

down to Crawton in time to see the body, of which I made careful measurements and notes, and from these I afterwards got the fellow identified; for though we had not arrived then at the Berthillon Method, we had some makeshift arrangement, and as to that same Berthillon Method, by the bye, I can assure you that a more correct name for it would be the 'Max Method.' But the French have no memory when a memory is inconvenient.

"A revolver lay on the table close at Mr. Spison's hand, but the old man could give no account at all of what had happened. In fact, I believe that from that day he never spoke again, and if there were doubts before as to his mental condition there were none now. His intellect had almost entirely gone. Mr. Edward Spison came over at once, and remained with his father throughout, but if Mr. John Spison knew his son at all, which is uncertain, he took no more notice of him than of anyone else. He sat the whole day in a stupor, from which it was impossible to arouse him.

The most plausible theory was that the stranger had demanded money of the old man, and perhaps threatened him, and that Mr. Spison had shot him in self-defence. Against this was the fact that Mr. Spison lived poorly, and had nothing in his house which would attract a thief. His possession of a revolver was a difficulty for me, and appeared to point to his constant apprehension of some danger. The stranger had been seen in the village during the day and in the neighbourhood of Mr. Spison's cottage, and it occurred to me that he might even have accepted a rendezvous there for the evening.

"However, there seemed to be no certainty to be arrived at. Mr. John Spison's mouth was closed; Mr. Edward Spison declared that he had no idea who the stranger was. But there was no hurry in the matter. The case would go before the jury, of course, but the magistrates accepted Mr. Edward Spison's bail and he took his father home with him.

"I returned to London, where I occupied myself in identifying the stranger. When I had got all my information I went down without announcement to Ringford, Mr. Edward Spison's seat, and sent up my name.

"Any news, Mr. Max?" asked Mr. Edward when he came in.

"Yes," I said brusquely, 'I have identified our man. Here are the details: Radford, John, of Littleford, born —, worked in the town as an apprentice to a Mr. James Talke, glazier; disappeared in the year —; heard of again in London, S. E.; numerous convictions for drunkenness, mendicancy, etc., etc.'

"I was watching Mr. Spison closely as I read, for I have the trick of doing two or more things at the same time. And how do you think I knew that John Radford was an old acquaintance of Edward Spison? I'll tell you.

"Years ago I went to see a man guillotined in France. I can promise you I did not go out of idle curiosity, but I was making a specialty at that time of the visible effects of extreme fear. The fellow they 'shortened' that day was a marvel. He walked out of the prison as if he were going to a wedding, elbowed aside the priest, who was going backward before him, trying to hide the

machine from his eyes, and stood at the fatal plank like a soldier at attention. There was only one thing that showed the mortal terror he was in. The tips of his ears were white!

"And when I read out those details to Mr. Edward Spison the tips of his ears went white. He was a brave man, but he had not quite absolute control of his heart action. I should say it is not one in a million that has.

"Well, Mr. Max?" he said, quietly, when I had finished.

"Well, Mr. Spison," I answered, 'I will use no threats, because I believe you are not the sort of man with whom threats would pay. But I should be glad if you could bring yourself to throw light on this blackmailing business, for such it is I'll swear.'

"Could you promise me," he asked after a minute, 'that it shall go no further?'

"My duty and the interests of justice rank with me before everything," I answered, 'and I will make no preliminary promise. But if I find later that I can honourably do so, I will give you my word that the secret shall rest between us.'

"And this, Captain Grensley, was the story he told me:

"I was no good at all as a boy and a youth, Mr. Max. I was an only son and spoilt. I could settle down to no profession, and my father was in despair about me. He was an excellent man of rather limited attainments and understanding, who had worked at a desk all his life, and considered that commercial zeal and probity were the highest of all virtues. My irregularity of life distressed him even more than my extravagance, I believe; for the former is quite fatal to commercial success, while the latter may even accompany it. At last, to my father's relief, Mr. George Hemstead offered me and I accepted a position in the Littleford bank.

"But this was not my salvation. I got in with a gambling lot, and found myself one morning with a large debt of honour to meet and nothing to

meet it with. When I tell you, Mr. Max, as I must tell you, that I robbed my employer, you may wonder how it is that I am in my present position.

"Luckily for me the fraud was discovered at once. If this had not been so, it might have been the first step on a fatal downward ladder to irretrievable ruin. Mr. George Hemstead, who had detected my falsification himself, sent for me and accused me. I lost my head and denied. Mr. Hemstead, in great indignation, for the theft was palpable, was about to send for the police, when I threw myself on my knees, confessed everything, and begged him at least to see my father first. This he reluctantly agreed to do, and sent me out to wait in his little private garden behind the bank.

"There are moments, Mr. Max, when the mind is so overwhelmed with some stupendous grief or misfortune that it is incapable of noting any but the most trifling and insignificant impressions. You know that a prisoner at the bar will count the spikes on the railing in front of him while his death-sentence is being pronounced.

"It was so with me as I waited. There was a young glazier at work on the panes of the conservatory which led from Mr. Hemstead's room into his garden. I



"I threw myself on my knees, confessed everything and begged him to see my father first."