

BOOK III
PRIVATE INQUIRY WORK

INTRODUCTION

THE development of private detective work—or, to be more exact—private enquiry agency work, grows apace in this country. It is, as a commercial enterprise, a comparatively modern thing, scarcely covering a period of half a century. But to take up the "Buff Book" to-day and turn to the section "Private Enquiry Agents" is to reveal that the list is a somewhat extensive one.

In the United States of America and on the Continent, thousands of enquiry agents exist and flourish, carrying out the business in some cases with a high degree of efficiency.

Among the pioneers of private detection in London must be placed such men as the late John Littlechild, Conquest, Sweeney, and Moser; whilst among other older-established institutions can be found such names as Arrow, Stockley, Small, Dew, Wright's Detective Agency, and Miss Maud West. Also there are Carlin and Meyer, Gough, Cox, Chandler and Selby—and last, but by no means least, H. Brust, and H. Fitch.

The status of our American contemporaries, as compared with that of the English enquiry agents, is very different. The reason is not far to seek. Constitutionally and politically in this country, the private enquiry agent is not recognised, while in the United States his position is, in some cases, tantamount to that of police detective officers in Great Britain.

There are many matters calling for investigation which are outside the scope of police detective work. There is, for instance, divorce business. Personally, I am not enthusiastic over this class of work, although I have done much of it—and very big cases they have been.

Then there is blackmail, which, as a rule, is handled by the police—providing the victim has the courage to prosecute; if he has not, the private detective often takes up the matter, and should, as a rule, settle the affair.

Next there are commercial enquiries which have to be made on behalf of large business houses, banks, institutions, associations and insurance companies. There are also matters involving family scandal. In fact, numerous and varied are the commissions which come within the scope of private detective work.

Commercial investigation generally falls to the lot of a

permanent staff. Indeed, some of the large insurance assessors have their own men, who, as a rule, are trained ex-police detectives. In addition, large companies such as Barkers, Debenham & Freebody, Harrods, Selfridges, and many more large emporia, have their own house-detectives.

One man of whom I know is still abroad ; he has been on a case since 1925 ! By this it will be appreciated that the case in question is of some import. The secretary of the big company by whom he is commissioned informed me that the last time they heard from him was by means of a cable which emanated from some remote part of the Antipodes ; then some weeks later, from Patagonia, South America. Now—so far as I know—he is in Tibet.

There are a few private crime men in Europe, but they are all ex-members of the Paris, Berlin or Italian Service de Sûreté, Pinkertons, or the United States Secret Service.

Occasionally, in this country, the routes traversed by the private and police detectives run parallel for some distance, but their ultimate objects may differ.

For instance, a private detective may have as his incentive the tracing and recovery of some stolen heirloom or valuable work of art ; the police work towards another target—they want the thief.

In the United States, the private detective has power of arrest if deemed necessary ; therefore, he is at an advantage as compared with the English private agent.

When I say " power of arrest if deemed necessary " I mean this : he can, by special attestation on oath to the local mayor of the state, be sworn in as a deputy sheriff, which gives him the same authority as His Majesty's Warrant Card does to any police officer of the London Metropolitan Police.

An American private detective friend of mine told me the last time he was over here in England that he had the power of arrest in nearly all the North and South Atlantic Divisions, and an immense pull in North and South Central Divisions, whilst in the Western Division of America he was all-powerful—the latter places comprising such states as Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, Alaska, and California.

He has often expressed surprise at the apparent helplessness of the English private detective, but I have assured him that it is all for the best, and that if a real trained man wants to arrest, he will very soon find ways and means to effect his

purpose, bearing in mind always the interests of his client and case.

It had been my experience, since I left the service, to carry on cases which, as a rule, do not fall the way of many advertising detectives.

All my cases have been large ones, where the personal element entered all the time. During my peregrinations in various parts of Europe, I have often come across the "Pinkerton man," for many of whom I hold the greatest admiration.

I will quote from one of Mr. George Dilnot's most recent publications.

"It is to be doubted whether such an organization as Pinkerton's could ever have been built up in England.

