

# A MODERN JUDAS.

OR, THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE JARLCHESTER MYSTERY.

Not an important place by any means, this sleepy little town lying at the foot of a low range of undulating hills, beside a slow-flowing river. A square-towered church of Norman architecture, very ancient and very grim; one principal narrow street, somewhat crooked in its course; other streets, narrower and more crooked, leading off on the one side to the sheltering hills and on the other down to the muddy stream. Market place octagonal in shape, with a dilapidated stone cross of the Plantagenet period in the centre; squat stone bridge, with massive piers, across the sullen gray waters; on the further shore a few red-roofed farm houses; beyond, fertile pastoral lands and the dim outline of distant hills.

Picturesque in a quiet fashion certainly, but striking in any way; a haven of rest for worn-out people weary of worldly troubles, but dull—intensely dull—for visionary youth longing for fame. The world beyond did not know Jarlchester, and Jarlchester did not know the world beyond, so accounts were thus equally balanced between them.

Being near Winchester, the ancient capital of Saxon England, it was asserted by archaeologists that Jarlchester, sleepy and dull as it was in the nineteenth century, had once been an important place. Jarl means earl and Chester signifies a camp; so these wiseacres asserted that the name Jarlchester meant the Camp of the Earl; from which supposition arose a fable that Jarl Godwin had once made the little town his headquarters when in revolt against pious Edward, who built St. Peter's of Westminster. As Godwin, however, according to history, never revolted against the king, and generally resided in London, the authenticity of the story must be regarded as doubtful. Nevertheless, Jarlchester folks firmly believed in it, and sturdily held to their belief against all evidence to the contrary, however clearly set forth.

They were a sleepy lot as a rule, those early-to-bed and early-to-rise country folk; for nothing had occurred for years to disturb their sluggish minds, so they had gradually sunk into a state of somnolent indifference, with few ideas beyond the weather and the crops.

Then Jarlchester, unimportant since Anglo-Saxon times, suddenly became famous throughout England on account of "The Mystery," and the mystery was "A Murder."

On this moist November morning, when the whole earth shivered under a bleak gray sky, a crowd, excited in a dull, bovine way, was assembled in front of the Hungry Man Inn, for in the commercial room thereof, now invested with a ghastly interest, an inquest was being held on the body of a late guest of the inn, and the bucolic crowd was curious to know the verdict.

A long, low-ceilinged apartment this commercial room, with a narrow deal table covered with a glaring red cloth down the centre; four tall windows looking out on to the crowd, who, with faces flattened against the glass, peered into the room. A jury of lawful men and true, much impressed with a sense of their importance, seated at the narrow table; at the top thereof the coroner, Mr. Carr, bluff, rosy-faced and eminently respectable. Near him a slender young man, keen-eyed and watchful, taking notes (reported by the crowd outside to be a London detective); witnesses seated here, there and everywhere among eager spectators; but the body! oh, where was the body, which was the culminating point of interest in the whole gawsome affair? The crowd outside was visibly disappointed to learn that the body was lying upstairs in a darkened room, and the jury, half eager, half fearful, having inspected it according to precedent, were now assembled to hear all procurable evidence as to the mode in which the living man of two days ago became the body upstairs.

First Witness.—Boots. Short, grimy, bashful; pulls forelock stolidly, shuffles with his feet, is doubtless as to aspirates and speaks hoarsely either from cold—it is raining—or from nervousness either of the jury or of the body; perhaps both.

Name? Jim Bulkins, sir. Bin boots at 'Ungry Man fur two year'n more come last Easter. Two days back, gen'man—him upstairs—come 'ere t' stay. Come wi' outach fro' Winchester. Only a bag—leather bag—very light. Carried 't upstairs fur gen'man, who 'ad thir'-seven. Gen'man come 'bout five. 'Ad dinner, then wrote letter. Posted letter himself. Show'd 'im post office. Guv me 'sixpence; guv me 't'other fur carr'in' up bag. Seemed cheerful. Went t' bed 'bout nine. Nex' morn'in' I went upstairs with butts. Gen'man asked fur butts t' be givin' p'osonally t' 'im 'cause 'e were p'erticler 'bout polish. Knocked at door; n' anser. Knocked

agin; n' anser. Thought gen'man 'sleep, so pushed door to put butts inside; door were open.'

