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DOUBLOONS

A Thrilling Novel of Mystery, Tragedy and a Stolen Fortune

By Eden Phillpotts and Arnold Bennett

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CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

He was awakened by what in Russia is called a domiciliary visit. A force of police, under the pained guidance of Mr. Hilgay, was searching the entire house, cubicle by cubicle, and floor by floor. It appeared that Mr. Varcoe had posted plain-clothed men in the street, with instructions to enter when summoned, and to enter without a summons if no summons had been received before a given hour. The limit having expired, they had violently entered, to the dismay and shocked resentment of the bland Adrian. But Mr. Varcoe had vanished. He had apparently vanished off the face of the earth. For his minions made sure that he was not in the house, and they were absolutely convinced that he had not left the house. Nor was he on the roof, nor clinging to spouts. Scenes of uncontrolled recrimination passed between gentility and the law in the corridors. Nearly all the guests threatened to leave on the instant the house where they had been subjected to such gross and unprecedented insult. But none left; the prices were so low. Day dawned on a sleepless community of souls.

CHAPTER XI.

In the Fourth Estate.

The next day was Saturday, a day usually rather flat and uninteresting, as regards its morning, in Central London, and rather vivacious, as regards its afternoon, even in the primmest suburbs. But that particular Saturday morning was not anywhere destined to dullness. Clerks who strolled across bridges and out of termini with the sole intention of drawing a week's salary and going home again, were met by the posters of a special second edition of the Daily Courier which contained an artistically breathless description of the night at the Corner House. No other morning paper had "got" the most startling episode in the annals of modern crime, an episode which the Courier's poster announced thus: "Corner House Mystery. Scotland Yard Defied. Detective Varcoe Spirited Away. Is He Dead?" The evening papers had not yet had time to come out, so that the Courier had a monopoly for quite two hours. And in spite of the fact that the Courier had just recently changed hands, tone and politics, and was therefore bound, morally or immorally, to stir London up at the earliest possible instant, experienced Londoners felt that here was something genuine in the way of a sensation. The voices of the newsboys as they cried the Courier had that "take-it or leave it" accent which on the lips of a newsboy always indicates that there is no deception. The Giralda affair had been great before; it was now unique. It was the one thing that existed in London, and the accommodation question on the District Railway; even Bridge was played less than usual that day.

In the Corner House life had become very difficult indeed. Not later than 9 o'clock the siege of the vicinity had already been resumed by the vast leisured class that exclusively occupied the main thoroughfare of the town. The crowds were kept at bay on the confines of Strange street by a force of policemen, but policemen could not be set to keep policemen out of the House; nor is the modern journalist, especially when he is attached to a Sunday paper and it happens to be Saturday morning, the sort of person that can be kept out of any house by any authority, natural, or supernatural, should he desire to enter it. The modern journalist, at a salary of fifty shillings a week and cab fares, knows the power behind him. And what with police in and out of uniform, and journalists weekday and Sunday, and the general leisured public surging and staring at the ends of the street, the Corner House had the right to call itself fully and strictly Invested. Chief and yet most mysterious among the strangers within its gates was a being from Scotland Yard greater than Varcoe; a personage, indeed, than which Scotland Yard could produce none higher; the king of his kind. Policemen did not refer to him by name; they said 'e or 'im, in an impressed whisper, with jerks of the head in the direction of the particular room where this formidable being was supposed to be. Few persons saw him; he was simply known to be "on the job." And that he was on the job, that he had designed to quit his lair in order to come to the job, rendered the job sublime in the eyes of those who could differentiate between jobs. He interviewed Philip; Philip's leading impression of him was that he was a very good listener. He also interviewed Mr. Hilgay. Shortly after this Mr. Hilgay took to his bed and sent for a doctor. The situation had become too vast and complicated for Mr. Hilgay, and he retired, defeated if not disgraced, expecting brain fever.

Philip, after what was called breakfast, but what that morning had been little more than a picnic, remained with several other boarders in the basement refectory, and employed his time steadily in refusing to talk either to journalists or to his fellow-lodgers. He wanted to do sundry things that he could not do; to find a situation—he could not even fix his mind on this important matter; to have an exhaustive conversation with John Meredith—John Meredith was not on view; or, in default, to chat with Sir Anthony—he would have difficulty in getting out of the street—it puzzled him how the journalists went to and fro. No one, unless it might have been the criminal himself, was more interested in the Corner House crimes than Philip was at that moment. He seemed to have stepped right into the middle of them; they absorbed him like a dog. They certainly prevented him from even beginning to carve his career.

A gray mustached commissionaire in the sober uniform of his corps entered the refectory.

"Mr. Masters?" he looked around inquiringly.

"Well?" Philip curtly replied.

The commissionaire handed a visiting card to Philip, and the card bore the legend: "The Right Honorable Lord Nasing."