"Its founder, William Allan Pinkerton, was originally a cooper in a small Illinois town. There he accidentally found the retreat of a gang of horse-thieves and coiners, and assisted the authorities in breaking them up. This led to his aid being requested by some prominent citizens of the neighbourhood in tracing some banknote forgers who were known to be in the neighbourhood.

"Pinkerton carried out this mission successfully, and, as a result, suddenly found his services as a detective in such request that he was forced to abandon his coopering trade and set up the agency in Chicago that has since become world-famous."

It is an oft-debated question whether there is any romance in crime, or whether, on the contrary, crime is essentially a sordid business—and criminals, when closely examined, a sorry gang of mentally-warped pests which society would do well, permanently and ruthlessly, to exterminate.

As a matter of fact, my experiences go to prove that there is, indeed, a type of criminal who, so far from being despicable, is, in his main characteristics, quite a likeable, and certainly loyal fellow. And, in saying this, I refer even to the great international "heads" in London, Paris, Berlin, New York, Chicago, and Buenos Aires.

It would, I think, be correct to say that if only a small proportion of projected criminal *coups* succeeded, then most criminals would be rich. On the contrary, only a very small percentage of the sinister army achieve any success at all.

168 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

Crime is the most unremunerative profession in the world. Out of every hundred crooks there are not more than two comfortably off; in every thousand there may be five rich men. Many of the remainder are gathered into gangs and coteries, sometimes almost aimlessly performing their sordid little felonies, and frequently paying the penalty of detection.

There are many international crooks who are often seen "working" the boats, travelling first-class and staying at the best hotels, yet who sometimes fall upon very evil days indeed, even to the extent of seeking charity. I have actually seen them on the Embankment. I have seen the "hero" of a five-figure robbery try to raise the price of his child's entry into a nursing home—and fail. *You must remember that the crook has no friends in the sense that other people have friends.*

I knew the late Father Bernard Vaughan very well, and may mention that he was a considerable authority on criminology. He held very strong views, but they were views arrived at after many years' close contact with all classes of society during his long and illustrious priesthood. I remember he rather startled me one day by saying in his downright way :

"Woodhall, my son, the real criminals are not to be found in our gaols! There you will find a number of unfortunates, driven by cruel necessity beyond their own endurance, and having none to help them, steal perhaps. Others who openly sin in other directions you will find there, but the real criminals of this life are to be found in the palaces of the West End here. There you get men, and women too, with more money than they can usefully spend, too greedy to enrich the poor, too idle to work, with no object in life but the indulgence of every selfish passion—there you have the devil's richest recruiting ground!"

Of course, Father Vaughan was profoundly right; for, though he had a way of startling you with his downright utterances, reflection invariably confirmed his theories.

CHAPTER I

“ INFORMATION RECEIVED ”

NINETY per cent of criminal detection is based upon “ information received.” This applies equally to the regular police forces and to private enquiry agents. It is the treacherous accomplice—fearful half-mug, half-crook, who has half-entered a scheme and then drawn back—together with the anonymous correspondent, who make the success of Scotland Yard complete and that of the trained private detectives. Or, on occasion, the informant may be a crook piqued by his exclusion from a shining prospect, as, I suspect, was the case in the attempt which I now relate—an attempt which, by its failure, must almost have broken the hearts of the crooks who planned it.

Two years ago, a considerable shipment of gold was being transferred from Europe to America. There was no public announcement about its transfer ; there never is—but, by some means, the crook fraternity “ got wind ” of it in sufficient time to plan an ingenious scheme for its capture.

The gold shipment was worth over a million sterling, and, through two contracting countries, was being sent to America to balance Russian credits. Three days before the boat sailed an agency, with which I was acquainted, received an anonymous message of the type to which I have referred, saying that a shipment of gold was coming across and would disappear at New York.

The police all along the route were acquainted of this, and it was decided at the last moment to change the route of the gold. Accordingly, some dummy packages were quickly (though carefully) made, and charged with lead. These were put on the original boat and the guard increased two-fold. The actual gold itself was transferred into a French gun-boat and sent under Government auspices. Eight detectives accompanied the dummy packages, and thirty met them in New York.

