

A MODERN JUDAS.

OR, THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

The doctor settled himself in his chair, placed his hands on each of his knees and observed:

'Now, then.'

Whereupon Octavius told him his experience during the Jarchester inquest, suppressed the conversation and the name of Roger Axton, and finished up by describing how he had discovered the dead man's name from Wosk & Co.

'So you see, Japix,' said the detective decisively, 'I saw your name on the prescription and came at once to see you, as I want you to analyze these eight pills. According to your prescription, according to Mr. Wosk, according to the assistant, twelve pills were made up and delivered to Melstane. I can account for half of the twelve, so that ought to leave six; but in that box you will find eight. Now that is not right.'

'Certainly not,' remarked the doctor, gravely regarding the pills; 'six from twelve do not leave eight—at least, not by the rules of any arithmetic I'm acquainted with.'

'So there are two extra pills.'

'So I see. Two extra pills not made up by Wosk & Co.'

'Now the question is,' said Fanks seriously: 'What do those two extra pills mean?'

The doctor said nothing, but looked inquiringly at the pill box as if he expected it to answer.

'I own,' resumed Fanks, 'that I was half inclined to agree with the verdict of the jurors; it looked like suicide, but I had a kind of uneasy feeling that looks in this case were deceptive, so I thought I would like to know the name of the dead man, in order to find out if there was anything in his past life likely to lead him to self-destruction. I found the name, as I have told you, and I also discovered that there are two extra pills in that box, which have been added after it left the hands of Wosk & Co.—you understand?'

'Perfectly.'

'Now those pills cannot have been added by Melstane, as he had no reason to do so. Twelve pills are enough for a man even with nerves, so why should he make those twelve into fourteen?'

'Ah! why, indeed?' said Japix ponderously. 'And your theory?'

'Is simply this: You say Melstane was a scamp; naturally he must have had enemies. Now I firmly believe that the two extra pills contain poison—say morphia, of which Melstane died—and they were placed in the box surreptitiously by one of his enemies.'

'Natural enough.'

'Melstane,' continued Fanks impressively, 'took one of those extra pills, according to his usual custom, before going to bed, quite innocent of doing himself any harm. In the morning Melstane is found dead, and there is no evidence to show how he came by his death.'

'Horrible! horrible!'

'But observe,' said Fanks, emphasizing his remarks with his forefinger, 'how "vaulting ambition o'erleaps itself." In other words, observe how the anxiety of the murderer to insure the death of his victim has led to a danger of his own discovery. If he—I allude to the murderer—had put in one pill, making thirteen—which would have been a lucky number for our undiscovered criminal—the victim would have taken it and absolutely no trace could have been discovered. Unluckily, however, for the criminal, he, afraid one morphia pill may not effectively do the work, puts in two morphia pills. Result: Sebastian Melstane in perfect innocence takes one and dies. The other pill—damning evidence, my dear doctor—is one of the eight in that box, and I want you to analyze the whole eight pills in order to find that special one.'

'And suppose I don't find it?' said Japix, putting the box on the table.

'In that case my theory falls to the ground, and Sebastian Melstane's death will remain a mystery to all men. But as sure as I sit here, Doctor Japix, you will find a deadly morphia pill among those seven harmless tonic pills.'

'Your theory,' remarked Japix, 'is remarkably ingenious and may be correct. I will analyze these pills and let you know the result to-morrow. If I find here,' said the doctor, laying one hand on the pill box, 'a morphia pill it will establish your theory in a certain sense.'

'I think it will establish my theory in every sense,' retorted Fanks.

Dr. Japix shook his head slowly and delivered himself oracularly.

'Let us not,' he said, 'jump to conclusions. I may find a morphia pill, but harmless.'

'Deadly.'

'Possibly harmless,' said Japix firmly.

'Probably deadly,' rejoined Octavius stubbornly.

'If deadly,' continued the doctor quietly, 'I grant your theory is a correct one, and that Sebastian Melstane met his death at the hands of the person who put those two extra pills in the box. If harmless, however,' said Japix, 'it establishes nothing. Melstane may have suffered from sleeplessness. Seeing his nerves were all wrong, I should say it was very probable he did, and taken morphia pills in order to get a good night's rest.'