"His Lordship would like to have the pleasure of an interview with you, sir."

The genteel lodgers pricked up their ears.

"Who is Lord Nasing?" Philip demanded.

"He is—er—Lord Nasing," the commissionaire explained. "His Lordship told me to say that he thought he could be useful to you."

"Where is he?"

"At his office."

"Where's that?"

"In Stewart square. I have a cab waiting, sir."

"And can we get out?"

"Yes, sir. Up Little Girdler's alley, and through the yard of the Cup and Ball."

Philip saw no reason why he should decline the adventure. It offered him at least an escape from inaction.

"I will come with you," he said.

He felt sure that Lord Nasing was famous for something or other, but he could not recollect what; and he did not care to ask the commissionaire. His ignorance of the latest creations in peerages was deplorable.

Arrived at Stewart square, that humming centre of journalism between Fleet street and the Embankment, the cab stopped in front of the glassy and monumental Brent Building, where three dailies and twenty-nine weeklies and three monthlies had their home. Of the four great journalistic houses in London, the Brent Company was not the least important. It was a one-man company. Nicholas Brent, its founder, had been the only son of his father, and he had never taken a partner nor a wife. It showed annual profits of over a quarter of a million, and its dividend increased each year. Its three lower stories were faced with glass, so that all the world might see the operations that went forward within. On the ground floor were the Victory printing machines which were even then throwing off copies of the first edition (nominally the second) of the Evening Record, at the rate of a hundred and twenty thousand copies an hour. On the first floor were the compositors engaged at linotype machines in setting up the flying and influential words of the descriptive reporters and writers on the second floor. These stories were occupied and busy day and night—a symbol and sign of the ceaseless activity of the Brent brain, that sardonic brain which had invented the celebrated newspaper maxim: "We spin you a yarn today. We give you the news next week."

The commissionaire, with the courage of an old soldier, plunged himself and Philip straight into the seething heart of the Brent daily battle, and did not leave his charge until after a light and long corridor, he had deposited him at a door marked "Mr. Brent," with the name crossed out and "Lord Nasing" written over it. Philip remembered then who Lord Nasing was. The commissionaire had knocked and received a favorable answer, and Philip entered.

The interior was vast and noble, the caprice of a millionaire who spent the whole of his waking horus in the successful pursuit of pleasure by means of business, and who believed in comfort with splendor. His office was an exact reproduction of Napoleon's council chamber at Fontainebleau, with its ceiling by Boucher, its Beauvais tapestries, and even the famous round table whose top is a single piece of mahogany.

At the round table, which was covered with letters and slip proofs, sat a pale, puffy man of forty-five with the ear-pieces of a telephone strapped round his dark head. Two young women were writing in remote corners of the room.

"No," the man was saying with careful distinctness into the telephone, "Giralda, G. as in gin, i. a as in roller, a, l, d as in donkey, a. Got it? Good!" He looked up. "Mr. Masters? Will you sit down a moment, I'm just 'phoning to Paris."

He finished what was apparently part of a paragraph for the Paris edition of the Record, and then he rang off, released himself from the ear-pieces, and turned to Philip. A messenger had come and gone. The two women silently departed.

"Good morning, Mr. Masters. Won't you have this chair near the table?"

"Thanks," said Philip. "Are you Lord Nasing?"

"I am. You know, I've just bought the Daily Courier?"

"I did not," said Philip.

"And yet I have spent twenty thousand in advertising the fact. It just shows that one can never advertise enough. Well, I've bought the Courier, and henceforth it's produced in this building. You are after a situation, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Philip.

"How would you like to come on the staff?" The tones were even, placid, cold.

"But I'm not a journalist."

"That's all the better. I want new blood. Journalists always think in grooves."

"I can't write."

"That's not necessary," said Lord Nasing; "I can't either. And look at me! I can hire writers for a couple of pounds a week."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go round and get stuff for the Courier."

"What sort of stuff?"

"Bright stuff. Interesting stuff. Exclusive stuff."

"And why do you pick out me?"

"For various reasons. Chiefly because Evenwood, the special of the Record, has been able to make nothing of you. His description of you, and—er—what we know—in short"——

"And the screw?" Philip demanded, smiling.

"What do you ask?"

Philip, having been thus requested to open his mouth, decided that he ought to open it extremely wide.

"Twenty pounds a week," he said calmly, drumming on the table.

Lord Nasing paused. "I will give it to you. But you know the rules of the house?"

"No," said Philip.

"No notice given or required. I have over four hundred staff contributors and secretaries in this place. Every one can walk out when he pleases, and I can shoot 'em out when I please; that's fair, isn't it?"

"Perfectly," said Philip. "Life must be quite interesting here."

Lord Nasing laughed. "It is," he said shortly.