Senior bank officials met the boat on berthing, and examined and signed for the dummy packages. All this was done, of course, to try to round up the gang who were contemplating the *coup*. The packages were carefully transferred to lorries, well-guarded, *en route* for the receiving bank. Armed detectives sat on the front of each lorry. The lorries passed through

a customs shed, and, having a clean bill, were released with little delay. They arrived at the bank, and their contents were duly vaulted.

What will you say when I tell you that the dummies received at the bank were not the same dummies that left Europe; that the boxes, on close inspection, were seen to be differently made, and were filled with bricks instead of lead? Nevertheless, that was absolutely the case. Somewhere during the journey the change had been effected. Personally, I think it was a lightning change at New York, with the full cooperation of some officials and certain police there, because I could not possibly see how the ship's strong rooms could have been penetrated on the voyage. Besides, where went the other dummies, which weighed tons?

No arrest was effected. The actual gold would most certainly have vanished had we not received that anonymous information. What prompted it? Spite? Fear? Conscience? Malice? I don't know, but it was useful.

My experience has proved to me beyond the remotest doubt that there exist in the underworld certain great minds which find expression, from time to time, through the actions of their subordinates, but whose own identity is never revealed. This is manifest especially in great forgeries, because it rarely happens that spurious notes are confined to one country. As a rule, reports will come from places as far removed as the Pacific Islands and Monte Carlo, to the effect that false notes of foreign countries are in circulation.

To appreciate this story, you must know—and I think everybody knows—that there is no greater booby on this earth than the successful American millionaire when he comes over to the land of his possible ancestry, on holiday. He will buy a silver snuff-box that was “used by Oliver Cromwell,” and fervently believe he has got the real thing, even if every reputable historian says that Cromwell did not take snuff!

I came into contact, through the medium of a large firm of American banking agents in London, with a very rich client of theirs, a millionaire, a few years ago, who had just completed a tour of Europe with his wife and daughter. He had fallen a victim to confidence men and lost several thousand pounds, so he wanted someone about him to give him the “strength” of any new acquaintances he might pick up.

Mr. A. B. C. was a particularly hard-bitten Yankee, and

it was rather surprising that he could so easily be made a victim, but, in spite of his experience, and despite my strongest protests, he deliberately walked into the next trap with his eyes open.

He went down to Chester and remained two days in the old city, rummaging over the many antique shops, and making purchases here and there, and I accompanied him. The reason for my presence was laughable enough, and I will explain it to you. His wife and daughter carried over fifty thousand pounds' worth of jewellery, and they were touring the Lakes. He was not worried about that, but he, in his attache-case, carried a small, antique sand-sprayer which he had bought in Paris, and which he valued beyond anything else he possessed. He solemnly assured me that it was the very sand-sprayer used to dry the signature on the death-warrant of Marie Antoinette! When I cast doubts upon its authenticity, he was furious, for he believed in his treasure as a good Catholic believes in a sacred rite.

Well, during the time he was in Chester, he formed the acquaintance of a venerable-looking old man in an antique shop. The old man was staying at Mr. A. B. C.'s hotel, and when I saw him, I certainly could not “ place ” him. He was about sixty-five, or perhaps more; was quiet and reserved in manner, well-dressed, and of professorial or clerical appearance.

During dinner that night, the old man began to talk of heraldry, and of the curious family trees of the poor as well as the rich. He pointed out that there were slum-dwellers of noble origin, whilst there were great families who had risen from very scullions. The subject was absorbing as the old man developed his theme in his rich, mournful tones. I could see that A. B. C. was interested.

“ Now,” said the old man, “ I'll just give an instance of how a great and noble line has disappeared into oblivion. There was a family of your name, sir, a family of A. B. C.'s, who lived in the County of Northumberland years ago.” Immediately A. B. C. pricked his ears. “ This family,” went on the old man, “ fell, in its later generations, upon very evil days, and, indeed, it is questionable whether or not the later generations even knew of their exalted origin. Yet, nevertheless, they were a noble family hundreds of years ago. They carried arms of more quarterings than the present

Duke of the County, and, were an accredited representative of that family to appear, I could place in his hands such information as would lead to a perfectly irresistible claim to an earldom."

A. B. C. was, by now, visibly shaking with excitement.

"Yes," continued the old man, "the last of the A. B. C.'s was a young man who left his native village in 1814—just at the close of the Napoleonic Wars, and went to America, where his descendants may now be. Or perhaps he is dead, and his name blotted out."

