, and bring great sorrow on the people of the church, on the Vicar, on Lady Yatton."

"Perhaps," said the inspector, "I may find it necessary to bring a charge against him."

"Perhaps," answered the doctor. "But you would find it impossible to prove anything, I fear; and you would give him a chance to make his sensational charges in court. The end would be that he would be committed to an asylum. If you think of doing anything let me know first, and I will get a specialist to examine him with me. If the opinion of the brain specialist should coincide with mine we could put him where he ought to be without the trouble, the expense, the notoriety of a trial. The only thing is that Lady Yatton is ridiculously soft-hearted, and will be upset at anything that is done. But, anyway, you go and see him. It may quiet him."

Inspector Rathbun promised to go immediately; and then, as the doctor went out, asked if he had news of his assistant.

The doctor shut his teeth with a snap and shook his head.

"You must be very busy. His disappearance was mysterious. I hope you did not miss any spoons."

The doctor tried to smile, and said that he made no charge against the absconder.

"Rum thing that!" said the inspector to himself as he looked after the retreating figure.

When he started out for his call on the invalid it must be admitted that he was not in what may be called precisely an unbiased frame of mind. He had no wish to do anything but his duty, but it was quite natural that he should approach that duty with a distinct idea in his mind that he was about to see a lunatic. The surgeon had said so, and it was his business to give that opinion great weight in deciding on his course of action. But before he went to the Manor House he himself visited the tower, which disclosed no secret to him. As he looked carefully out of that open arch in the spire, however, he shuddered, and muttered that no further proof was required.

Lady Yatton was not at the Manor House when he arrived there; and the nurse had gone for her afternoon walk. A red-cheeked little maid was in temporary charge of the patient, and how was she to know or tell the inspector that the excitement of the day had made the invalid very feverish, and that his temperature had gone up nearly to 102?

Policeman and patient were alone together for the best part of an hour; and the end of it all was that the inspector left with a wondering impression at the moderation of the doctor's opinions. Such a wild and flighty jumble of horrors he had never listened to before; but when he had found that he could not get any coherent statement, he had devoted himself to quieting the poor chap as much as he could.

He left the house determined to advise the doctor when he saw him next day to waste no time in consulting with a brain specialist. He flattered himself that the impression he left behind was one of belief in the story, and that Marshall would rest contented that something would be done.

He must, however, have been a very bad actor, for when the little country girl took up her post once again in the sick-room the invalid cried out: "Jennie, I think everybody in this neighbourhood is mad."

(To be continued.)