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have arranged for a second at an hour when he might reasonably expect it to be unobserved. The fact that the body found must have been fully clothed when the fire broke out rather lends colour to this theory."

"How did you prove that he was fully clothed?" asked Dick abruptly.

"My dear sir, the position of the keys, and the blade of the pocket-knife, discovered lying just under the deceased, shows clearly that they had been contained in his pockets." The detective enjoyed for a moment in silence the spectacle of the other's evident surprise and discomfiture, then continued: "You will probably ask for what purpose could Mr. Emberson have made such an appointment? I reply frankly: I cannot tell you—it is idle now to surmise; perhaps to receive certain papers which the others had not with them (they had left a bag in the cloak-room), or pay over a sum of money. The reason is immaterial. The quarrel of the afternoon—"

"Which was probably only the idle imagining of two wooden-headed servants!" interposed Dick hotly.

"May have been resumed," continued the other imperturbably.

The younger man, with a resigned shrug of his shoulders, resumed his former position, with his back to the light, so that only the silhouette of his face was perceptible to the keen eyes fronting him.

"May have reached a higher pitch—have changed from words to blows. Supposing a fatal one to have been struck—intentionally or unintentionally—what would be the first idea of the survivor? How to escape detection. What would naturally present itself to his mind as the safest course of action? To fire the house and slip away unobserved in the darkness."

He paused, noting with satisfaction the slight tremor which passed through Dick's frame; then continued quietly, whilst his companion maintained an ominous silence—

"Accepting this hypothesis, the natural question arises—Who was the assailant? who the victim? If Mr. Emberson had fallen—there would have been little or no reason to hide his identity; the fire would be expected to cover up the crime; but if it was his visitor who met with a sudden and violent death that night, the case would have been different; it might then have been necessary to take certain precautions to prevent later identification."

The measure was full; with a bound Dick was upon the detective, had seized him by the collar, and shaken him as a terrier does a rat; then flung him to the ground, and stood over him with clenched fists and gleaming eyes.

"You had better pick yourself up and go, Mr. Screed," he said between half-closed teeth, "whilst I have still sufficient command over myself to refrain from breaking every bone in your body. You will know perhaps another time that it is scarcely safe to dub a man murderer and incendiary in his son's presence."

The little man picked himself up rather ruefully, and quietly straightened his disordered collar and tie.

"I think I knew that before," he answered dryly; "but in our profession we have to take risks. Your arguments are most convincing, Mr. Emberson; and I sincerely envy your muscular strength. Some men might bear you malice for handling them as you have me; but, upon my soul, I like you all the better for it. Let us cry quits! Set your shaking against my offence. I will promise not to repeat it, if you, on your side, will hear me patiently to the end."

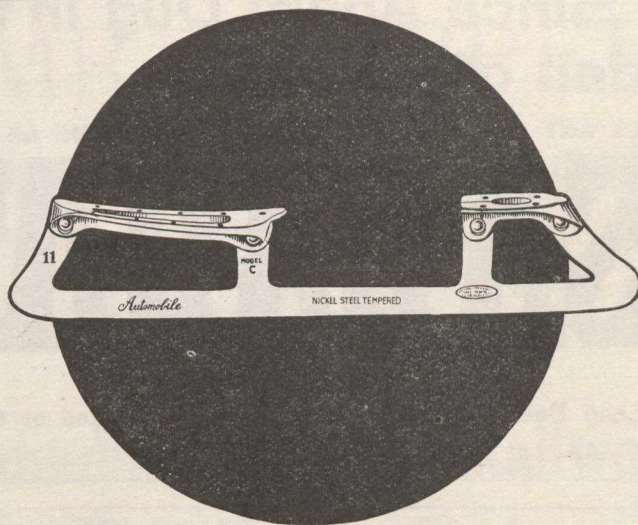
Dick stared at him in amazement; but his fury had spent itself in the tussle, and the pluck and sportsmanlike spirit of the little man raised the latter several degrees in his estimation. Flung himself heavily back in his chair, he said with a short laugh—

"For heaven's sake, then, proceed and get it over."

The detective remained standing, placing his elbows on the top of the chair and leaning over it in such fashion that it formed a rampart between him and his impetuous companion, he said quietly—

"I have not yet told you my chief reason for doubting the identity of the person buried yesterday."

"You are touching on dangerous ground, Mr. Screed. I thought we had



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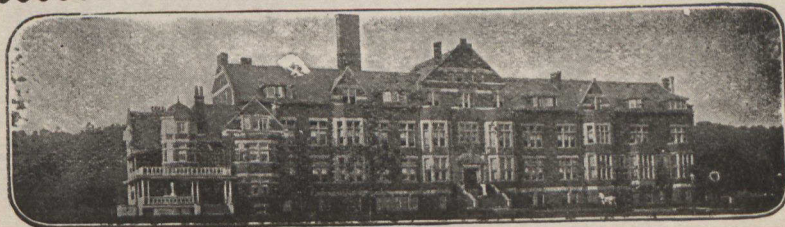
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