"Sir," said A. B. C., with trembling voice, "I guess this is just Providence. When a youth, my grandfather, whom I remember quite well, left a little place in Northumberland, near Alnwick, in 1814, and his name was A. B. C."

"You don't say so?" The old man was nearly as excited as A. B. C., and immediately the scales fell from my eyes. This was a confidence trick *par excellence*, for there had been some good research work done here. I sat up, and began to take notice, but for several minutes it seemed as though my two companions had forgotten my existence. They were shaking hands with each other, and the millionaire's eyes were moist, whilst the old villain—for I was sure by now that he was a villain—was speaking in quavering tones, supposed to be charged with deep emotion. He probably did feel deep emotion—but it was of laughter, if he did.

Now I am going to ask you to believe a hard thing, but it's true, and serves to illustrate how difficult it is to protect a man from himself. I sat up with that millionaire for two solid hours, praying him to believe me when I told him I was certain that he was being made the victim of a confidence trick. Would he believe me? No! He positively insulted me.

"Here, you," he said, taking a pocket-book from his pocket, and drawing out a bundle of notes. "Take your fee and get out. I don't employ sleuths to cast aspersions on my family."

I had to go, of course, but I kept observation from a distance and I had a word with his banker. That gentleman told me later Mr. A. B. C. went back to America a happy man, armed with a bundle of parchment which "proved" that his ancestors had been barons. Incidentally, the research had been costly, for he had parted with over five thousand pounds.

Doubtless he would say that through some legal difficulty he was unable to get the title, but he was satisfied that he was the rightful Lord Something-or-the-other, and was perfectly happy to have paid !

Now, this incident shows perfectly clearly that there was a master-mind working there. Someone who knew the millionaire and his whims and conceit had taken the trouble to do some very expensive and very difficult research work as to the origin of A. B. C. Of course, the story of the noble origin was rubbish. It is possible to weave any sort of a line of ancestry out of the tangled webs of the genealogies of the centuries, but the master-mind had weighed up the character of A. B. C. with uncanny accuracy, and not only that, but had got the best “ workman ” possible for doing the actual “ work ” with the millionaire.

I remember relating this story to the late Mr. William Le Queux one evening, and he told me that, in his experience, ninety per cent of crimes perpetrated on travelling Americans was the price of their vanity. I think he was right.

When millionaires are travelling it is often customary to warn detective agencies and the police in advance. The shipping companies do this to avoid scandal, as they know perfectly well that their wealthy passengers will be surrounded by a crowd of crooks and adventurers.

Frequently detectives are able to save the rich traveller. For instance, if he is approached by a casual stranger, the detectives find out at once who the stranger is and, if he is an undesirable, immediately warn the millionaire. In many cases the millionaire takes the warning and there is an end of the incident ; but, on the other hand, I could tell you of lots of cases where, as in the case of Mr. A. B. C., the warning was rejected and the rich one lived to regret it.

When crooks work with women this is particularly true. I have seen shrewd men get into the toils of pretty girl crooks as unscrupulous as they are pretty, and in trying to save a man from this sort of thing I have many times been insulted.

Sir Edward Marshall Hall once said :

“ Where women are concerned in crime, don't look for logic or reasoning ; go straight for motive, look for love and hatred.” He was right, of course. Women rarely make master criminals. The very qualities which make for success

in individual cases, particularly where they are handling a man, make for absolute failure in the long run. They are betrayed by their own hearts. This latter truth is one which makes the prosecution of certain types of criminals exceedingly hard. Women are very strange creatures in matters of the heart. Nothing is really a lesson to them. Let me give you an instance :

I once had to find out what was happening to the funds of a rich client. She was the wife of a clergyman and had met some man during the war, when she was an assistant in a canteen, who had exercised a great influence over her. I interviewed the clergyman. He was rather a mean-looking little man, grey-haired and sharp-faced. There was one daughter of the marriage, a girl of nine. The clergyman said that he would not, on religious grounds, consider the question of divorce.