Coroner—'What do you mean by the door being open?'

Witness—'Weren't locked, sir; closed t' a bit—what you might call ajar, sir. Entered room, put down butts; gen'man were lyin' quiet in bed. Thought 'e were sleepin' an' come down stair. This were 'bout nine. At ten went up agin. Knocked; n' anser. Knocked agin; n' anser. Went into room agin; gen'man still sleepin'. Went to wake 'im an' found 'e were ded. Sung out at once, an' Mr. Chickles 'e come up.'

Juryman (sharp nosed and inquisitive)—'How was he lying when you saw him first?'

Witness—'Bedclose up t' chin, sir. 'Ands and h'arms inside bedclose; lyin' on back—bedclose smooth like. Know'd 'e were ded by whiteness of 'is face—like chalk, sir—h'awful!'

Coroner—'Are you sure deceased asked you to give him his boots personally next morning?'

Witness—'Yes, sir—said 'e were vury p'erticler?'

Coroner—'Did he seem to you like a man intending to make away with himself?'

Witness—'No, sir. Quite lively like. Sed as 'ow 'e were goin' to look roun' this 'ole nex' day, sir.'

Coroner (pompously)—'And what did the deceased mean by the expression "this hole," my man?'

Witness (grinning)—'Jarlchester, sir.'

Great indignation on the part of the patriotic jury at hearing their native town thus described, and as Boots is still grinning, thinking such remark to be an excellent joke, he is told sharply to stand down which he does with obvious relief.

The next witness called was Sampson Chickles, the landlord of the Hungry Man. A fat, portly individual is Mr. Chickles, with a round red face and a ponderous consciousness that he is the hero of the hour—or rather the minute. 'Swear Sampson Chickles!' Which is done by a fussy clerk with a rapid gabble and a dingy Bible—open at Revelations—and Mr. Chickles, being sworn to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, gives his evidence in a fat voice coming somewhere from the recesses of his rotund stomach.

'My name, gentlemen, is Sampson Chickles, and I've lived in Jarlchester, man and boy, sixty years. But I keep my health wonderful, gentlemen, saving a touch of the—'

Coroner—'Will the witness kindly confine himself to the matter in hand?'

Witness (somewhat ruffled)—'Meaning the dead one, I presume, Mr. Carr. Certainly, Mr. Carr; I was coming to that. He—meaning the dead one—came here two days ago by the coach from Winchester. There is, gentlemen, no name on his bag—there is no name on his linen—no letters, no cards in his pockets—not even initials, gentlemen, to prevent his clothes being stolen at the wash. He never mentioned his name, Mr. Carr. I was going to ask him next morning, but he was dead, and therefore, gentlemen, not in a position to speak. As far as I am concerned, Mr. Carr, the dead one has never been christened. The mystery—meaning the dead one—has no name that I ever heard of, and was spoken of by me and my daughter (who may know more than her father) as the gentleman in No. 37. I only spoke to the dead one twice, Mr. Carr and gentlemen; once when I arranged about terms—thirty shillings a week, gentlemen, not including wine—and again when I asked him if he had enjoyed his dinner—soup, fish, fowl and pudding. Gentlemen, he had enjoyed his dinner.'

A Juryman (hungry looking, evidently thinking of the dinner)—'Was he cheerful, Mr. Chickles?'

Witness—'J'ound, sir, if I may use the term. Merry as a lark.'

Facetious juryman suggests wine.

Witness (with mournful dignity)—'No, sir! Pardon me, Mr. Specks, he had no wine while he was in this house. His explanation was a simple one, gentlemen—wine did not agree with his pills—tonic pills, Mr. Carr—one to be taken before bed time every night.'

Coroner (with the air of having found something)—'Pills, eh? Did he look ill?'

Witness—'Not exactly ill, Mr. Carr; not exactly well, gentlemen. Betwixt and between. Weak, sir. His legs shook, his hands trembled, and when a door banged he jumped, gentlemen—jumped!'

A Juryman—'Then I presume he was taking tonic pills for his constitution?'

