

A MODERN JUDAS.

OR, THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

Mr. Wosk (who was also the Co.) was a slender, serious man, always clothed in black, with a sedate, black bearded countenance, a habit of washing his hands with invisible soap and water, and a rasping little cough, which he introduced into his conversation at inopportune moments. He would have made an excellent undertaker, an ideal mute, for his cast of countenance was undeniably mournful, but fate had fitted this round peg of an undertaker into the square hole of a chemist in a fit of perverse anger. He bore up, however, against this uncongenial situation with dreary resignation, and dispensed his own medicines with an air of saying 'I hope it will do you good, but I'm afraid it won't.' He was the pillar of the church in a small way, and stole round the chapel on Sundays with the plate in a melancholy fashion as if he was asking some good Christian to put some food on the plate and despaired of getting it. Ebenezer was his name, and his wife, an acquainted lady of uncertain age, ruled him with a rod of iron, perhaps from the fact that she had no children over whom to domineer.

Mrs. Wosk, however, could not rule the assistant, much as she desired to do so. Not that he made any show of opposition, but always twisted this way and turned that in an eel-like fashion until she did not know quite where to have him. In fact, the assistant ruled Mrs. Wosk (of which rule she had a kind of uneasy consciousness), and as Mrs. Wosk ruled Mr. Wosk, including the Co., M. Jules Guinaud may have been said to have ruled the whole household.

A hard name to pronounce, especially in Ironfields, where French was in the main an unknown tongue, so suburban Ironfields by common consent forgot the surname of the assistant and called him in friendly fashion M. Jooles, by which appellation he was known for a considerable time. Mrs. Wosk, however, who meddled a good deal with the shop and saw a good deal of the assistant, being learned in Biblical lore (as the wife of a deacon should be), found a certain resemblance, suggested by the name and appearance of the assistant, between M. Jooles and Judas Iscariot, whereupon, with virulent wit, she christened him by the latter name, and M. Jooles became widely known as M. Judas, which name pleased the Ironfields worthies, being easy to pronounce and containing a certain epigrammatic flavor.

The name suited him too, this slender, undersized man, with the stealthy step of a cat; the unsteady greenish eyes that appeared to see nothing, yet took in everything; the smooth, shining red hair plastered tightly down on his egg-shaped skull; and the delicate, pink and white complexioned hairless face that bore the impress of a kind of evil beauty—yes, the name suited him admirably, and as he took no exception to it, being in suburban Ironfields opinion an atheist, and therefore ignorant of the Biblical significance of the title, nobody thought of addressing him by any other.

He spoke English moderately well, in a soft, sibilant voice with a foreign accent, and, sometimes used French words, which were Greek to all around him. Expressive too, in a pantomimic way, with his habit of shrugging his sloping shoulders, his method of waving his slim white hands when in conversation and a certain talent in using his eyes to convey his meaning. Lids drooping downward, 'I listen humbly to your words of wisdom, monsieur.' Suddenly raising them so as to display full optic, 'Yes, you may look at me; I am a most guileless person.' Narrowing to a mere slit like the pupil of a cat's eye, 'Beware, I am dangerous,' and so forth, all of which, in conjunction with the aforesaid shrugs and pantomimic action of his hands, made the conversation of M. Judas very intelligible indeed in spite of his foreign accent and French observations.

It was raining on this particular morning—seasonable weather, of course; but as far as rain went all the months were the same in Ironfields, and a thick, black fog pervaded the atmosphere. A cold, clammy fog, with a sooty flavor, that crept slowly through the streets and into the houses, like a wounded snake dragging itself along. Here and there pedestrians looming large in the opaque cloud like gigantic apparitions; gas lamps flaring drearily in the thick air, cabs and carts and carriages all moving cautiously along like endless funerals. And only two o'clock in the afternoon. Surely the darkness which spread over the land of Egypt could be no worse than this; nay, perhaps it was better, Egypt being tropical and lacking the chill, unwholesome moisture which permeated the air, wrapping the dingy houses, the noisy foundries and the cheerless streets in a dull, sodden pall.