"Of course, I understand your motives," Philip remarked.

"My motives?" Lord Nasing repeated, with a gesture almost threatening.

"Yes," said Philip. "You're going to tell me to work up the Corner House affair. Now it seems to me that, next to the murderer, I know more about it than anybody in London. I'm in it. I'm of it. I've refused to talk to reporters, and the Record is cross with me for my silence. I'm worth money in Fleet street. What you can't get in one way you usually get in another. That's why you succeed, Lord Nasing. You think you've got the most valuable asset in London for a paltry twenty pounds a week."

"And haven't I?"

"Yes," said Philip. "Provided you give me a month's engagement certain."

"Impossible, Mr. Masters. I cannot break the rule of a lifetime."

"As you please," Philip rejoined. "But suppose the mystery was cleared up tomorrow, I reckon I should be 'shot out' tomorrow. And it's not good enough."

Lord Nasing rose.

"I admire you," he said.

"The admiration is mutual," said Philip "Good morning, my Lord."

"Not at all," said Lord Nasing. "I yield, young man, I yield. But you will sign your articles."

"I will sign everything I write," Philip agreed. "You want me to begin right off, I imagine?"

"Certainly. I shall expect you here tonight at 7 o'clock, with results, including, naturally, your own story in full. If necessary, I mean to issue a special edition of the Courier tomorrow. Tell me, what do you think is the real explanation of this mess that Scotland Yard has got itself into?" Lord Nasing sat down again.

"To my mind," said Philip, "the explanation is perfectly simple. The late Varcoe"——

"You think he's dead?"

"I do. The late Varcoe fancied himself too much. He fancied he was going to do the trick all alone, and he very nearly did, but not quite. Somebody else was just a shade cleverer than he was, and that somebody is the criminal. He told me so. I am pretty sure that he had discovered everything. But he confided in nobody. That was his mistake. Nobody at Scotland Yard was to have a ha'porth of credit but Varcoe. And so, in getting rid of Varcoe, the criminal was just as safe as he was before Varcoe started his inquiries. I suppose there's jealousy at Scotland Yard as there is everywhere. But they'll never admit it."

"Excellent! Excellent!" murmured Lord Nasing. "You go and write that theory up. But, look here, if Varcoe is dead, where is his corpse?"

"I expect it's in the Corner House."

"Do you think you can find it?"

"Who knows?" said Philip. "Hadn't I better be going?"

"Yes," agreed Lord Nasing.

"What about expenses?"

"Carte blanche," said his lordship.

"I assume when you say carte blanche you mean"—

"Carte blanche," his lordship repeated.

"Right," said Philip, getting up. "Well, in addition to carte blanche with the cashier, I shall want a—a tame grammarian and a photographer."

"You mean to take photographs?"

"I mean to show you what my notion of journalism is," said Philip.

He departed, with his scrip and the staff (consisting of the photographer and a youth who could write), very joyous in his new profession, and withal gloomy as a man. The thought of Varcoe dead touched his heart; a nameless apprehension concerning John Meredith affrighted him; and the portrait of Giralda was always before his eyes like a lure.

It seemed to him, however, that he had sharpened the knife by which he should recommence the carving of his new career.

CHAPTER XII.

The Bank Note.

The police, even aided by the monarch of Scotland Yard, made no useful discovery that day. They had no point from which to begin. If Mr. Varcoe had only given the least and vaguest hint to his assistants, the enquiry perhaps might have been more successful. He had chosen otherwise, however, and he was now paying, if he had not already paid, the penalty of vain-glorious pride. As for the journalists, they did no better than the police; but then they were hampered by the police, whereas the police, were not hampered by them. Philip, as the newly appointed representative of the Courier, moved with his satellites regally up and down the house. He had conceived a preliminary and extremely comprehensive plan, and he began at once to carry it out, though he did not hope for immediate results; he had forty hours before the next ordinary edition went to press, and if any unusual luck happened to him within twenty hours there would still be time for the special Sunday edition suggested by Lord Nasing. His photographer and his tame grammarian, who was also a stenographer, he regarded as two beautiful new toys.

In the execution of his plan, he knocked at John Meredith's door. The hour was noon.

"Who's there?" cried the wonderful voice of Meredith, and Philip noticed in it a tone of almost excessive alarm.

"It's Masters," Philip replied, "I want to have a talk with you, if you can spare the time."

No reply came and Philip knocked again.

"Did you hear?" he questioned.

"I—I can't talk just now," Meredith replied, and Philip seemed to detect tears in the voice.

"Shall you be in for lunch, may I ask?"

Another pause and then an agitated response:

"I don't think so; I may be."

