

They asked for Dr. Withers, and were shown at once into a front sitting-room on the first-floor. A little man, thin, bent, and wizened, not yet fifty, to judge by his face, but prematurely aged and grey and battered, rose from his seat in a chair by the fire-place, and bowing slightly, with much effort, motioned them each into their places.

"Mr. Lichfield?" he said, with an inquiring glance towards Harry.

Harry bent his head in silent acquiescence. "I have never borne that name myself," he said; "but I find it was my father's. I am the person to whom you addressed your communication."

"I need not ask either of *your* names," Dr. Withers said, turning to the barrister and the General together. "Changed as you are, you are less changed than I am. I remember both of your faces perfectly. You are Serjeant Thorowgood; and you, sir, are Mr. Arthur Flamstead. My memory is probably better than yours; I don't suppose you can either of you now succeed in recognising me."

"I do," Serjeant Thorowgood answered, without one moment's hesitation, "I distinctly remember both face and voice; your name, when I last saw you, was Waterlow."

Sir Arthur said nothing, but Harry noticed a flush of colour, such as he had never before in his life observed, come suddenly into those pallid cheeks. It was a flush of hope, not of mere excitement. Sir Arthur felt the load of suspicion was to be lifted at last from his uncomplaining shoulders.

"Tell us at once," Harry cried eagerly,

"what you have to say about the Trith murder."

"There was no murder," Dr. Withers said slowly and solemnly. "No blame attaches to any man on earth but ME, and even to me the blame of thoughtless carelessness only. It was I who put the curari powder into the zinc ointment for dressing Colonel Lichfield's wound."

If a thunderbolt had fallen into their midst that moment it could not have produced a more immediate effect than Dr. Withers's long-delayed confession. Instantaneously, each took in its full bearings, both on himself and his neighbours. The double load was lifted at once from Harry's tortured and distracted mind. He looked at Sir Arthur. The old soldier, broken at last as no reverse of fortune could ever have broken him, bowed down his head on his hands between his knees, and cried like a child in silent thankfulness; then with a sudden burst of fervour he seized Harry's hand and gripped it hard. "My boy, my boy," he cried convulsively, "we are both saved—your father from the shadow of that horrible crime; myself from the burden of that life-long suspicion. For twenty-five years, Harry, I thought him guilty; for twenty-five years, I have expected myself to see Thorowgood's suspicion take definite form and head against me. And I will tell you now what I have never told any man yet. Two days before the trial, Waterlow gave me, for an experimental purpose, an ounce of curari. If that fact had come out in evidence, I should at once have been universally suspected of the murder. Tell us, tell us all about it!