'But why two morphia pills?' objected Octavius. 'Chemists don't sell morphia pills in twos.'

'Your objection, sir, is not without some merit,' said Japix. 'Still these two pills may have been the balance of another box, and placed in this one so as to obviate the trouble of carrying two boxes.'

'Possible, certainly, but not probable. No, no, my dear doctor, you need not try to upset my theory. Wait till you analyze those pills.'

'I shall do so to-night and to-morrow you will have my answer.'

'I suppose you didn't give Melstane any morphia pills?' said Fanks as he arose to take his leave.

'No; I don't believe in morphia pills for sleepless people except in extreme cases. I generally give chloral, as I did to Mr. Jackson Spolger to-day.'

'Oh! the Ancient Mariner,' said Octavius. 'Does he suffer from sleeplessness?'

'Yes; on account of his approaching marriage, I presume.'

'With Miss Marson?'

'By the way,' observed Fanks, 'was she not engaged to Melstane?'

'No, not engaged exactly,' replied Japix, 'but she was in love with him. Strange how women adore scamps. But it's a long story, my dear Rixton. To-morrow night, when we both dine across the walnuts and the wine, I'll tell to thee the tale divine. Ha! ha! you see I'm a poet, eh?'

'Yes, and a plagiarist also. The second line is Tennyson.'

'Really, Mr. Bucket—Dickens, you observe—you're as sharp after a rhyme as after a thief. With your active brain I wonder you don't suffer from insomnia.'

'When I do I'll come to you for morphia pills,' said Octavius laughing; 'not the sort in that box though. I don't want to die yet.'

'I don't believe in morphia pills,' remarked Japix, rising to accompany his guest to the door. 'I never prescribe them. Oh! yes, I did prescribe some for a Mr. Axton.'

Octavius, who was going out of the door, turned suddenly round with a cry of horror.

'Roger Axton!'

'Yes; do you know him? Why, what's the matter?'

For Octavius Fanks, trembling, had sunk into a chair near the door.

'Are you ill?' inquired the doctor anxiously. 'Here, let me get you some brandy.'

'No, no,' said Fanks, recovering himself with a great effort, though his face was as pale as death. 'I'm all right. I used to know Roger Axton and the name startled me.'

'Unpleasant associations,' said Japix, rubbing his head in a vexed manner. 'I hope not. I liked the young fellow. A good lad—a very good lad.'

Fanks at once hastened to dispel the doctor's distrust.

'No; nothing unpleasant,' he said hurriedly; 'he was my school-fellow and I haven't seen him for ten years.'

Not a word about the meeting at Jarchester, even to genial Dr. Japix, for the vague fears which had haunted the detective's mind were now taking a terrible shape—terrible to himself, more terrible to Roger Axton.

'I did not know Axton had been at Ironfields,' he said at length.

'Oh! yes, bless you; he was here for some time,' cried Japix cheerily; 'I saw a good deal of him.'

'What was his reason for staying down here?'

'Aha! aha!' thundered Japix, 'eh, you saw the reason leave my house to-day. A dark, queenly reason.'

'You allude to Miss Varlins.'

'Of course. Ho! ho! "Love's young dream." Tommy Moore's remark, eh. I have no experience of it myself, being a bachelor; but Axton, ah! he thought Moore was right, I'll swear, when he was beside Judith Varlins.'

Every word that dropped from the good doctor's lips seemed to add to that hideous terror in the detective's mind, and he could hardly frame his next question.

'I suppose she loves him?'

'Dear! dear! Now that's exactly what

I don't know,' said Japix in a vexed tone; 'she does and she doesn't. I was afraid she loved Mr. Scamp Melstane. She was with him a good deal, she wrote him letters and all that sort of thing, but it might have been friendship. I don't understand women, you see; I'm a bachelor.'

This last speech of the doctor seemed too much for Octavius, and he felt anxious to get outside even into the fog and rain in order to breathe. He was so confused by what he had heard that he was afraid to open his lips, lest some words detrimental to his old school-fellow should escape them. Hastily shaking the doctor by the hand, he made a hurried promise to see him on the morrow.

