

"The seventh day of the seventh month—seven letters in each name—seven!"

And the ball, with a rapid click, flew into number seven.

Tubby drew back, the pallor deepening on his face, a curious shrinking in his eyes.

"By Jove!" he said under his breath. "It's ghastly, but he's right. Seventh day of the seventh month. Seven letters in each name—Lisbeth Bainton—and now mine—Theodor—and Pridham's."

He walked away, with the look that had been on his face reflected on his own—the look of the gambler who brings everything to one touchstone: the lucky number!

CHAPTER VIII.

"Add to your list, as the eighth deadly sin, anxiety of mind."

MR. PRIDHAM, at his library table, with his elbows resting on it, holding a receiver to each ear, waited for the connection to be established between him and Merry's Private Detective Agency.

"You're through," said the operator, and a minute after he was recounting to Mr. Frank Merry the disappearance of his son, and being assured, in a suave, discreet voice, that measures should at once be taken for discovering the whereabouts of Mr. Laurence Pridham, without either publicity or scandal.

"Spare no expense," was Mr. Pridham's final sentence. "Find him by to-night, if possible."

There was a ray of distinct hope in his mind, as he rang off, for Merry knew his business, and the initials of it were to inspire confidence in every one who dealt with him.

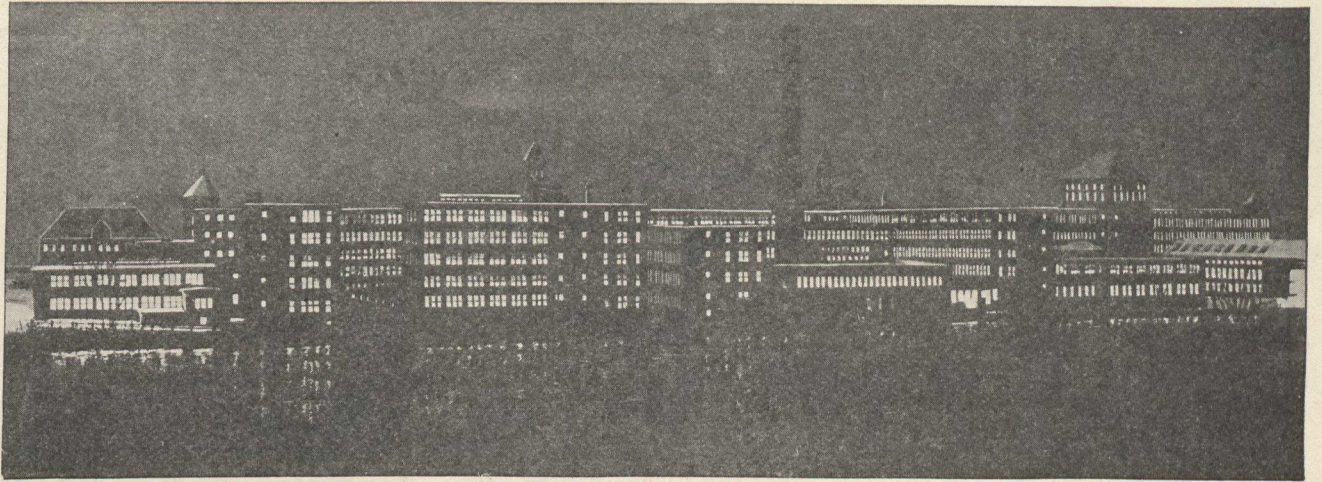
At the other end of the line, Mr. Merry's stenographer had taken down in shorthand, "Laurence Pridham, only son of Horatio Pridham, J.P., of Spinney Chase, Hants., lieutenant, Chiltern Fusiliers now stationed at Hounslow, absent without leave since 1 a.m. Left Spinney Chase at 10.45 on the 7th, to catch the 11.5 train up to Waterloo. Had no luggage with him. Was in the habit of going down, when on leave, to his father's house without luggage, as he had necessary outfit at the Chase as well as in barracks.

"Height, five feet eleven inches; very fair hair and moustache; blue eyes, straight features; fair complexion; was wearing dark green Hom-burg hat, dark blue cloth suit, stick-up collar, tie in regimental colours, vertical green, mauve, and black stripes, gold safety-pin brooch, gold sleeve links with initials 'L.P.'; gold half-hunter flat watch in vest pocket; gold cigarette case in coat pocket; black boots, dark blue silk socks. Carried no stick. Intended to proceed to Hounslow on arrival at Waterloo. Had no debts or difficulties as far as his parents knew. Colonel Bray, of the Chiltern Fusiliers, telegraphed this morning asking reason for his absence from parade and barracks. Only unusual incident in the neighborhood of Spinney Chase, the murder, by some person unknown, of a girl of humble station, on the canal bank, about three hundred yards from the grounds of Spinney Chase. Girl's name, Lisbeth Bainton. Girl unknown to any members of Mr. Pridham's family. Murder took place at about eight minutes past eleven, according to unofficial statement by local doctor, George Fraser. No expense to be spared in search."

Meanwhile, Mr. Pridham, buried in thought, restlessly pacing to and fro, or sitting down and resting his head on his hand, could imagine no reason plausible enough to account for the inexplicable circumstances that had transpired. He saw himself involved in a disgrace that would lend an unenviable notoriety to his name just at the moment when that name was to be written on the Scroll of Time.

He saw his only son branded as a deserter, forced to send in his papers, to resign the chance of a marriage with Lord Brismain's daughter and unable to hold his head up in the company of honourable men.

He saw his own years of honest, ambition-sweetened toil made null



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