“ Besides,” he asked with a glint of real meanness, “ why should that scoundrel get her money ? ” I soon found that the man was a drunken lout. Pretentious, of good education, he drank from morning until night. Three times had he been convicted for thefts from women. He lived on women. He used the name of E. F. G. and called himself Captain—but without any right.

The unfortunate lady, who remained in her husband’s house, was the mistress of this drunken creature and she had advanced him sum after sum. Altogether he had received over six thousand pounds from her—and spent it all. When he had a few hundred pounds he varied his vices, and ran a *ménage* in St. John’s Wood where he kept a French girl. I traced this out and awaited my opportunity, then took the clergyman’s wife, whom I shall call Mrs. H. I. J., to St. John’s Wood.

When the elderly and exceedingly commonplace Mrs. H. I. J. saw her rival and her lover, it did what all the efforts of her family had failed to do—it opened her eyes.

She weepingly upbraided him, but he was too drunk to understand much. He turned round now and then and cursed her in language appalling to hear, and ultimately I got her away and took her home. All the while she kept repeating that she felt so terribly ashamed of herself—so “ soiled,” to use her word. I was very sorry for her. She said she had married her husband at the request of her family and had

looked upon her affair with E. F. G. as the one great love of her life.

Anyhow, she was cured. Her husband and I both felt that.

Six months afterwards, I received a message from her and went to see her. She looked much happier than she had been on the last occasion on which I saw her. She took me into her drawing-room and seated me on a couch.

“ Now,” she said, “ Mr. Woodhall, I want you to help me. I’m afraid Frank has got into some trouble again——”

“ Who is Frank ? ” I interrupted.

“ Oh ! E. F. G., you know——”

“ But, my dear lady,” I protested, “ You don’t mean to say that you still have any association with that man ? ”

“ Well,” she said, with a slight flush, “ I feel that if I were to drop him that he would simply sink to lower depths than ever. I—I—it is as much for his sake as my own,” she ended a little lamely.

I could relate story after story to prove this inexplicable loyalty of women to unworthy rascals. I could table a list now of more than a dozen men in the West End of London living the lives of gentlemen in comfortable bachelor flats and chambers, whose sources of income are the wives of other men, who, in many cases, have actually settled capital sums upon their parasitic alleged admirers.

CHAPTER II

A MILLIONAIRE ON TOAST

ANOTHER question to which I must refer is the manner of organisation of crooks. It is not by any means pure chance that brings one here and another there. On the contrary, there are definite and well-organised gangs, their members all over the world, ever plotting, watching, reporting, consulting. The trouble is, one can rarely get at the leaders. Mr. Laurie, chairman of the London Sessions, was fully alive to the danger of organised criminal gangs.

"Whenever I see evidence of a gang," he said one day, "I invariably give long sentences all round, followed by Preventive Detention if I can; that is the only way to break their gangs." But the Judge was wrong. He was only sentencing the "pawns" in the game. The leaders remained inviolate, and appointed new "pawns." The proper thing to do, of course, would be to get, either by bribery or some other way, the "pawns" to betray the "Kings" and "Queens," "Rooks" and "Bishops" of crime.

Let me give an instance: In the early part of the present season, a rich gramophone manufacturer, whom I will call Silas Sam, probably a millionaire many times over, came across to London for a few weeks preparatory to a tour of the Continent.

His departure, I subsequently found, was reported from Chicago by a man of whom I never heard before, called D——, to a man in New York whom I certainly did know! His name is Percy R——. R—— is a very suave, pleasant-mannered man of about forty years, known in his craft as a good confidence man. He plays a fine game of bridge and I have seen him play poker very well too, but I do not think he is a card-sharper. Although I have watched for it, I have never seen him put any "work" into a card game, such as the various tricks of cutting, palming, ringing changes, marking, and a hundred and one others in which such characters are usually highly expert.

His prime mission is to meet his man, "pal" him up, get him into a card game or some other activity and others are there who do the rest.

Well, Percy R——, advised of the journey of the millionaire immediately booked a saloon passage in the same great liner

on which the marked-down victim was to travel. I have a copy of his instructions—or his “brief” as he would call it—which I append :

“DEAR PERCY,

Millionaire Silas Sam travelling to Europe on s.s. — Thursday. Might do cards, keen on women, won't race, carries no groins. Aim at a kite. Take Lettie—she'll land him. If you can't touch at cards try the 'black' but not in England. D.”

