

the discovery, was inclined to prosecute, but the publicity of a prosecution would have been very painful to the whole family, and it was decided that the matter had better sink into oblivion.

About a month after Hannington's death, however, a letter arrived which threw considerable light upon several points. It was addressed to Alan Moncrieff, and the postmark was that of an obscure town in Spain. It was from Ralph Ringscott himself.

"Dear Alan," it began, with an audacity which almost took away Moncrieff's breath: "I have just learned from the newspapers that poor Hannington is dead: I suppose he has told you how the affair took place, and I need not make any secret of the matter in writing to you, but for my own satisfaction I wish to tell you why I shot him as I did. The act was not premeditated, but it seemed to me unavoidable. He brought it on his own head, by his utter obstinacy and stupidity.

"To make you comprehend the matter from beginning to end would be too long a task; I cannot undertake it. But I will give you a few *renseignements*, from which you may construct the story if you like. Mrs. Moncrieff and your children will probably supply details.

"I must trouble you first with my reasons for staying so long at Torresmuir after Marie's death. The place was not interesting to me; your society was not that which I preferred—you were always too straight-laced for me—and the work that you expected me to do was detestable. Add to this that I hate your climate, and you may well wonder why I stayed a month with you. My dear Alan, you forget—you had always a knack of forgetting—that I was poor. You paid me what you considered a handsome salary, no doubt; it was enough for my wants if I had meant to live at Torresmuir forever. But I had dreams of my own. I wanted a competency. I wanted a villa in some warm southern place, where I could be all day in the sun, and get the accursed Scotch chill out of my blood. I very early resolved that I would make my fortune out of you, and would leave you as soon as I had done so. It took me a longer time than I anticipated, and involved me in various awkward complications, on which I had not reckoned; but my efforts have at last been crowned by complete success. If you will not meddle with me, I