

was unlocked. Mystery, deep and solid, insoluble by any known process of chemistry, played upon Egham.

The fear of Mr. William, the butler, and the absence of the servants who had been ordered to watch—these things did not go well with the theory of trickery. And then there was the strange dragging noise overhead which they had all heard.

As the morning gray turned yellowish before the winter sun, Hearne went and threw open the great door. He ran down the broad, monumental, Palladian steps.

"What's he muddling about among the gravel for?" asked one of the men.

"Can't say, I'm sure," answered his fellow, on whose temper the night rigours had told. "Got a crack, they say. His mother was a Red Indian!"

"Ummm!" growled the other. "Then he may find something. I wish to gracious he would. This is no sort of work for men—standing about in this teeth-chattering funeral vault. And the chief, too! Lor', what will they say in Glasgow? What will the Secretary say if they have to let Knifer off after all and we can't prove nothing against anyone else?"

"Well," muttered the first speaker, "I wouldn't be in the chief's shoes for—ah, what's that? That chap out there is holding up his hand. He has found something!"

They rushed down the steps to the wide sweep of gravel in front of the main entrance of Egham.

Hearne had nothing more mysterious than the brass castor of a bedroom chair in his hand. It did not seem much to them. But Hearne had an idea.

"Follow me," he said, "and for the Lord's sake—softly!"

"Take off those boots!" commanded the chief; "off with them this minute!"

And as the men grimaced at the lumpy, frosty gravel, he set them the example. Hearne did not