This somewhat cryptic and curiously-phrased document testifies to the fact that the millionaire was known to enjoy the society of the fair sex ; that he might play cards ; that he carried no jewels of any value, and that Rowley must aim at getting a cheque from him. The note assured him that the millionaire would not go racing, but as a last resource he might be manoeuvred into a compromising situation with the aid of “Lettie”—and blackmailed. Significantly you will notice that the blackmail had not to take place in England, an instruction due to the recent tightening up of sentences for blackmail in this country.

The journey began and R— set off. Travelling as his sister was “Lettie,” who was the most dangerous little hussy in the two Americas.

According to American detective agency files, her history can, in my slipshod way, be written as follows :

“Lettie” is the daughter of a great Methodist minister of the Middle West, and first distinguished herself when she was twelve years old by stealing the horse of a visiting holy man and selling it to a travelling tinker. She was then sent from home by the outraged father, and ultimately entered a convent after some terrible adventures. A frightful scandal arose at the convent. She had hoaxed the nuns into believing that they saw the Madonna, whom she had impersonated. She was removed elsewhere, but escaped, and at fourteen she was admitted into a New York maternity hospital, where she had a baby, which died.

Sent into a home she escaped again and when next she appeared she was taking part in a train hold-up. She was recognised but escaped. Then, at sixteen, she led a gang of bandits, whose daring exploits included three mail robberies

and one bank-raid. Rounded up, the gang were sentenced to varying terms, and Lettie to a heavy term of imprisonment. Four months afterwards she escaped.

Pretty, with a pair of eyes that would turn Hollywood green with envy, Lettie was slim, rather diminutive, with wonderful ways and a simply overwhelming smile. She landed Silas Sam in two days.

One of the American detectives travelling on the boat recognised Lettie and cabled for instructions. Either R— or Lettie recognised him as well. During the journey the millionaire refused to be drawn into a card game and Cherbourg was approached without serious incident. As Lettie was travelling to Southampton it was decided to take proceedings there, and arrest her as she left the boat, rather than risk the chance of instructions not coming through in time at Cherbourg.

When the boat left Cherbourg to go on to Southampton, Lettie was missing. Search as they would the bird had flown. Nothing could be done, of course. The ship was carefully searched; R— swore that the girl was his sister, and that the particulars on her passport were true. There the matter had to end. No steps could be taken against R—, and he proceeded to London.

The next thing that happened was that I received an instruction to go to a great West End hotel to meet Mr. Silas Sam. I went. The millionaire was in a terrible state. He had parted with eight thousand pounds in blackmail, and was now being threatened in America with divorce proceedings, which would break up his home. The facts were that Lettie had told him that she was secretly married to a man who was meeting her at Southampton—a man she loathed.

She intended to leave the boat at Cherbourg and make her way to Wimereux, where she would be very lonely, but at any rate free from the hateful husband.

Silas Sam swallowed the bait like a conger. He was on his way to Belgium by air the next day. There had followed a wonderful week at Wimereux for the gramophone king in a snug little villa. Then the crash had come. The "husband" arrived fortunately enough with his "solicitor." No need to stress the painful scene. Lettie hysterical, the "husband" storming, the "solicitor" talking law and publicity, and Silas Sam shivering with terror at the consequences of his

peccadillo. Ten days went by and the same demand was made and met. Now, he was confronted with a demand for a hundred thousand pounds. Added to all this, the conspirators had done their work with diabolical cunning, for, amongst other proofs of the Wimereux incident, was a series of intimate photographs taken by another of the gang who acted as maid. The photographs were unanswerable and it was suggested that one be sent to Mrs. Silas Sam.

I begged Silas to call in the Yard and take proceedings, but he wouldn't dream of it. He wanted to be rid of the gang and their menaces, but he would not stand for any proceedings at all. Not a possible risk of publicity would he run.

"I want those plates," he kept repeating, referring to the photographic negatives. "I don't mind what I pay."

An appointment had been arranged for the millionaire to go to meet the "husband" and the "solicitor" at Wimereux, when he returned after making arrangements to get the money in London.

