

the papers, and so on, in the drawers had only been turned over in a lump, not rummaged, and there was no system in the lock-breaking. A man who had meant business would have taken them one after the other in order.

"I sat down in the empty house to work out the problem.

"Who could that acquaintance be whom Mary Denning would let into the house so late at night without any distrust? The Dennings, owing to the old man's infirmities, kept very much to themselves; they were on intimate terms with only a few neighbours, and these had accounted for their movements on the fatal Friday night. No suspicion at all could attach to them.

"If the motive of robbery did not enter into the crime, as I was sure it did not, then I had to consider the motive of interest. To whose interest would it be that Richard Denning or his niece, or both of them, should disappear? My thoughts naturally turned to the old man's only relative, the nephew, John Telford, and the distant cousin, Edward Telford. The latter I put aside at once. He was an old man, and in frail health, and comfortably off. As to John Telford, he had a flourishing business, and was assured of the inheritance of two-thirds of his uncle's estate.

It seemed on the surface as if he could in no way come under suspicion.

"But that was too obvious. And as I thought over the matter an entirely different view of the case presented itself to me, an idea that made me jump to my feet, lock up Box Villa, take the first train to Branton, and present myself in John Telford's office.

"I am Mr. Max, from Scotland yard," I said, brusquely, the moment I was alone with him, with all my eyes open for the first instinctive movement which is for me so important. 'Yes,' he said, quietly. 'The Briddon superintendent told me they were sending down one of their best detectives.'

"You may imagine how I cursed inwardly my pompous colleague. Why could he not at least keep his stupid mouth shut? And 'one of the best,' too! That made me smile.

"John Telford was a young, lightly and strongly built man, an athlete all over, with a pleasant and frank expression. And, by the way, Captain Grensley, let me urge you never to judge a man by his manner of looking at you. You know how people say, 'I dislike So-and-so, he can't look you in the face.' It's constitution, not conscience, nine times out of ten. I have known some pretty good rogues who could outstare me, and I am not bashful.

"I'm glad you've come down," John Telford said, looking straight enough at me. 'We must get to the bottom of this terrible business. My poor, poor relatives! All I can do, Mr. Max, I will do. Command me in any way, ask me any questions you like.'

"I put him through a pretty stiff catechism, I can assure you. He told me that he was very fond of all sports, particularly running and walking, and that he often went on foot to Box Villa. He had a bicycle, but did little with it, as he did not care for that form of exercise; and he could not afford to keep a horse, though he liked riding. As to his movements on that Friday night, he had left the Red Horse at half-past ten after his usual glass of beer, had taken his customary constitutional of three-quarters of an hour on the Brid-

don road, and had called out 'Goodnight' to his house-keeper at a quarter past eleven. I was enabled subsequently to verify the times he had given me. He told me that his uncle's will had been read on the day of the funeral, and that he had inherited the proportion of the property that the old man had indicated. His idea was now that he was rich enough, to dispose of the business, settle in a house in a neighbouring street, perhaps marry. Box Villa he should try to sell.

"I spent the next few days in trying to get John Telford, in imagination, to Briddon and back in three-quarters of an hour, with ten minutes to spare, because I thought I had traced the motive of interest which might implicate him in the business. For it was, at any rate, possible that he had noticed with some concern his uncle's growing affection for and dependence on Mary Denning, and feared a new disposition of the old man's property. That was the idea that had struck me the first day as I sat alone in Box Villa; a slight thread indeed, but the only one I could get hold of. Do what I would, however, I did not see my way to it. The last tram for Briddon left Branton at ten; that closed the service for the day. There were no trains between seven and midnight either way. On foot the thing was impossible; and even if John Telford were an ardent bicyclist, it would be a considerable feat to cover ten miles in thirty-five minutes at the outside with a violent head wind one way. There were no short cuts.

"But, of course, I did not give it up. After some days I told John Telford that I could see no clue and was going back to London, where he would write me if any fresh evidence came to hand. That evening we sent down a secret agent to keep his eye on Telford.

"The agent was a smart fellow—not quite so smart, though, as the authorities thought, for he chiefly followed up my hints. He reported that he had discovered a narrow track, used by the workmen, at the foot of the railway embankment and found that by riding to Briddon on the east of the line and back on the west, a man

would be aided by the wind going and protected from it coming back. But we were not yet at our goal.

"The next report that came in notified the fact that John Telford had sold the business and was going away for a few weeks. When I tell you that I travelled north in the same railway compartment as he did for a hundred and fifty miles, you may understand that I have studied the art of disguise to some purpose. There was an enormous crush at Leeds, which was our destination, and, to my great annoyance, I lost my man. I went to the police for help in my search, but John Telford seemed to have disappeared from off the face of the earth.

"I stayed there for a fortnight, and was going to give up the chase, when one afternoon, quite by accident, I turned into a great bicycle meeting. The finish of a ten-mile event was just on. I was by the post, and the winner passed within two yards of me. It was John Telford, riding under a feigned name, and he had brought off a record.

"There was no particular hurry about the matter, and I waited till John Telford's return to Branton before I took any steps. Then I went to his house. He looked surprised to see me.

"Good-morning, Mr. Max," he said. 'Have you any news?'



Drawn by G. Butler  
"There was an enormous crush at Leeds and I lost my man."