Gas glared in the shop of Wosk & Co.,

behind the glass doors, which kept out as much of the fog as they were able—gas which gave forth a dim, yellow light to Mr. Wosk behind the screen looking over prescriptions and to M. Judas at the counter making up neat packages of medicine bottles. At the little window at the back, which looked into the Wosk dwelling house, an occasional vision of Mrs. Wosk's head appeared like that of a cross cherub, keeping her eye on chemist and assistant.

'Bur-r-r,' says M. Judas, blowing on his lean fingers, 'it is to me the most coldness of times. Aha! le brouillard! it makes itself to be all the places to-day.'

'Seasonable, seasonable!' murmurs Mr. Wosk, washing his hands in a contemplative fashion. 'Good for—ahem!—good for business—that is, business in our line.'

'Eh, Monsieur Vosks, mais oui, mon ami,' answered the Frenchman, raising his eyebrows, 'and for de—what you call de coffins man. L'homme des funerailles.'

'That—ahem!' said Mr. Wosk with his rasping cough, 'is what we must try and prevent. The undertaker—not coffins man, Monsieur Judas, that is not correct Anglo-Saxon—is the last, the very last resource of a sick man. Prevention—ahem!—in the person of ourselves is better than—dear me, I don't think the remark is applicable.'

At this moment the glass doors opened to admit a stranger enveloped in a comfortable fur coat, and also gave admission to a cloud of fog that had been waiting for the opportunity for some time. The stranger made his appearance like a Homeric deity in a cloudy fashion, and M. Judas (inquisitive) and Mr. Wosk (mournfully indifferent) saw that he was a keen-faced young gentleman with a sharp, decisive manner.

'Wosk & Co., eh?' queried the stranger, who was none other than Mr. Octavius Fanks.

'Yes, sir,' said Mr. Wosk advancing, 'the name—ahem!—my name, sir, is in front of the—the shop, sir.'

'So is the fog,' replied the detective, leaning over the counter. 'I could hardly see the shop much less the name.'

'De fog is still heavier, monsieur,' said Judas, taking in the appearance of Mr. Fanks in a comprehensive fashion.

Octavius swung sharply round at the sound of the foreign voice, and instantly took an intuitive dislike to the appearance of the red-haired young man.

'Oui,' he replied, looking at him sharply; 'n'etes-vous pas Francais?'

'Monsieur a beaucoup de penetration,' said Judas, startled at hearing his own tongue.

His eyes had narrowed into those dangerous slits which betokened that he was on his guard against this clever—too clever Englishman. The two men looked at each other steadily for a moment, and two ideas flashed rapidly through their respective minds.

The Fanks idea, suggested by the suspicious appearance (to a detective) of M. Judas: 'This man has a past and is always on his guard.'

The Guinaud idea, inspired by a naturally suspicious nature: 'This Englishman is a possible enemy. I must be careful.'

There was really no ground for such uncomplimentary ideas on the part of these two men who now met for the first time, except that instinctive repulsion which springs from the collision of two natures antipathetic to each other.

Mr. Wosk being warned by the apparition of Mrs. Wosk's head at the little window that he was wasting time, addressed himself at once to his customer in a business fashion:

'What can I do for you, sir?'

Octavius withdrew his eyes from the face of the assistant, and producing a pill box, laid it down on the counter before Mr. Wosk.

'I want to know the name of the gentleman for whom you made up these pills.'

'Rather difficult to say, sir,' said Mr. Wosk, taking up the box; 'we make up so many boxes like this.'

'They were made up for a gentleman who left Ironfields shortly afterward.'

The chemist, never very clear-headed at any time, looked perfectly bewildered at being called upon to make such a sudden explanation, and turned helplessly to his assistant, who stood working at his medicine bottles with downcast eyes.

'I'm afraid—ahem!—really, my memory is so bad,' he faltered childishly; 'well, I scarcely—ahem!—but I think Monsieur Judas will be able to tell you all about it. I have the fullest confidence in Monsieur Judas.'

'It's more than I should have,' thought Fanks, as the assistant silently took the pill box from his master and opened it.

'Eight pilules,' he said, counting them.

'Yes, eight pills,' replied Fanks, taking a seat by the counter, 'but when you made up the prescription there must have been more.'

'De monsieur weeth de pilules did he geeve dem to monsieur?'