I arranged to take his place. It was to be a game of bluff—and I determined that all the bluff would not be on one side. Armed with what looked very like a warrant, and accompanied by two assistants, including the American Agency man, I arrived at the villa, and I assure you a pretty little sight met my eyes.

Lettie was not there, but the "husband" was, and I recognised a very old friend indeed. John Henry Clifford has a distinguished criminal record, three blackmail convictions standing to his account. Beside him, venerable and white-bearded, sat our old friend, "Mason," the seventy-six-year-old ex-solicitor, who has served three terms of penal servitude since he changed his method of living. A pretty argument followed. Clifford knew me and seeing no official "Scotland Yard" man, took a chance and attempted to bluff matters out. Mason talked gravely and quietly of misapprehensions—where were the proofs, he asked?

"Time is pressing in this case," I said. "My client wants to get back home, and we are not going to have the delays of the extradition proceedings, or a trial in Belgium under the tortuous Code Napoleon. I've got a little vessel out there, and, legal or not legal, I'm going to take the pair of you to England now and answer the legal questions afterwards."

I signed to my two assistants. One is a man who often works for me in auxiliary jobs where drastic action may be needed, and who has aspired to championship honours, having lifted more chins in England than many others in the profession. He looked at Clifford—that was all. Poor old Mason made a pathetic attempt to run away. Within two minutes both men were cowed.

"We will wait here until night-fall," I said. I positively believe that Clifford would have faced it out and called the bluff, but poor old Mason soon cracked up. He wept bitterly and begged to be given a chance. He didn't want to go to gaol again at his age. He revealed where the camera was, and the plates, which I seized, together with all printed copies. He told me where the money was deposited—everything. I left them there with my assistants and went to the local branch of the bank to get the money on Mason's open cheque but here I was too late. Lettie had drawn it an hour before! So Silas got his plates and the blackmail ceased. Lettie got away with twenty thousand pounds or a substantial share of it. I have never seen or heard of her since.

If people only knew the misery that blackmail causes, the broken lives—and in some cases, alas! suicide, of the victims of these merciless sharks of the criminal sea, I think they would brave all and prosecute. I hold the view that greater secrecy than that even now existing should surround blackmail trials, although the recent improvement was a big step in the right direction.

Blackmail can only be stamped out by rigorous and secret prosecution, followed by the absolute maximum penalty. *To give the devil his due, ninety per cent of crooks look with loathing on the blackmailer*—they are often his most remunerative victims. The present Lord Chief Justice, Lord Hewart, takes a very strong view, indeed, of blackmail, and on more than one occasion has given the maximum sentence—a "lifer."

Apart from this form of moral murder I can tell also of some amazing happenings during my experiences when protecting exalted personages in London, the Continent, and to and fro across the Atlantic. As well as having to tell you the story of some of the most daring robberies and forgeries, I am also able to recount some projected great *coups* that failed.

But before proceeding I may mention that lack of proper co-operation between the police institutions of various countries in tracking the international crook makes it as difficult as catching minnows with a herring net—they slip through the mesh.

CHAPTER III

KIDNAPPING A PRINCE

ROMANCE, political intrigue, excitement and a wonderful demonstration of the constancy of mother-love are all exhibited in an unusually high degree in the story of how His Highness Prince Ahmed Seif-ed-Din was smuggled from Ticehurst Private Asylum in Sussex, in August, 1925.

I remember very well coming out of the Temple and turning into Fleet Street when a man, a perfect stranger to me, stopped me and asked :

“ You are Mr. Woodhall ? May I have a chat with you ? ”

I agreed. I am not unused to strangers speaking to me, for it often happens, during the course of an investigation, that information comes from people who are anxious to assist but who dare not risk the publicity of their active participation. We turned into the “ George,” opposite the Law Courts, and when we were seated at a table out of earshot of any other guests, the stranger unfolded his story.

“ You were pointed out to me a moment before I approached you,” he said, “ by a well-known solicitor, who not only refused to perform the introduction, but will not even allow his name to be used.” This sounded suspicious, but I merely nodded, examining him the more closely. He seemed like a superior civil servant with just a something about him, difficult to define, which suggested the adventurer.

