

And your own sense of taste will convince you.

"SALADA" TEA

'Fresh from the gardens'



CHAPTER XVIII.—(Cont'd.)

There was a sudden snigger from a nervous gentleman in the crowd at the back of the room, and the coroner put on his glasses and stared sternly in the direction from which it came. The nervous gentleman hastily decided that the time had come to do up his bootlace. The coroner put down his glasses and continued: "Did anybody come out of the house while you were coming up the drive?"

"No."

"Thank you, Mr. Gillingham."

He was followed by Inspector Birch. The Inspector, realizing that this was his afternoon, and that the eyes of the world were upon him, produced a plan of the house and explained the situation of the different rooms. The plan was then handed to the jury.

Inspector Birch, so he told the world, had arrived at the Red House at 4.42 p.m. on the afternoon in question. He had been received by Mr. Matthew Cayley, who had made a short statement to him, and he had then proceeded to examine the scene of the crime.

The French windows had been forced from outside. The door leading into the hall was locked; he had searched the room thoroughly and had found no trace of a key. In the bedroom leading out of the office he had found an open window. There were no marks on the window, but it was a low one, and, as he found from experiment, quite easy to step out of without touching it with the boots.

A few yards outside the window a shrubbery began. There were no recent footmarks outside the window, but the ground was in a very hard condition owing to the absence of rain. In the shrubbery, however, he found several twigs on the ground, recently broken off, together with other evidence that some body had been forcing its way through.

He had questioned everybody connected with the estate, and none of them had been into the shrubbery recently. By foraging a way through the shrubbery it was possible for a person to make a detour of the house and get to the Stanton end of the park without ever being in sight of the house itself.

He had made inquiries about the deceased. Deceased had left for Australia some fifteen years ago, owing to some financial trouble at home. Deceased was not well spoken of in the village from which he and his brother had never been on good terms, and the fact that Mark Ablett had come into money had been a cause of great bitterness between them. It was shortly after this that Robert had left for Australia.

He had made inquiries at Stanton station. It had been market-day at Stanton and the station had been more full of arrivals than usual. Nobody had particularly noticed the arrival of Robert Ablett; there had been a good many passengers by the 2.10 train that afternoon, the train by which Robert had undoubtedly come from London. A witness, however, would state that he noticed a man resembling Mark Ablett at the station at 3.53 that afternoon, and this man caught the 3.55 up train to town.

There was a pond in the grounds of the Red House. He had dragged this, but without result.

Antony listened to him carelessly, thinking his own thoughts all the time. Medical evidence followed, but there was nothing to be got from that. He felt so close to the truth; at any moment something might give his brain the one little hint which it wanted. Inspector Birch was just pursuing the ordinary. There was something uncanny about it.

Antony went on with his thoughts. The coroner was summing up. The jury, he said, had now heard all the evidence. The medical evidence would probably satisfy them that Robert Ablett had died from the effects of a bullet-wound in the head. Who had fired that bullet? If Robert Ablett had fired it himself, no doubt they would bring in a verdict of suicide, but if this had been so, where was the revolver which had fired it, and what had become of Mark Ablett?

If they disbelieved in this possibility of suicide, what remained? Accidental death, justifiable homicide, and murder. Could the deceased have been killed accidentally? It was possible,

but then would Mark Ablett have run away?

The evidence that he had run away from the scene of the crime was strong. His cousin had seen him go into the room, the servant Elsie Wood had heard him quarreling with his brother in the room, the door had been locked from the inside, and there were signs that outside the open window someone had pushed his way very recently through the shrubbery. Who, if not Mark?

They would have then to consider whether he would have run away if he had been guiltless of his brother's death. No doubt innocent people lost their heads sometimes. It was possible that if it were proved afterward that Mark Ablett had shot his brother, it might also be proved that he was justified in so doing, and that when he ran away from his brother's corpse he had really nothing to fear at the hands of the law. Mark Ablett guilty of murder it would not prejudice his trial in any way if and when he was apprehended. . . . The jury would consider their verdict.

They considered it. They announced that the deceased had died as the result of a bullet wound, and that the bullet had been fired by his brother Mark Ablett.

Bill turned round to Antony at his side. But Antony was gone. Across the room he saw Andrew Amos and Parsons going out of the door together with Antony between them.

CHAPTER XIX.

The inquest had been held at the "Lamb" at Stanton; at Stanton Robert Ablett was to be buried the next day. Bill waited about outside for his friend, wondering where he had gone.

