

From a Medico's Note Book—The Diary of Shirley Crichton, M.D.,

An Interesting Series of Stories Published in Canada for the First Time

THE MISSING FINGER

My friend, John Seaton, once stayed with me for a few days. He was following the legal profession, and found it necessary to come up to London before his chambers were quite ready, so he accepted my invitation to put up with me for the time being. As we sat smoking and chatting before the fire one evening, I noticed he wore a ring which I did not remember having observed the last time we met—about twelve months previously. Knowing one another for a considerable time, I could afford to be inquisitive, and after a little I said, "Pardon my curiosity, Seaton, but I don't think I have seen that ring before."

"No," he said, looking up with a smile, "it only came into my possession in July last, during my holiday on the Mediterranean." Then, pulling it off his finger, he handed it over to me, saying, "Have a look at it—rather peculiar, I think you will admit."

As he said, it was decidedly peculiar. The band, a remarkable piece of chasing, was square edged, and, as far as I could see by the artificial light, the gold of which it was formed was very pale in color. At equal distances round it were six small pyramid-like projections, the apex of each being a small stone. The front of the ring was a banner-shaped design, in which was set a flat ruby-like stone, engraved for a seal. On closer examination I found the die to be that of a small scimitar or East Indian knife.

"I came by it in a rather curious manner," said Seaton, after I had been studying it for some time. "If you think you will not feel bored, I will relate the circumstances."

I assured him it would be quite the reverse, and requested him to proceed. I threw on a piece of coal, as the room was beginning to feel chilly, and, with a fervent hope that I would not be called out during the remainder of the evening, I prepared to listen.

"As I told you," he commenced, "I went to the Mediterranean for my holiday this year. One afternoon, on the return voyage, I strolled into the smoke room, which was remarkably empty for the time of the day. On entering, I noticed a young fellow sitting on one of the benches, pulling moodily at a Havana, and seeing me, he invited me to sit down. I had not been seated long when he passed some common-place remark, and soon we were in conversation together. He took me by surprise, however, when after we had been talking about half an hour on various topics, political and otherwise, he suddenly broke off at a tangent and enquired if I would buy his ring, at the same time extending his hand, on the third finger of which was the ring you have just been looking at. He informed me that although the fact of his undertaking a trip like the present might indicate that he had plenty of money, such was not the case. While in London he had taken more wine than was good for him, as well as getting into debt in many quarters, so in order to see if it might be the means of making him off some of these undesirable habits, he would like to have passed £100 off on the voyage. He had borrowed five pounds from one of the passengers, who, after a deal of patience, he admitted, now threatened to show him up to all on board, unless the money was repaid by twelve o'clock the following day. As you can understand, I was not a little surprised at the story, and naturally did not feel inclined to purchase the ring under the circumstances. Instead, seeing that the fellow was much worried, I offered to advance him five pounds, returnable as soon as he found it convenient to do so. Even with his many weaknesses he had a fair sense of honor left, because he at once declined my offer, informing me that unless I took the ring he would be reluctantly be compelled to refuse the money. I eventually effected a compromise by taking the ring in exchange for the five pounds on the understanding that as soon as he was able to do so he would buy the ring back from me. The matter was concluded, and we exchanged our dresses. I saw the last of him at Naples, where he went ashore to stay for a short time with the uncle who had paid the expenses of the trip, and from whom, he informed me, he hoped to get the money to repurchase the ring as promised.