'No; I want to know the gentleman's name.'

'An' for wy, monsieur?'

'Never you mind,' retorted Octavius coolly; 'you do what you're asked, my good fellow.'

The 'good fellow' gave Mr. Fanks an ugly look; but in another moment he was bland and smiling as ever. Mr. Wosk (beckoned by the cherubs head) had gone into the back premises, so the two men were quite alone, of which circumstance Mr. Fanks took advantage by speaking to M. Judas in French in order to understand him better.

Translated, the conversation (guarded on both sides by mutual suspicion) was as follows:

'Will monsieur permit me to ask him a few questions? Otherwise,' said Judas with a shrug, 'I cannot hope to find the name monsieur requires.'

'Ask whatever questions you like.'

'Does monsieur know when the gentleman left this town?'

Mr. Fanks made a rapid calculation and answered promptly:

'I'm not quite sure; after the 6th and before the 13th of the present month. But your best plan will be to go back from the 13th of November.'

'Certainly, monsieur.'

Judas disappeared behind the neat screen and rapidly turned up the order book, beginning with the 13th of November as directed.

'They are tonic pills I see, monsieur,' he called out.

'Yes, it is marked on the box.'

In another moment Fanks heard an exclamation of surprise behind the screen and shortly afterward M. Judas emerged, carrying the order book with him. He was visibly agitated and his lean hands trembled as he placed the book on the counter.

'What is the matter?' asked Fanks suspiciously, rising to his feet.

'I will explain to monsieur later on,' said Judas with a sickly smile. 'At present, however, here is what you want. These pills were made up for Monsieur Sebastian Melstane.'

'Sebastian Melstane,' muttered Fanks thoughtfully. 'Oh! that was his name.'

'Yes, Sebastian Melstane,' said Judas slowly. 'He bought these pills on the 11th of November and went down to Jarchester the next day.'

'How do you know he went to Jarchester?' asked Fanks, considerably startled.

'Because I know Sebastian Melstane, monsieur. We lodged at the same pension. He makes me the confidence that he was going to that place, and I believe took these pills with him. Now you have the box, but my friend, where is he?'

M. Judas threw out his hands with a fine dramatic gesture and fixed his crafty eyes on the impassive face of the detective.

'Do you read the papers?' asked Octavius with great deliberation.

'Yes; but I read English so bad.'

'Get some one to translate for you then,' said Fanks coolly, 'and you will see that an unknown man committed suicide at Jarchester. That man was Sebastian Melstane.'

'Gave himself the death?'

'Yes; read the papers. By the way, Monsieur Judas—that is your name I believe—as you knew Sebastian Melstane, I may want to ask you some questions about him.'

M. Judas pulled out a card with some writing on it and handed it to Fanks with a flourish.

'My name and habitation, monsieur. If monsieur will do me the honor to call at my pension I will tell him whatever he desires to know.'

'I'm afraid that's beyond your power, Monsieur Guinaud,' replied Fanks, glancing at the card. 'However, I'll call round this evening; but at present I want to know about these pills.'

'They were bought by my friend on the 11th,' said Judas, showing the entry. 'Behold! monsieur, the book speaks it.'

'Who signed the prescription?'

'A doctor, monsieur. I cannot say the name, it is hard for my tongue; but, monsieur, you shall see his own writing.'

Once more he vanished behind the screen, and shortly afterward reappeared with a sheet of note paper which he placed before Octavius.

'There it is, monsieur.'

Fanks took up the paper and read as follows:

R. Acid, Arsen, g. i.
 Pulv. Glycyrrh. gr. xv.
 Ext. Glycyrrh. gr. xxx.
 Misce et divide in pilule.
 No. XII.
 Sig. Tonic pills.
 One to be taken before retiring nightly.
 JACOB JAPIX, M.D.
 'I see you made up twelve pills,' said Fanks after he had perused this document,

'Yes, monsieur, twelve pills. It is the usual number.'