Philip walked to the head of the stairs, undecided what to do. He had set his mind on an interview with John Meredith, not necessarily for reproduction in the Courier, but for his own enlightenment. The young man's singular demeanor on the previous night, at mention of Captain Pollexfen's brother, had remained in Philip's mind with special clearness. And the matter of the blind presented features of the most extraordinary interest. Moreover he still felt strongly that Meredith was in need of assistance, and he wished to render that assistance.

As he stood in the shadow at the head of the stairs he heard a door very cautiously opened, and then a soft, rapid step along the corridor. Meredith appeared in hat and overcoat, and Meredith had evidently not expected to find Philip in the path. He gave one furtive look of pathetic dismay, hesitated, and then rushed past him down the stairs without a word.

Philip, dumfounded, descended after him to the street. Meredith had hastened out, turned to the right and up the Alley, half running. At a discreet distance he was followed by a man who detached himself from the staring crowd without hindrance from the police and whom Philip knew for a detective.

Difficulties with his private photographer afforded some distraction to Philip's mind. Meredith did not come to lunch. But Mrs. Upottery, to the surprise of all the world, did come to lunch. She was in profound mourning, as at the inquest, and she ate a satisfactory meal with infinite gravity, refusing, however, the tapioca pudding—perhaps on account of its flippancy. She spoke to none of the remnant of people at the tables, and none dared to address her. She was sterner here even than at the inquest, and men marvelled anew that such frigid and antique charms had bewitched Captain Pollexfen, who was a sailor and probably therefore a connoisseur in charms of all countries.

Philip, who had eaten nothing, marked Mrs. Upottery for his lawful prey. He had never, in such brief part of his life as had been devoted to silken dalliance, achieved astounding victories over the young, but among elderly ladies he had always been a favorite. There was something in his eyes that appealed to elderly ladies, and he had an idea that that something would not in vain appeal to Mrs. Upottery. He waited for her to rise, meaning to follow her out, but she did not rise. Instead of rising she took a small book from her pocket and began to read; it was a prayer book of the Church of England. One by one the guests departed, and at length Mrs. Upottery and the young man who meant that his eyes should appeal to her were left alone together. Her eyes wandered from the prayer book and were accidentally caught by his. She was in his net.

"Mrs. Upottery!" he addressed her earnestly, with a serious smile.

"Young man!" Her tone was deep and formidable, but not unfriendly.

"I'm sure you've been fearfully bothered and worried by all sorts of people this morning, but I'm charged with a special mission of inquiry by a big daily paper, and I wondered if you would"——He stopped.

"If I were what?" she positively smiled in her turn.

"If you would mind telling me the whole history of your relations with the late Captain Pollexfen."

"I have been bothered and worried," said Mrs. Upottery. "And tomorrow is his funeral. I hope you will go to it, young man. I think it is the duty of every one in the house to go to it, as a mark of respect."

Her voice faltered, and she hid her face in the black-bordered handkerchief.

"Certainly," said Philip. "Certainly, I wasn't aware"——

"It's at B—Brompton," sobbed Mrs. Upottery.

He assured her that he would attend the funeral, and he was about to excuse himself from troubling her further when she astonished him by saying, as she wiped her eyes:

"What do you want me to tell you?"

He replied eagerly. "I want you to begin at the beginning and tell me everything. I'm sure we shall come across something that may lead to a clew."

"Here?" she queried, looking round, and, not waiting for his answer, she said, "Yes. Come and sit near me. I'm rather deaf."

"Now, how did you first become acquainted with the Captain?" Philip demanded, obeying her, and trying to feel as much like a journalist as he could.

She turned on her chair to face him; her lips trembled in the effort to articulate; a terrific sob escaped her, and she fell against him, seeming partly to lose consciousness. Then, as if ashamed of this weakness, she somehow found her feet and sank back on her chair.

"Brandy," she whispered. "Get me some brandy, young man."

She was breathing heavily.

Philip, vastly disconcerted, raced from the room and called a boy, and, after some delay, brandy was obtained and administered, and he assisted Mrs. Upottery upstairs, finding her very heavy and unwieldy, especially on the basement steps.

"Thank you, young man," she said. "You are the first person who has been kind to me, since his—his"——

"Don't talk," said Philip, "if it upsets you."

"I cannot talk of it," she answered. "But I can write it all down and I will do it. It will calm me. I will do it tonight, this very night."

He thanked her. "And may I use what you write in my paper?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Upottery. "It's a very rich and sucessful paper, isn't it?"

"Very," Philip agreed.

"Well," the lady said meekly, "they must give me a hundred guineas for what I write. It will be worth that."

Philip was thunderstruck. "A hundred guineas!" he muttered.

"Yes," said Mrs. Upottery. Of course not for myself, young man. I shall give it to the Sailors' Home at Southampton, where once my poor—my poor"——

Tears silenced her. Philip consented. He had carte blanche.