"Shortly after we left that port I was aware of a new arrival on board. The reason I noticed this individual was owing to his unusual height, not an inch less than six feet three. I should say, and a peculiar habit he had of snapping his fingers as he

strolled about the deck. By his features, crisp black hair and beard, and certain characteristic manners, I judged him to be of Spanish blood. I made his acquaintance also in the smoke room. We got into conversation and I found him a most interesting person. He showed an intimate knowledge of many of my particular pursuits and interests, and in a short time we were on very friendly terms. As he was about to commence a fresh cigar, and I happened to be relighting my modest meerschaum, I extended him the light. He took one pull at his cigar and then stopped short, and the match burned out. I was wearing the ring, having slipped it on along with my own plain signet, believing it to be safer there than anywhere else I might put it, and it was this which had caused my companion to interrupt the lighting of his cigar so suddenly. He stared at the ring for a moment or two with marked surprise, then with profuse apologies for his inquisitiveness remarked that it was a peculiar piece of jewellery, and enquired if I had come across it in London or abroad. Of course, under the circumstances in which it had come into my possession, I did not feel inclined to enlighten him, and beyond mentioning that I had purchased it from a gentleman by private treaty gave him no information. He then lit his cigar, and although he made an effort to continue the subject of conversation previous to the interruption I saw his interest was gone and we gradually relapsed into silence. After a short time he again reverted to the ring, and, informing me that he had taken a particular liking for it, asked if I could be prevailed upon to part with it for a reasonable amount. I politely but firmly declined, and I think my manner indicated that I preferred the matter to drop. A frown of disappointment crossed his face, but was gone in a moment, and he merely said with a smile, "All well, Seaton, I hope you may not regret your refusal," and then quickly turned the conversation. I had intended to complete the voyage to London, but on arrival at Marseille I found a letter awaiting me necessitating my presence at home sooner than I expected, so I left the steamer at that port and journeyed overland. I did not see my Spanish friend when I went ashore, and presume he went round to London, as most of the passengers did. The remark made by him in the steamer smoke room caused me some little thought at first, but I have come to the conclusion that it was meaningless, and was merely the outlet for his disappointment at my refusal to part with the ring, for which he had evidently taken a marked fancy. I have since discovered that the address given to me by the person from whom I got the ring is a fictitious one, and as I suppose the ring is now my property, and will doubtless remain so, as the party has not come to claim it."

Seaton left my place a few days later, on learning that his chambers were ready for occupation, and we saw nothing of each other for about a month. Late one night, however, I received, by special messenger, a note from him—at least not from him, but written at his direction—requesting me to come across. I at once had a hansom called and drove over as quickly as possible. On arrival a surprise awaited me. Seaton reclined on a couch, and his clothes and shirt front were bespattered with blood. As I entered the room he held up a bandaged hand, and I saw that the third finger was missing and with it the curious ring! Then before I had recovered from this surprise, he pointed to the table near, and on looking I saw thereon a small bloodstained knife exactly similar in design to the miniature shown in the seal on the ring. One thing I looked for was missing, namely, the severed digit. Thanks to a slight knowledge of ambulance work, Seaton's man had been able to stop the bleeding, although as it was my friend had lost a considerable quantity of blood, and was naturally feeling very weak as a result. On examining the stump, I found the amputation to have been made with a certain amount of surgical skill, and the bone had evidently been severed by a recognized instrument, although the small knife on the table had been used for making the incision. With the aid of his man, I had Seaton conveyed to bed, after having properly fixed up the wounded hand. There he explained that a stranger had called on him during the day, informing him that he had a most important case to discuss, and requesting as a special favor that Seaton should receive him privately after business hours, when

they might go into the matter together. Seaton, with his usual courtesy, asked him to call at his chambers in the evening, and in due course the client appeared. Seaton rang for refreshments, and they sat down together. He does not clearly remember the circumstances of the case on which his advice was wanted, but had a faint recollection of listening to something about an erroneous or duplicate will regarding an estate in Herts, the whole of which story, however, can have been nothing more than an elaborate excuse for gaining admission to his private apartments. Once or twice during the conversation he had occasion to rise for a volume from his bookcase, and believes that while his back was turned the stranger must have taken the opportunity of drugging his glass. At any rate, he woke to find Thomas, his man, standing over him, the stranger gone, and also one of his fingers.

Thomas's story afforded a little more information on the subject. He stated that a short time after his master and the stranger had been closeted together, a second person called, and saying that it was not necessary to announce him as he was expected by Mr. Seaton, went upstairs. About a quarter of an hour later the two visitors came down together, and were shown out by Thomas, one of them placing five shillings in his hand as they went. He thought it rather unusual that his master had not come down with the pair, and on going upstairs a short time after he found him lying unconscious and one of his fingers severed.