Octavius looked thoughtful for a moment, then turning his back on the assistant, walked to the door, where he stood gazing out at the fog and thinking deeply in this fashion:

'There were twelve pills in the box when Melstane bought it on the 11th of this month. According to his statement to Miss Chickles, he took a tonic pill regularly every night. On the 11th therefore he took one. Left Ironfields on the 12th and must have slept in London, as the journey is so long. There he took another pill; and at Jarchester on the 13th he took a third. Doctor Drewey analyzed three pills, so that's six accounted for out of the twelve. There ought only to be six left. But there are eight in the box now. Good heavens! what is the meaning of those two extra pills?'

Turning round, he walked back to the counter.

'Are you sure you are not making a mistake?' he said quickly; 'you must have made up fourteen pills.'

'But, monsieur, behold!' said Judas, pointing to the prescription No. XII.

'Yes, that's twelve, sure enough,' observed Fanks, trying to appear calm, but feeling excited at the thought that he had stumbled on some tangible evidence at last.

'Did you make up the pills?'

'Yes, monsieur.'

'And you are sure you only made up twelve?'

'On my word of honor, monsieur,' said Judas, opening his eyes with their guileless look; 'but I do not ask monsieur to believe me if he has doubt. Monsieur, my master also counted the pills.'

'That is the custom, I believe,' said Mr. Fanks; 'a kind a check.'

'But certainly, monsieur, without doubt.'

At this moment, as if he knew his presence was required, Mr. Wosk walked into the shop, whereupon M. Judas at once explained the matter to him.

'My assistant is—ahem!—correct,' said Mr. Wosk sadly, as if he rather regretted it than otherwise. 'I remember Mr. Melstane's tonic pills, and I did count them. There were—ahem!—twelve.'

'You are sure?'

'I am certain.'

'An' I to myself can assure it,' remarked Judas in English; 'but if monsieur would make to himself visits at monsieur le docteur he could know exactly of the numbers. Eh bien. Je le crois.'

'Where does Doctor Japix live?' asked Fanks, picking up the pill box. 'I will call round and see him.'

Mr. Wosk wrote out the address and handed it to the detective.

'There's nothing wrong with the—ahem!—medicine, I trust,' he said nervously. 'I am most careful, and my assistant, Monsieur Judas, is much to be—ahem!—trusted.'

'I don't know if anything is wrong with these pills,' said Octavius, touching his breast coat pocket, 'but you know the saying "There is more in this than meets the eye." Shakespeare, you observe. Wonderful man; appropriate remark for everything. Monsieur Guinaud, I will see you to-night. Mr. Wosk, to-morrow expect me about these pills. Good afternoon.'

When he had vanished into the fog Mr. Wosk turned to his assistant with some alarm.

'I trust, Monsieur Judas, that the pills—the pills—'

'They are in themselves qui' right. Eh, oh! yes,' replied M. Judas, letting his eyelids drop over his eyes. 'To-morrow I to you will speke of dis—eh, le mystere—vous savez, monsieur. Le mystere Jarchesterer.'

'That thing in the paper!' cried Mr. Wosk aghast. 'Why—ahem!—what has it got to do with us?'

M. Judas shrugged his shoulders, spread out his hands with a deprecating gesture and spoke slowly:

'Eh, le voila! I myself am no good to read les journaux anglais—les feuilletons. If you so kind vil be to me, monsieur, an' read de mystere Jarchesterer I vil to you explin moeh, eh. Il est bien entendu.'

'But what has the Jarchester mystery got to do with us?' repeated Mr. Wosk helplessly.

'Eh, mon ami, qui sait?' replied M. Judas, enraged at his master's stupidity. 'De man dead is he who took ze pilules.'

'Sebastian Melstane!' cried Mr. Wosk thunder struck.

'Oui, c'est le nom.'

And M. Judas narrowed his eyes, spread out his lean hands and smiled complacently at the look of horror on the face of Mr. Wosk.

CHAPTER V.
 DR. JAPIX SPEAKS.
 Octavius Fanks had no difficulty in finding the residence of Dr. Jacob Japix, for that kind-hearted gentleman was well known in Ironfields, not alone in the village suburb but throughout the great city itself, where his beaming face, his cheery words and his open hand were much appreciated, especially in the quarters of the poor. Not a professional philanthropist, this man with

the large heart, for he labored among poverty and vice from an innate desire to do good and not from any hope that his works would be blazoned forth in the papers. He had no wife, no family, no relations, so he devoted his money, his time and his talents to the service of paupers who could not afford to give anything in return except gratitude, and did not always give even that.