At 7 o'clock precisely he reentered the Brent Building.

"Which floor is Lord Nasing's room on?" he demanded of the lift-boy.

"You can't see 'is lordship," the boy answered.

He was a tall, loutish lift-boy, graduating in the Brent school of manners, to which Philip was not accustomed. He therefore took the boy's ear between his fingers and thumb and pressed the second finger into a particular spot behind the ear. In five seconds the lift was wafting him upward.

"Now show me Lord Nasing's door," said Philip. "I'm not very good at geography."

"I daren't leave the lift," the boy protested.

"Come," said Philip.

The boy came.

"And now knock at the door for me."

The boy knocked.

"And now run away to your lift, and remember to know me next time I come."

There was no reply to the knock. However, as he had a definite appointment, Philip entered. The room was empty. One electric light burned over the great round table. By way of illumination there were also the dull yellow horizontal rays of the electric heater in the fireplace; they showed to advantage the pattern of the carpet.

Philip coughed loudly.

"Who are you?" said a valet coming noiselessly out of an adjoining room.

"My name is Masters," said Philip. "And I have an important appointment with Lord Nasing at 7 o'clock."

"Well, I should advise you to hook it," said the valet.

"Listen, my friend," Philip was beginning, when Lord Nasing strolled into the room in the wake of his man. He was tying a white necktie at the summit of a broad lap of shirt front.

"You're there!" said Philip, relieved. "I thought it was very strange if you'd forgotten me."

His greeting so affected the valet that the valet disappeared into the next room to conceal his sense of humor.

Lord Nasing dropped the ends of his necktie. Then, having considered the situation, he laughed. There was nothing else to do.

"Oh!" said he. "You're the young man that's got charge of the Corner House affair."

"I am," answered Philip very drily. He had been called "young man" just once too often that day, and Lord Nasing was the final offender.

"What have you done?.'

"Are you engaged for dinner?" Philip asked him, as if at the sword's point.

"N—no," said Lord Nasing, quite unused to these tactics from his legionaries.

"Well," said Philip. "Come along and dine with me at the Savoy, and I'll tell you there what I have done. I'm too exhausted to talk till I've got some Burgundy inside me."

Silence reigned for a space in the council chamber.

"Straker," Lord Nasing called.

"My lord?" the valet appeared.

"My coat. Mr. Masters has been good enough to ask me to dine with him at the Savoy."

"If you don't mind," Philip added, "we'll go to the grill-room, as I'm not dressed."

He was strangly enthusiastic in his new profession. He reckoned that he was succeeding. And certainly his exit in company with Lord Nasing from the Brent Building gave currency to a rumor among the innumerable staff that he was.

The reception of the pair in the grill-room of the Savoy, where Lord Nasing was well known, amounted to a triumph. Philip ordered the wine, and drank most of the first bottle before the peer could begin.

"And now," said he over the soup. "I'll tell you what I've done. Well, I've spent about a hundred and eighty pounds."

Lord Nasing arrested his spoon.

"You're a costly luxury," said his lordship. "No wonder you ask me to dinner."

"Not at all. I'm cheap. In return for that trifling sum I've secured a long signed article by Mrs. Upottery—it will be delivered tomorrow—giving the entire history of her relations with the dead man, and also interviews with signed statements form thirty-one out of the sixty boarders in the house. I've also secured a long article from myself of unique interest. And look here!"

He tumbled a heap of rough photographic prints from his pocket.

"Here are photographs of the house; the sewer; the captain's room, where the murder was probably committed; the stairs; a group of boarders at lunch; the crowds in the street; separate portraits of forty boarders. See this photograph of Mrs. Upottery! Also these photographs of policemen and detectives. Never before, I fancy, has a newspaper had photographs of detectives in the act of detecting. And here, photograph of the Volga—the captain's last command. Also a collection of partraits of Giralda."

"Good!" said Lord Nasing. "Good. But where's the murderer?"

"All in due course," Philip replied. "All in due course. I have only been at work ten hours."

Suddenly Lord Nasing laughed.

"What's the joke?" Philip ventured to inquire.

"I was just thinking," Lord Nasing answered. "Supposing you are the murderer—you might be, you know!—what a scoop it would be for the Courier in the end!"

"Yes, wouldn't it!" Philip concurred.

At the end of the generous but rapid meal he asked for the bill, and opened his pocketbook to get a banknote. He unfoulded his bundle of notes. The note that first met his eye was one for £100, which constituted rather less than half of his entire fortune. He read mechanically the number and date: "E-34 687056 London, 15th May, 1904. And the room began to rock and the world to be unreal. The number of the notes handed to Captain Pollexfen by his employers on the fatal Tuesday had been published everywhere. And this note was one of them! Philip knew the numbers by heart.