Witness—'Well, yes, Mr. Polder; yes, sir. There is the box of pills—tonic pills, as he—meaning the dead one—told me. Found in his room, gentlemen—on the chest of drawers—after his death.'

Inspection of pills by jury. Great curi-

osity evinced when pills (eight in number) appeared to be like any other pills. The London detective, however, secured the pill box after inspection and sat with it in his hand thinking deeply.

Mr. Chickles having given all his evidence, retired with the full consciousness that he had given it in a masterly fashion; and his daughter, Miss Molly Chickles, plump, pretty and a trifle coquettish, was duly sworn. At first she was rather bashful, but having found her tongue—a task of little difficulty for this rustic daughter of Eve—told all she knew with many sidelong glances and confused blushes—feminine arts not quite thrown away on the jury, although they were to a man married and done for.

Said Molly in answer to the Coroner:

'My name is Mary Chickles. Father calls me Molly. I am the daughter of Sampson Chickles and bar maid here. I knew the deceased, but he did not tell me his name. He arrived here two days ago—on Tuesday at five by the coach. He came into the bar and asked me if he could put up here for a week. I told him he could, and called father, who arranged about the terms. He then went up to his bedroom and came down to dinner at six. After dinner he went into the parlor and I think wrote a letter. After doing so he asked me where the post office was. I sent him with Boots, and heard afterward that he posted his letter. On his return he sat down in the bar for a few minutes. There was no one there at the time. He seemed to me to be very weak, and told me his nerves were shattered. I asked him if he had consulted a doctor. He replied that he had done so, and was taking tonic pills every night before he went to bed. I said that I hoped he took regular, as it was no use unless he did so. He assured me that he always took one pill every night without fail. He mentioned that he was going to stay for a time in Jarlchester, and hoped the quiet would do him good.'

Coroner—'Did he say he was down here for his health?'

Witness—'Not exactly, sir; but he talked a good deal about his nerves and such like. He said he was going to stay a week or so, and expected a friend to join him shortly.'

Coroner—'Oh, a friend! eh? Man or woman?'

Witness—'He did not say, sir.'

A Juryman—'When did he expect this friend?'

Witness—'He said in a few days, but did not mention any special time. After a short conversation he went to bed at nine o'clock, and next morning father told me he was dead.'

Coroner—'Did he appear gloomy or low spirited?'

Witness—'Oh, dear! no, sir. A very pleasant spoken gentleman. He said his nerves were bad, but I was quite astonished at his cheerfulness.'

Coroner—'Did he say anything about the next day?'

Witness—'Yes, sir. He asked if there was anything to be seen in Jarlchester, and when I told him about the church he said he would look it up next day.'

A Juryman—'Do you think he had any intention of destroying himself?'

Witness—'Not so far as I saw, sir.'

Coroner—'He did not mention anything about the letter?'

Witness—'Not a word, sir.'

A Juryman (facetiously)—'Did you think him good looking, Miss Molly?'

Witness (tossing her head)—'Well, not what I call handsome, sir; but there's no knowing what other girls think.'

With this parting shot, Miss Chickles retired to her usual place in the bar and gossiped to outsiders about the present aspect of the case, while Sergeant Spills, the head of the Jarlchester police force, came forward to give his evidence. A crisp, dry-looking man the sergeant, with a crisp, dry manner and a sharp ring in the tones of his voice; economical in his words, decisive in his speech.

Charles Spills, sir, sergeant of the police in Jarlchester. Jim Bulkins reported death of deceased. Came here; saw body lying in bed. Clothes drawn up to chin. In my opinion, deceased died in his sleep. Examined bag of deceased. Contained linen (not marked), suit of clothes (not marked), toilet utensils of the usual kind. Drawing block and some lead pencils (much used).

Coroner (prompted by London detective)—'Were there any drawings?'

Witness—'No, sir.'

Coroner—'No sketches or faces on the block?'

Witness—'No, sir! Clothes worn by deceased, dark blue serge suit, double breasted.'

Coroner—'Any name on the clothes?'

Witness—'No, sir! Tag used to hang up coat, on which tailor's name generally placed, torn off. Searched pockets; found penknife, loose silver (twelve shillings and sixpence), and box of pills laid before the jury. Silver watch on dressing table—silver chain attached—silver sovereign purse containing six sovereigns. Nothing else.'