Of course he had rich patients also. Oh! yes, many rich people came to Jacob Japix to be cured and generally went away satisfied, for he was a clever physician, having the eye of a hawk and the intuition of a Galen for all kinds of mysterious diseases. But the money which the rich took from the poor in the way of scant payment for labor done went back to the pockets of the poor via Dr. Japix, so he illustrated in his own small way the law of compensation.

Mr. Fanks knew this doctor very well, having met him in connection with a celebrated poisoning case at Manchester, where he had attended as a witness in the character of an expert. Octavius therefore was very much delighted at chance having put Japix in his way for this special affair, as he was beginning to be troubled with vague fears, the existence of which he persistently refused to acknowledge to himself.

Dr. Japix inhabited a big house just on the outskirts of the town, and on ringing a noisy bell Octavius was admitted by a footman, who said that the doctor was engaged at present, but would be at liberty soon. And soon it was, for just as the footman was about to show Fanks into the waiting room on the left, a party of three (two ladies and one gentleman), accompanied by Japix, emerged from a door on the right.

One lady was tall, dark and stately, with a serious cast of countenance; the other small, fair and vivacious, all sparkle and sunshine; and the gentleman was a long, lean man, with a saturnine expression not by any means prepossessing. Dr. Japix accompanied the trio to the door, talking with a subdued laugh.

'Well! set him up, Miss Florry, never fear—nerves—pooh! ha! ha! ha! nerves in a bridegroom. Who ever heard of such a thing?'

'Ay! but you see you're a bachelor,' said the golden-haired fairy gaily; 'a horrid old bachelor, who doesn't know anything except how to give people nasty medicine.'

'Hey! now, ha! ha! that's too bad. I always make your medicine nice. Wait till you're a matron I'll make it nasty.'

'When I'm a matron,' said Miss Florry, 'I'll take no medicine except Spolger's Soother,' at which speech the doctor laughed, the lean man scowled and the two ladies, attended by the scowl, departed, while the doctor turned to greet his new visitor.

'Well, sir—well, sir—ha! may I be condemned to live on my own physic if it isn't Monsieur Vidocq?'

'Eh, my dear doctor, me voici. Dumas, my dear physician; you've read The Three Musketeers, of course.'

'Ha! ha! if you start quoting already,' laughed Japix, walking into his study, followed by Fanks, 'I give in at once; your memory, Mr. Thiefoatcher, is cast iron and mine isn't. So I surrender at discretion. Now I'll be bound,' continued the doctor, sitting in his huge chair, 'you don't know where the quotation comes from.'

'I don't,' replied Fanks, sitting down; 'you score one, my dear doctor. By the way, don't call me Thiefoatcher.'

'Certainly not, Jonathan Wild.'

'Nor that either.'

'Why, Monsieur Fouche?'

'The third is the worst of all. At present I'm nothing but Mr. Rixton as I told you.'

'And Octavius Fanks?'

'Is anywhere except where Mr. Rixton is.'

'Ha! ha! hey! 'You're down here on business.'

'Private business. But really I want to be serious.'

'Be serious by all means,' said Japix, 'business first, pleasure afterward. Dine with me to-night.'

'No, I've got an engagement. Say seven to-morrow and I accept.'

'When found make a note of,' remarked the doctor and scribbled a few lines in his memoranda book. 'Eh, author?'

'Dickens' Captain Cuttle.'

'Very good; go up top.'

'Are you going to be serious?' said Fanks in despair.

'My dear Rixton, I am serious,' replied Dr. Japix; 'proceed.'

'First, who were the people who left as I came in?'

'Now what the deuce do you want to know that for?' said Japix, looking puzzled.

'Because I think one lady is Miss Judith Varlins and the other Miss Florry Marson.'

'Correct so far.'

'And the gentleman's name, Japix.'

'Jackson Spolger, a patent medicine millionaire. Inherited it from Papa Spolger. Large fortune; disagreeable man; engaged to marry Miss Marson.'

'Biography in a nutshell,' said Fanks; 'but surely not engaged.'