He commanded himself, discovered a fiver, put the other notes back into his pocketbook, and paid the bill.

CHAPTER XIII.

A Discovery.

Philip's departure from the Savoy grillroom was accomplished with the irreducible minimum of formality; and the cloakroom attendant had a narrow escape of being maimed for life, merely because of a slight tendency toward ritualism in the delivery of the journalist's hat and coat. As for Lord Nasing, abandoned with such breath-taking someone pitched the bed-hangings into the middle of his suppertable was far less astonished than he. Lord Nasing's sole comfort was a moral certainty that Philip must be the criminal himself. Philip bounded into a cab, and told the driver to drive, in an unmentionable manner, to the Devonshire Mansion. He drew again the pocketbook from his pocket. Happily the cab was the last word of civilization in cabs, and had a small oil lamp fixed in its interior, so that Philip could examine the banknote thoroughly and at leisure. Not only was there no mistake about the number of the note, but he had another note for a hundred pounds, and that also bore one of the advertised numbers. He thus held in his possession two of the notes which the shipping firm had paid to Captain Pollexfen on the day of the latter's murder. No wonder the hand trembled and he forgot for the moment that he was a journalist and therefore "ipso facto" imperturable!

Oxwich, who might with advantage have started a school of imperturbability for young journalists, opened to him on the fifth floor of the Devonshire Mansion.

"Sir Anthony in?"

"Yes, sir. But he's expecting"——

"I must see him instantly," said Philip. "Instantly!"

Oxwich had a great power of grasping a situation.

"Certainly, sir." And without another word he escorted Philip to the drawing room. Sir Anthony was walking nervously to and fro, an unrivalled chrysanthemum in his buttonhole. He jumped as the door opened.

"Say, Tony," Philip spluttered out.

"Look here, old man." Sir Anthony stopped him with a rapid flow of words. "Awful glad to see you. But you can't stop here. Josephine has dined with me down below in the restaurant, and she's just gone for a moment to see Kitty, and then she's coming here and we're going to try over one of her songs, and then I have to drive her to the Metro, or she'll be late. She comes on at 9.20. It's a fearful bore, but what can I do? See you afterward, eh?"

"I don't care for fifty Josephines," said Philip, producing his pocketbook. "How do you explain this." The door opened again.

"Here she is," Tony whispered. "Skip, my son!" He glanced at the door and his face suffered a great change. It did not merely fall; it fell to pieces. "Mildred!" he exclaimed.

"My darling Tony?" twittered a fluffily dressed and maturely handsome woman who floated across the room in a maze of chiffon, and then took Tony by the neck. After which, on perceiving Philip, she gave a little "Oh!" of coquettish surprise.

"My friend, Philip Masters," said Tony, disengaging himself. "Phil, this is my sister, Mrs. Appleby."

"I'm always delighted to meet my Tony's friends," Mrs. Appleby asserted, sailing down upon Philip.

It was at once evident that she conducted her existence exclusively in the superlative degree. There are many such women. They invariably remain stationary at the age of thirty-eight, spend the largest possible sums on costumes, and fight eternally against embonpoint. Their husbands are usually dead, and if they have not a wonderful young son they have a wonderful young daughter. Mrs. Appleby had a son, as soon appeared.

"And what are you doing in town?" Tony demanded, with a pitiable effort to be joyous and enthusiastic.

"It's poor Horace," his sister replied, sinking with a sad sigh, but gracefully, into a chair. "He's unwell again. He telegraphed for me this morning and I drove to Crewe and caught the eleven express. It doesn't seem to be anything serious, but really something will have to be done. For his age—fourteen, Mr. Masters—he's wonderfully advanced. In fact, his teacher can't keep him back. He tells me he was going into permutations and combinations next week! Just imagine that! But his constitution won't stand it. And I fancy there's something in the air of Blackneath. I shall have to take him away. He looks on you as quite a second father. Tony, dear, and as I"——

Oxwich showed himself in the doorway. He said nothing. He merely interrupted the discourse by gazing at Sir Anthony in a fashion which indicated alarm, regret, impotence, and entreaty. Disturbing sounds were to be heard in the corridor.

"And as I"—— Mrs. Appleby vivaciously resumed.

"Half a second, Mildred!" Tony said, almost blushing, and hurried out of the room, only half shutting the door.

Philip and Mrs. Appleby regarded each other, Philip being burned up with a suppressed fever and nearly light-headed.

"And as I always consult dear Tony in these"—— Mrs. Appleby recommenced, with a siren's smile.

"Just so!" said Philip, and left her in order to follow Tony.

"Sister, indeed!" he heard an irate voice. "Then why should your silly Oxwich keep me out?" And his eye caught the last six inches of Josephine's skirt as she whisked magnificently out of Tony's flat.

Tony gazed blankly at Philip. Oxwich completely shut the door on Mrs. Appleby.