'Fog and rain,' shouted the physician as Octavius stepped outside; 'must expect that now. November smiles and November tears—principally tears. Don't forget to-morrow night—the pills—certainly. I will remember. Good bye.'

In the fog, in the rain, in the darkness, Octavius Fanks stopped by a lighted shop window, pulled out his pocket book and looked at the memorandum in short hand he had made of his conversation with Roger Axton.

In another moment he had restored the book to its former place, and from his lips there came a low cry of anguish:

'Oh! my old school-fellow, has it come to this?'

EXTRACTS FROM A DETECTIVE'S NOTE BOOK.

'It is too terrible . . . I can't believe it . . . He did lie to me, as I thought . . . He has been to Ironfields. He knew the name of Melstane . . . What was he doing at Jarchester? . . . Why was he there at the same time, in the same house as Melstane? . . . He must have known that the man who died was Melstane . . . He slept in the next room on the night of the murder . . . The door of Melstane's room was ajar in the morning . . . Could Roger have gone into the room and . . . No, no, I can't believe it . . . He would not commit a crime . . . And yet he had morphia pills in his possession . . . What prevented him from getting two pills made extra strong, going into Melstane's room at night and placing them in the box? . . . His motive for doing such a thing . . . Dr. Japix supplies even that . . . He saw in Melstane a possible rival and wanted him out of the way . . . But what am I writing? . . . He cannot be guilty of this terrible crime . . . Yet everything points to it . . . His presence at Jarchester . . . his possession of morphia . . . his evasive answers . . . I must find out the truth . . . I can't believe he would act thus, and yet . . .'

Mem.—To write to Axton's London address at once.

CHAPTER VI.

MONSIEUR JUDAS IS CONFIDENTIAL.

A short distance from the mansion of Dr. Japix, on the road which ran from Ironfields to the dwellings of the magnates of the city, stood a large, square stone house in a dreary piece of ground. The house itself was also remarkably dreary, being painted a dull gray, with all the windows and doors dismally picked out in black. Two stories it was, with five windows in the top story facing the road, four windows and a door with a porch in the lower, and still deeper down the basements guarded at the sides of the house by spiky iron railings of a most resentful appearance. The garden in front had a broad walk running down to a rusty iron gate, on either side a plot of jank green grass and in the centre of each churchyard-looking plot a tall, solemn cypress. The four lower windows opened like doors directly on to the grass plots, but were always closed, as Mrs. Binter (proprietress of this charming establishment) thought egress by the funeral front door was quite sufficient.

Over the porch was a broad white board, whereon was inscribed in grim black letters 'Binter's Boarding House,' and although the sight of the unwholesome house was enough to scare timid mortals, Binter's was generally well stocked, and the proprietress did fairly well in her particular line of over-charging and underfeeding.

A tall, gaunt, grim person was Mrs. Binter, arrayed in a severe looking dress of a dull gray color (like the house) and picked out in black (also like the house) by wearing an inky ribbon round her throat, a jet-trimmed gauze cap on her iron-gray hair and rusty black mittens on her lean hands. She also wore round her narrow waist a thin belt of black leather, attached to which by a steel chain was a large bunch of keys, which so jingled when she walked that in the twilight one could easily believe that Binter's was haunted by a gaunt ghost clanking its rusty chain through the dreary passages.

Mrs. Binter's father (long since deceased) had been a warder in the county jail, and his one fair daughter having been brought up with an intimate knowledge of prison life, had so accustomed herself to view the world through the bars of a jail that she had become quite imbued with the routine, the traditions and the spirit of a first-class penitentiary. It might have been heredi-

tary, it might have been habitual, but Mrs. Binter was certainly very jaillike in all her ways. Having captured Mr. Binter (who had no mind of his own), she made him marry her, and for the rest of his life relegated him to the basement, where he did all the work of a 'boots' without the wages of one. His wife looked after the boarders, whom she treated like prisoners, presiding at her own table, where the food was very plain and very wholesome, seeing that they were in their little cells at a proper hour, and altogether conducting the house in as near a manner approaching the paternal system as she was able.