Then, realizing that Cayley would be coming out to his car directly, and that a farewell talk with Cayley would be a little embarrassing, he wandered round to the yard at the back of the inn, lit a cigarette, and stood surveying a torn and weather-beaten poster on the stable wall, "Grand Theatrical Enter" it announced, to take place on "Wednesday, Decem."

Bill smiled to himself as he looked at it, for the part of Joe, a loquacious postman, had been played by "William B. Bevel," as the remnants of the poster still maintained, and he had been much less loquacious than the author had intended, having forgotten his words completely, but it had all been great fun.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," said the voice of Antony behind him. "My old friends Amos and Parsons insisted on giving me a drink."

He slipped his arm into the crook of Bills arm, and smiled happily at him.

"Why are you so keen about them?" asked Bill a little resentfully. "I couldn't think where on earth you had got to."

Antony didn't say anything. He was staring at the poster.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"What?"

Antony waved to the poster.

"Oh, that? Last Christmas. It was rather fun."

Antony began to laugh to himself.

"Were you good?"

"Rotten. I don't profess to be an actor."

"Mark good?"

"Oh, rather. He loves it."

"Rev. Henry Stutters—Mr. Matthew Cay," read Antony. "Was that our friend Cayley?"

"Yes."

"Any good?"

"Well, much better than I expected. He wasn't keen, but Mark made him."

"Miss Norris wasn't playing, I see."

"My dear Tony; she's a professional. Of course she wasn't."

"I'm a fool, and a damned fool," Antony announced solemnly. "And a damned fool," he said again under his breath, as he led Bill away from the poster, and out of the yard into the road. "And a damned fool. Even now—" He broke off, and then asked suddenly, "Did Mark ever have much trouble with his teeth?"

"He went to a dentist a good deal. But what on earth—"

Antony laughed a third time.

"What luck!" he chuckled. "But how do you know?"

"We go to the same man; Mark recommended him to me. Cartwright, in Wimpole Street."

"Cartwright in Wimpole Street," repeated Antony thoughtfully. "Yes, I can remember that. Cartwright in Wimpole Street. Did Cayley go to him, too, by any chance?"

"I expect so. Oh, yes, I know he did. But what on earth—"

"What was Mark's general health like? Did he see a doctor much?"

"Hardly at all, I should think. He

did a lot of early morning exercises which were supposed to make him bright and cheerful at breakfast. They didn't do that, but they seemed to keep him pretty fit. Tony, I wish you'd—"

Antony held his hand and hushed him into silence.

"One last question," he said. "Was Mark fond of swimming?"

"No, he hated it. I don't believe he could swim. Tony, are you mad, or am I? Or is this a new game?"

Antony squeezed his arm.

"Dear old Bill," he said. "It's a game. What a game! And the answer is 'Cartwright' in Wimpole Street."

They walked in silence for half a mile or so along the road to Woodham. Bill tried two or three times to get his friend to talk, but Antony had only grunted in reply. He was just going to make another attempt, when Antony came to a sudden stop and turned to him anxiously.

"I wonder if you'd do something for me," he said, looking at him with some doubt.

"What sort of thing?"

"Well, it's really dashed important. It's just the one thing I want now."

Bill was suddenly enthusiastic again.

"I say, have you really found it all out?"

Antony nodded.

"At least, I'm very nearly there, Bill. There's just this one thing I want now. It means your going back to Stanton. Well, we haven't come far; it won't take you long. Do you mind?"

"My dear Holmes, I am at your service."

(To be continued.)

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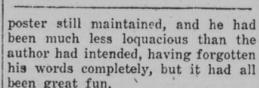
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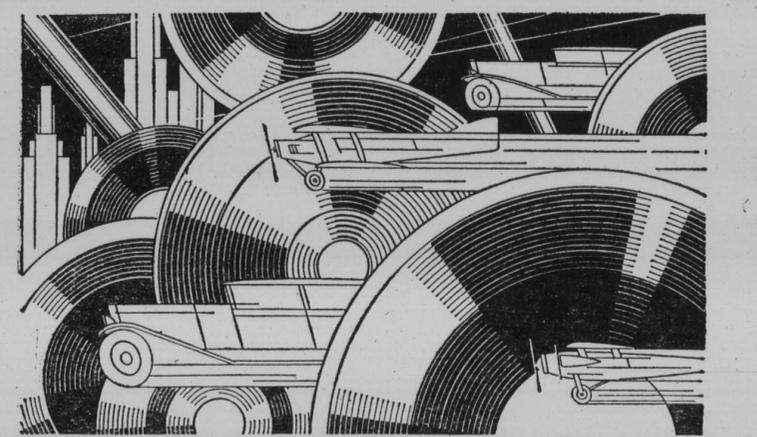
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