"I must go after her immediately," said Tony.

"In your place, Sir Anthony, I should delay twenty-four hours," Oxwich remarked, in low, respectful tones.

"Impossible, Oxwich,"

"If not forty-eight—if not forty-eight!" Oxwich pursued. "Pardon the liberty, Sir Anthony"——

"See here!" cried Philip, careless of being heard, and brandishing his notes. "You paid me these notes on Wednesday morning. Look at the numbers. Take them and look at them. I tell you."

Sir Anthony obeyed, somewhat awed by his friend's virulence.

"Well?" Sir Anthony inquired. "What? Are they forged?"

"I wish they were!" Philip answered. And he explained. Sir Anthony, not unnaturally, was difficult to convince, but after Oxwich had consulted two different newspapers and ascertained that the numbers were indeed those of two notes belonging to the murdered captain, the Baronet was at any rate reduced to astounded exclamations. By that time they had retreated to the dining-room. "Oxwich," he demanded at length, "where did we get these notes?"

"From Miss Fire," Oxwich replied, full of finely controlled emotion. "We had no other hundred pound notes. Miss Fire repaid them to us on Tuesday night. You will remember, Sir Anthony, that you expressed surprise."

"I'd lent her a monkey to get her aunt's husband out of a difficulty, or some rot or other," Tony said quickly to Philip. "That was last week. And on Tuesday she told me she only needed three hundred, and she gave me two hundred back."

"What time was that?"

"What time was it, Oxwich?"

"About midnight, Sir Anthony."

"It is I who must go after her then," said Philip. "And at once!"

"I'll go with you," Sir Anthony muttered excitedly. "This is a most serious thing."

"Serious?" Philip cried. "Why, it's the key to the entire situation! Come on." He snatched the notes.

"It will be difficult to neglect Mrs. Appleby, Sir Anthony," said Oxwich. "She informed me that she had not yet dined."

"Oh! Conf—— Go and tell Mrs. Appleby, Oxwich, that—No, I'll go myself."

He rushed to the drawing-room.

Philip waited perhaps five seconds. It became a moral and physical impossibility for him to wait any longer. He fled, ran headlong down the grand staircase of the Devonshire, because the lift was not attending his convenience, and disdaining the aid of six porters, shot into a cab. He still held the notes loose in his hand.

His adventures between the stage door of the Metropolitan Theatre and Josephine's dressing room could not have been adequately described in less than five columns of the "Courier." He had to defy the stage doorkeeper, a majestic personage who had once said, "No!" to an under-secretary of state and who was reported to buy a public house or so once a quarter out of the tips he received from aspirants to the hands of the queens and princesses of the Metropolitan's two stages. He outdistanced two commissionaires detailed off for the pursuit, lost himself, found himself before the footlights—happily during an entr'acte—invoking the assistance of the mistress of the ballet—a kind, fat old thing whose triumphs dated back to the Third Empire— and finally had to arrange matters with a callboy and Josephine's dresser, who was also by a curious accident Josephine's aunt. Josephine, in the famous dressing-room lined with mirrors and littered with expensive frippery, pots, pans, bouquets, torn envelopes, boxes, sweeties, curling-irons, music, overturned chairs and photographs, was perfecting the work of nature.

She glanced sternly at Philip, pencil in hand, and indescribably glorious as to peignoir.

"Well!" she said. "I call this 'cheek;' that's what I call it. If you think you're going to make peace on Tony's behalf, old boy, you're mistaken. So you can go and tell him I said so."

A gas jet hissed among the electric lights.

"I don't care twopence for Tony. It's more important than Tony"——

"That's enough," she made a gesture. "How much have you given auntie to stop outside? Call her in."

Philip approached close to her.

"Don't be silly, my girl," he said harshly. "In the first place let me tell you I'm on the staff of the 'Courier,' and in the second place, have you seen these notes before?"

He laid them before her on the splashed, untidy dressing bench.

She was daunted. She stared vaguely at the notes.

"How do I know if I've seen them before?" she grumbled. "I've seen many a hundred pound note in my time."

"You gave them to Tony at midnight on Tuesday," he said.

"And what if I did?"

"They're stolen notes," he replied, and breathed the single sinister word "Pollexfen."

"If you want to know, then," said Josephine, who was recovering her ground. "I just didn't give them to Tony on Tuesday at midnight. I gave him two notes, but they were old notes and these are new. So there!"

"How can you prove that?"

"Mr. Sinclair can prove it."

"Who is Mr. Sinclair?"

"Mr. Sinclair is the assistant cashier. He cashed a check for me on Tuesday afternoon, and he gave me the notes."

"I must see Mr. Sinclair."