Binter's was usually full, as Mrs. B. always advertised it as being in the country, and the worked-to-death clerks of Ironfields were glad to get a breath of fresh air, even when attended by the inconvenience of living in a private jail. But in the evening all the prison boarders generally went out on a kind of ticket-of-leave (the understanding being that they were to be in before midnight), and Mrs. Binter had the whole of her private jail to herself.

On this evening, however, all the boarders had gone out with the exception of M. Judas, who was seated in a little cell (called by courtesy the drawing room) before a feeble little fire in a large, cold grate. The room was scantily furnished in a very substantial fashion, the chairs were straight in the backs, the sofa just short enough to prevent any one lying down comfortably, the floor covered with black and white diamond oilcloth, with a narrow strip of woollen matting in front of the fire. If Mrs. Binter could have chained the fire irons to the wall after the most approved prison fashion she no doubt would have been glad to do so; but as she had to preserve a certain appearance of freedom (for which she was profoundly sorrowful) she let them lie loose, and M. Judas was now sitting with the tongs in his hand adding little bits of coal to the fire.

Mrs. Binter having ascertained through one of the head warders that M. Judas was going to stay in all the evening, regarded this as an infringement of the ticket-of-leave system and went up to the drawing room cell to speak to him.

Judas heard the rattle of the keys and knew the head jailer was coming along, but without desisting from his employment he raised his crafty eyes to the gaunt figure that speedily stood before him.

'Ain't you goin' out?' queried the gaunt figure.

'De fogs is too mooh,' responded Judas, picking up another bit of coal, 'an' I am chez moi for a frien'.'

'Oh! that's it, munseer,' said the head jailer, rattling her keys, 'you're expectin' of a frien'. Why ain't you goin' back to the shop?'

'Eh, ma chere, non. I am home to-ni.'

'You'll want the fire, I suppose,' remarked Mrs. Binter grudgingly, as if she would like to take it away with her, 'an' the lamp. I was goin' to put 'em both out. Would your frien' like supper?'

'Je ne sais pas,' said M. Judas, putting down the tongs. 'No; I do no so tink.'

'Supper's extra,' observed Mrs. Binter, determined to have out of the supper what she was losing in the lamp and fire; 'but it ain't hospitable to let a frien' go away without a bite. It may be French manners, added the jailer with scathing irony, 'but it ain't English.'

Monsieur Judas spread out his hands with a deprecating gesture, murmured something indistinct and then relapsed into silence, much to the disappointment of Mrs. Binter.

'There's two legs of a fowl,' said the lady. 'Binter was goin' to have 'em for his breakfast; but I can trim 'em up with parsley, if you like, an' with bread an' cheese an' a bottle of that sour vinegar it'll be quite a little 'oliday for you.'

Just at this moment the bell rang, and Mrs. Binter hastening to the front door, admitted Mr. Fanks, took him in charge, and having delivered him over to the safe custody of M. Judas, retired with a final rattle of the keys in deep wrath at her failure with the supper idea.

Octavius, who looked rather pale, but with a stern expression on his face, slipped off his fur coat, and having surveyed Judas with a calculating expression, sat down by the fiction of a fire, the Frenchman taking a seat opposite.

'I do wait for you,' said M. Judas, smoothing one lean hand with the other and letting his eyelids droop over his crafty eyes.

'Speak French,' relied Fanks in that language; 'we'll understand each other better if you do.'

'Eh, certainly, my frien', said Judas; 'it is easier for me. You speak French very well; yes, monsieur.'

Fanks acknowledged this compliment with a nod and plunged at once into the object of his visit.

'Now, Monsieur Guinaud, about your frien' Melstane?'

'Eh, a moment if you please,' hissed Judas, in his low voice, holding up his hand. 'Before we speak of the poor Melstane let us understand each other, monsieur. That is, but right, my frien'.'

'Yes, it is but right; what do you want to know?'

'Your name, monsieur?'

'Rixton.'

'It is very well—that name, Monsieur Fanks,' replied Judas with a mocking smile. 'You know my real name, I see,' rejoined Octavius. 'I compliment you on your penetration.'