Coroner—'Nothing likely to lead to the name of deceased?'

Witness—'Absolutely nothing, sir. Searched, but found no name. Inquired—discovered no name. Oase puzzled me, so wired to London for detective—Mr. Fanks—now sitting on your left.'

Sergeant Spills having thus discharged his duty, saluted in a wooden fashion, and substituting Joe Stagers, coachman, for himself, took up a rigid attitude beside him, like a toy figure in a Noah's ark.

Evidence of Joe Stagers. Horsey gentleman, large, red and fat; smothered voice, suggestive of drink; a god on the box seat behind four horses, but a mere mortal given to drink when on the ground.

Joseph Stagers, sur. 'Ees, sur! Druv the coach fro' Winchester t' Jarlchester these ten year an' more. Two days ago—it were 'Jood'y, cost 't bay 'oss cast a shoe—I were waitin' at station, an' gen'man—the corpus—come up t' me an' ses 'e "Jarlchester?"' inquiring like. "'Ees, sur," ses I, an' up 'e gits an' off we goes. 'E sat aside me an' talked of plaace. 'Ees, sur. Ses 'e: "This are foine arter Lunnon."

Coroner—'Oh, did he say he had come from London?'

Witness (doggedly)—'E'es what I sed afore, sur. Talked foine, sur; but didn't know a 'oss fro' a cow.'

Mr. Stagers's evidence unanimously pronounced by jury to be worse than useless, an opinion not shared by Mr. Fanks (of London, detective), who scratched down something in a secretive little book with a vicious little pencil.

Coroner—'Call Doctor Drewey.'

A most important witness Dr. Drewey, he having made a post-mortem examination of the body, and the jury, hitherto somewhat languid, now wake up, Mr. Fanks turns over a new page in his secretive little book, and Dr. Drewey, bland, gentleman-like, in a suit of sober black and gravely smiling (professional smile), gives his opinion of things with great unction.

'I have examined the body of the deceased. It is that of a man of about eight-and-twenty years of age. Very badly nourished, and with comparatively little food in the stomach. The stomach itself was healthy, but I found the vessels of the head unusually turgid throughout. There was also great fluidity of the blood and serious effusion in the ventricles. The pupils of the eyes were much contracted. Judging from these appearances and from the turgescence of the vessels of the brain, I have no hesitation in declaring that the deceased died from an overdose of morphia or of opium.'

Coroner—'Then you think the deceased took an overdose of poison?'

Witness (with bland reproof)—'I say he died from an overdose, but I am not prepared to say that he took it himself.'

A Juryman—'Then some one administered the dose?'

Witness—'I can't say anything about that.'

A Juryman—'When do you think the deceased died?'

Witness—'That is a very difficult question to answer. In most cases of poisoning by opium death takes place within from six to twelve hours. I examined the body of the deceased between one and two o'clock the next day, and from all appearances he had been dead ten hours. According to the evidence of Miss Chickles, he went to bed at nine o'clock, so if he took the dose of opium then—as was most likely—he must have died about four o'clock in the morning.'

Coroner—'During his sleep?'

Witness—'Presumably so, opium being a narcotic.'

Coroner (prompted by London detective)—'Did his stomach look like that of an habitual opium eater?'

Witness—'No, not at all.'

Coroner—'According to you, the deceased must have taken the poison at nine o'clock when he went to bed, and on looking at the evidence of Miss Chickles I see that the deceased stated that he took his tonic pill regularly before he went to bed. Now did it strike you that he might have taken two pills by mistake, which would account for his death?'

Witness (hesitating)—'I acknowledge that such an explanation certainly did occur to me, and I analyzed three pills selected at random from the box. When I did so I found it was impossible such pills could have caused his death.'

Coroner (obviously bewildered)—'Why so?'

Witness—'Because these tonic pills contain arsenic. There is not a grain of morphia to be found in them. If the deceased had died from an overdose of these pills I would have found traces of arsenic in his stomach; but as he died from the effects of morphia or opium—I am not prepared to say which—these tonic pills have nothing to do with his death.'