From a description given by the servant there is not the slightest doubt that the second arrival that night was none other than the Spaniard Seaton had met on board the steamer.

One point which has caused us a good deal of conjecture is, was the party from whom Seaton obtained the ring in any way connected with the Spaniard, either by rivalry or otherwise—but we have never got beyond conjecture, and I do not suppose we ever shall. Poor Seaton often looks at the stump of his finger and shakes his head. He cannot now bear the sight of a ring, and never wears one.

Gossip

Gossip is not one of the lost arts, but has been preserved and even cultivated by being handed down from mother to daughter.

We are thankful there are only a very few villages in this Province where this gift of tongues has become a fine art.

I have such a village in mind, as I write, where a society was formed with name, the initials of which were W. C. T. U. Let me explain, not the Women's Christian Temperance Union, that noble body of Christian women who have done so much to ameliorate the sufferings of their sisters, who have sunk almost to the depths of despair by the demon intemperance.

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But the society I mean is W. man's Crazy Tattlers Union. The qualifications to become an A.I. member is a glib tongue and no respect for the feelings of their fellows. The tongue will wag—sometimes innocently, but more times with malice, spite and venom. To enter this society the initiation ceremony is very simple, but far-reaching, and consists of a plain oath or affirmation—administered on any book. Some well-worn novel preferred.

"Do you promise and swear, to enter all your neighbors' houses—as true friends—gather all the family secrets you can, and all scraps of news and small talk, add to same all you conscientiously can; don't scruple or hesitate to change a word to make it stronger—then quickly repeat same to any or all of the members of the society?" I do.

In order that you may know a sister of this degree—they generally wear a long apron tied around the waist, the end thrown carelessly over the left shoulder, and arms akimbo. The meetings take place anywhere—in the back yard, over the garden gate, or wherever there is no cover to conceal a spy or eavesdropper.

The subjects discussed are many, chiefly the shortcomings of those who do not mix with them. And we do to that woman who will not mix. "She is proud. She thinks herself above us. Who is she anyway? 'Amat Hettis' knew her family long before they came here. Why I heard, I don't know how true it is, that her great grandfather was once arrested for stealing. So she needn't stick herself above her betters." The new minister has to take his dose of scandal to cripple him in his labor of love. The new lady teacher comes under the displeasure of this society, if she tries to assist in any good work. "She is too fresh, too officious and meddling." If she treats the young men with common civility. "Oh, she is after the beaux," and some old gossip will rise up on her hind legs and declaim and declaim, and say, "I never was like that, in fact I would never have married if my John hadn't sworn he'd take poison, and I just had to marry him to get rid of him." Then up jumps another, "Well, I am thankful my daughter is not like the teacher—you do know she has no inclination for the men, she would rather settle down and read a good book such as 'Harry Tracy,' 'Jesse James,' or 'The Highwayman.' Something to improve her mind for Sunday school."

Gift to Acadia College

The many warm friends of Acadia College were much pleased by the announcement made by President Trotter this week. For some months past Dr. Trotter has been quietly seeking to secure greater facilities for meeting the noble body of Christian women who have done so much to ameliorate the sufferings of their sisters, who have sunk almost to the depths of despair by the demon intemperance.

On Friday last he had received from Andrew Carnegie, of New York, the written promise of a gift of \$30,000 for a new Science Building. Mr. Carnegie's offer is not conditioned upon the raising of any new fund from other sources. His only stipulation is that the \$100,000 contributed by the people of the Second Forward Movement is on hand in the form of "cash or realizable securities." Mr. Carnegie will then make good his promise. This will not be long delayed for the Board has in hand forty-four thousand dollars of the amount in cash and the entire balance in written pledges perfectly good, all of which will be redeemed by Jan. 1st, 1908.—The Acadian.

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