'Eh, it is not mooh,' said the Frenchman. 'Monsieur Vosk he read to me the papers of Jarloesterre, and I find one Monsieur Fanks, agent of the police, to be present. He has the box which my poor frien' had for the pills. A stranger comes to me and shows the same box, and I say: "Monsieur Fanks." Is that not so?'

'Well, you've read the papers,' observed Fanks, 'and know all the circumstances of your frien's death.'

'The papers say he gave himself the death, monsieur.'

'And what do you say?'

'Eh, I do not know,' replied M. Judas, opening his eyes to their fullest extent. 'What is the opinion of monsieur?'

Mr. Fanks thought a moment or two before replying. He wanted to find out all about Melstane's past life, and no one could tell him so much as the fellow-lodger of the dead man. Judas, however, was no ordinary man, and would not speak freely unless he knew the whole circumstances of the case. Now, Fanks did not trust Judas in any way. He did not like his appearance, nor his manner, nor anything about him, and would have preferred him to remain in ignorance of his (Fanks') suspicions. But as he could not find out what he wanted to know without telling Judas his suspicions, and as he could not tell Judas his suspicions without letting him know more than he cared to, Octavius was rather in a dilemma.

Guinaud saw this and put an end to this hesitation in a most emphatic manner.

'Monsieur, I see, does not trust me,' he said with an injured air. 'Monsieur would know all and tell nothing. But no, certainly that will not be pleasing to me. Figure to yourself, monsieur. I am a Frenchman; I am a man of honor, is it not so? Monsieur knows all of the case, but I—eh, I may know something of good also. If monsieur shows me his heart the heart of Jules Guinaud is open to him.'

Not the heart of M. Guinaud, but the statement of M. Guinaud's feelings; so Fanks, seeing that he must either give confidence for confidence or remain ignorant, chose the former alternative and spoke out:

'Very well, I will tell you what I think; but you will keep our conversation secret.' 'My faith, yes. Monsieur is the soul of honor, and I am the resemblance of that soul. What you speak this night drops into the open heart of me. The talk is safe; but, yes—you understand.'

'Then that's all right,' said Fanks; 'we may as well proceed to business. As Mr. Wosk translated to you, the papers say Melstane committed suicide—gave himself the death. Comprehend you, eh. Very well, I say no. It was a crime. Melstane was murdered.'

'And by whom, monsieur?'

'That's what I've got to find out.'

'And the opinion of monsieur?'

'I will explain. Melstane had a box of tonic pills with him containing, when it left your shop, twelve pills.'

'It is true, monsieur, twelve pills.'

'I can account for six pills, and in the box at present there are eight.'

'I understand,' said Judas. 'Two pills were placed in the box by an unknown. Those two pills contained poison. The poor Melstane took one pill of poison and died. Monsieur has taken the pills to Monsieur the Dr. Japix to find the other pill.'

'You are perfectly right,' said Fanks, rather astonished at the rapidity with which the assistant grasped the case.

'Eh, monsieur, I am not blind,' replied Judas; 'and now monsieur desires to find the unknown who placed the pills of poison in the box.'

'Exactly. And to do so I want you to tell me all you know about Sebastian Melstane's life here,' answered Fanks, producing his secretive little note book.

M. Guinaud looked thoughtfully at the fire, then glanced at Mr. Fanks.

'It is difficult to make the commencement,' he said, speaking slowly, as if he weighed every word. 'Behold! monsieur, I make the story this way: My poor Sebastian, he is an artist. Not what you call a great artist for the salon in London, but good in the pictures. Oh! yes, much of the talent. Six months ago in London he beholds a pretty lady. It is Mees Marrson, the daughter of the very rich monsieur of this town. My frien' has the grand passion for the charming mees—I believe it well—and comes to this town to say: I love you! Alas! he finds that the too charming mees is to marry the rich Monsieur Sp—Sp—I cannot say your English names.'

'Spolger.'

'But certainly that is the name. Yes; she is to marry this rich monsieur; but my brave Sebastian, he mocks himself of that. Here in this house he stays and I make my