"Oh, you can see Mr. Sinclair, all right. Auntie!" She opened the door. "Run and ask Mr. Sinclair to come here as quick as he can." She shut the door, and stood facing Philip, her hands on her hips, breathing hard. "You shall soon see Mr. Sinclair," she repeated, "and Mr. Talke shall see if I am to be insulted in my own dressing-room like this!"

"My dear young lady," said Philip, "I'm not insulting you. Tony told me he'd had those notes from you—"

"Well, he'd no business to chatter," said Josephine, sharply. "He's like a blessed magpie."

"Wouldn't you sooner have me here than the police?" Philip smiled. "Why, I'm doing all I can for you."

"Oh, of course," she murmured.

Then Mr. Sinclair, in one of those amazing perfect evening suits that only the minor officials of fashionable theatres seem to be able to afford, deferentially entered.

He confirmed Josephine's statement. Further, he took Philip to his office, and showed him a memorandum of the numbers of the notes handed by him to Miss Fire on Tuesday afternoon; they did not correspond with Philip's notes at all.

Philip left the theatre, and passed Tony entering. And each was thinking so hard that neither recognized the other. Philip walked slowly to the Corner house. He believed in the honesty of Josephine Fire and equally, of course, in Tony's honesty. There remained two explanations of the almost inexplicable. Oxwich was one possible explanation; but Philip could not conceive Oxwich as an accomplice of thieves and murderers. Philip himself was the other explanation. Had some one entered his cubicle while he slept, and substituted two of the Pollexfen notes for Philip's? It was inconceivable, for Philip had left his pocketbook where John Meredith kept the key of his room—under the pillow—and he was a light sleeper Then—

He made his way into the Corner House. He climbed the stairs and went to his room. After turning up the light the first thing he saw was his little lost black bag, lying on the bed. He sprang to it, and opened it. The finger-marked stone was inside, with the pajamas and other things. He ran into the corridor, and by chance encountered one of the boy attendants.

"Who did my room today?"

"Me, sir."

"What's the meaning of that bag on the bed?"

"It was under the bed," said the boy, made sullen by Philip's threatening tone. "I thought you'd kicked it under without knowing. So I put it on the bed for you to see."

CHAPTER XIV.

Dactylography.

At dusk on the following afternoon, which was Sunday afternoon, Philip was curled up in the office of Mr. Hilgay like a spider awaiting its prey. He had woven his web and he was still expecting a genuine fly, though his patience had already exhausted itself. Mr. Hilgay, happily for Philip's plan of campaign, had been visible, a broken figure, during the middle hours of the day. Mr. Hilgay was still not quite persuaded that he had escaped him forever.

During the earlier half of the day Philip had employed himself in making experiments in the recording of fingermarks, convinced as he was, first that he possessed in the bit of broken sewer pipe an authentic fingermark of Captain Pollexfen's murderer, and, second, that the murderer was still inhabiting the house. Being of a profoundly practical nature, in the English manner, he did not permit his mind to be too much troubled about the history of the little black bag between the moment when he lost sight of it on the Tuesday evening and the moment when he saw it again on the Saturday evening. He guessed that Varcoe must have discovered it and left it, by accident or intentionally, in his bedroom on the Friday night. This having been divined, he centered his interests exclusively on the imprint. He did not even trouble to answer the feverish inquiries and demands which from time to time during the day he received from various members of the editorial staff of the Courier.

Now, Philip was not an expert in the science of fingerprints. It may be doubted if he knew it had been christened dactylography. He certainly was not aware of the method of classifying finger prints into the four main divisions of arches, loops, whorls and composites. He did not dream that arches might be simple and tented, loops, ulnar and radial, whorls single and double, and that composites were susceptible of not less than four clearly defined divisions. It may be questioned if he had the slightest idea that Scotand Yard has a record of nearly a million fingerprints and that the system of indexing this vast dictionary of criminal biography is one of the wonders of the world. It is beyond boubt that he had not read the learned work of the celebrated Five Towns specialist, Henry Faulds, for that work had not then appeared. What he had read, on its publication some ten years before, was Mark Twain's "Pudd'n'head Wilson." In which the immortal and adorable author of "Life on the Mississipi" had the charming caprice to explain the science of dactylography at considerable length; and his recollection even of that unforgettable romance was not by any means free from vagueness. He had reasons for not going down to Scotland Yard and demanding there the aid of the supreme expert in dactylography. Finally, the day being dominical, all book-sellers' shops were closed

(To be continued.)

Liberal Elected by Acclamation

Venerable Archdeacon Pentreath, of Vancouver (B.C.), spoke in the evening on the needs of the mission work in the dioceses of British Columbia. He reviewed the work done in these dioceses and spoke especially of the work among the Indians, many of whom had been changed from savages to honest, peaceable citizens.

Archdeacon Pentreath will speak in other churches of the city on the same subject.

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