This decisive statement considerably puzzled the jury. The deceased died of an overdose of morphia, the pills contained nothing but arsenic; so it being clearly proved that the pills had nothing to do with the death, the deceased must have obtained morphia or opium in some other fashion. Sergeant Spills was recalled on the

chance that the deceased might have purchased poison from the Jarlchester chemist. In his evidence, however, Sergeant Spills stated that he had, by direction of Dr. Drewey, inquired into the matter and had been assured by the chemist that the deceased had never been near the shop. The room had been thoroughly searched, and no drugs nor medicine of any kind had been discovered except the box of tonic pills now before the jury. There was absolutely nothing to show how the deceased had come by his death, that is, he had died of an overdose of morphia, but how the morphia had come into his possession was undiscoverable, so the jury were quite bewildered.

All obtainable evidence having been taken, the coroner gave his opinion thereon in a neat speech, but a speech which showed how undecided he was in his own mind as to the real facts of this peculiar case.

'I think, gentlemen, that you will agree with me in acknowledging this affair to be a remarkably mysterious one. The deceased comes down here from London (as proved by the evidence of Joseph Stagers) for a few days' rest (evidence of Miss Chickles). He gives no name, and has neither name nor initials marked on his linen, his bag or his clothes. Not even a letter or a card to throw light on his identity. Entirely unknown, he enters the doors of this inn; entirely unknown, he dies the next morning, carrying the secret of his name and his position into the next world. From all accounts (testified by the evidence of several witnesses) he was quite cheerful, and evidently—I cannot be sure—but evidently had no idea of committing suicide. Looking at the question broadly, gentlemen, the idea of suicide would no doubt have to be abandoned; but looking at the case from my point of view the whole affair is peculiarly suggestive of self-destruction. This gentleman, now deceased, comes down here; he is careful to give no address, which showed that he wished his friends to remain ignorant of his death. He is very cheerful and talks about exploring the neighborhood next day—a mere blind, gentlemen of the jury, as I firmly believe. After writing a letter—doubtless one of farewell to some friend—he retired quietly to bed and is found dead next morning. The post mortem examination, undertaken by Doctor Drewey, shows that he died from the effects of an overdose of morphia or opium. Now, gentlemen, he must have taken the morphia or opium himself. No one else could have administered it, as he was not known in Jarlchester, having been here only a few hours when his death occurred, so no one had any reason to give him poison. Regarding the pills now before us, they have been analyzed by Doctor Drewey, and are found to contain only arsenic, so we may dismiss the pills altogether. He died of morphia, and must have taken it himself, as had it been administered violently by another person, the sounds of a struggle would have been heard. No sounds were heard, however, so this proves to my mind that he killed himself wilfully. No traces of any drugs (saving the pills alluded to) were found in his room; as proved by Sergeant Spills, he bought no drugs from our local chemist, so only one presumption remains. The deceased must have brought here from London a sufficient quantity of morphia to kill him—took it all and died, leaving no trace of the drug behind. Unknown, unnamed, unfriended, the deceased came to this town, and no one but himself could have administered the poison of which he died. You, gentlemen, as well as myself have heard the evidence of the intelligent witnesses, and will therefore give your verdict in accordance with their evidence; but from what has been stated and from the whole peculiar circumstances of the case, I firmly believe—in my own mind, gentlemen—that the deceased died by his own hand.'

Thus far the sapient coroner, who delivered this address with a solemn air, much to the satisfaction of the jury, who were dull-minded men, quite prepared to be guided by a master spirit such as they regarded the coroner.

During the speech, indeed, a scornful smile might have been seen on the thin lips of Mr. Fanks; but no one noticed it, so intent were they on the words of wisdom which fell from the lips of Mr. Coroner Carr.

Under the inspiration therefore of the coroner, the twelve lawful men and true brought in a verdict quite in accordance with their own and the coroner's ideas on the subject:

'That the deceased (name unknown) died on the morning of the 13th of November through an overdose of morphia taken by himself during a temporary fit of insanity.'

Having thus relieved their minds to their own satisfaction, this assemblage of worthies—asinine for the most part—went their several ways quite convinced that they had solved the Jarlchester Mystery.

'The fools,' said Mr. Fanks scornfully, slipping the pill box, which had been left on the table, into his pocket. 'They think they've got to the bottom of this affair. Why, they don't know what they're talking about.'

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