He told me that he had been long in the Egyptian Service and had left, at the invitation of certain Turco-Egyptian interests, to accept a position of trust in connection with Near-Eastern finance. He then tabled his credentials. They meant little to me though I later found out that they contained the most illustrious names in Turkey and Egypt. But by far the most convincing credential was a draft on the Bank of France for the equivalent of half-a-million sterling ! This, naturally, made a great impression upon me and redoubled my interest in his story. In most things, if the money is right, everything else more or less pans out right also. The most amazing stories of hidden treasure, of lost wills and abducted heiresses nearly always fall down upon that one test. The crook generally begins by saying that money is no object and ends by some plausible excuse for wanting some. This

man not only showed his draft, but he drew from his pocket a wad of Bank of England notes which would have brought pickpockets from the four corners of the earth.

Amazing as his story was, the longer I listened to it the more did it ring true. It is essential that my readers hear it before I unfold my part in this most astonishing drama. Briefly, it was this :

Thirty years ago, when all of Cairo who mattered were gathered at a State Ball, a tragedy occurred which startled the world.

Members of the Diplomatic Corps were present in their gorgeous uniforms ; the Khedive and his Court were present ; the veteran Tewfik Pasha, most astute of the Egyptian Ministers, the Sirdar, His Highness the Prince Mahmoud—fattest and jolliest of titled men, and a number of distinguished foreigners. It was a brilliant scene.

The present King Fuad of Egypt, then Prince Fuad, was seen in conversation with his brother-in-law, Prince Ahmed Seif-ed-Din, at that time a lad of seventeen.

Angry words passed between the two Princes, and Prince Ahmed drew a revolver and shot his brother-in-law.

The panic was indescribable. Attendants and doctors rushed up, and at first it was thought that the wounds had proved fatal ; but fortunately the Prince recovered.

Prince Ahmed was immediately arrested, and after a sensational trial sentenced to seven years penal servitude. The sentence was later reduced to four years ; but after he had served two years of it in Egypt he was certified insane, and removed to Ticehurst House, a private mental hospital in Sussex.

That magnificent institution, with its staff of eminent specialists and very carefully-chosen attendants, its costly furnishings and its beautiful grounds, provides something as near an earthly paradise for the mentally-afflicted as one could well imagine. The inmates play tennis, billiards, cards, and any other game they want. No women are permitted in the establishment, but the inmates, or those of them not considered dangerous, are allowed to motor about the country with attendants and have anything that money can buy.

But Prince Ahmed Seif-ed-Din was not happy. The cage was gilded, but it was a cage, all the same. As the years went by, various strings were pulled in attempts to get him out

Great sums of money were offered by his friends, but all to no purpose. Then came the war, and fortunately for the country, Turkish influence in Egypt suffered its death-blow, whilst the English Party were in the ascendant under King Fuad. The captive Prince's hopes seemed dashed for ever.

Now the war was over and twenty-four weary years had passed since the Prince left his native land. His mother was in the 'seventies and longed for the return of her son. Again strings were pulled, but all to no purpose. King Fuad refused definitely to ask the British Government to send back the Prince. The old Turkish Party was split into two separate parties: the National Party led by Zaghloûl Pasha, and the small remnant of Pro-Turks, which was negligible. From her palace on the Bosphorus, the once-beautiful Princess Nevdjnavi again sent her S.O.S. to the lover of her youth, Ibrahim Feridoun Pasha, and the aged but exceedingly virile Turkish statesman and landowner came, as ever, at her behest.

There was something very touching in the devotion of these two. Both had married, and politics, foreign wars, and every conceivable obstacle that the wit of man and the malice of fate in unholy alliance could devise, had been placed in the way of their romance; yet now, in the very late autumn of their lives—it sounds too cruel to say the winter—they grasped what was left of happiness for them and married!

Like a knight of old, pledged to rescue some hapless captive, old Ibrahim Feridoun Pasha pledged himself to effect the rescue of his step-son, Prince Seif-ed-Din, and himself came to Paris with his agent, his secretaries, and, most important, his golden key, in the shape of practically-unlimited funds.

“Now,” said my acquaintance, ending his story, “I am asking you to rescue the Prince Seif-ed-Din. Will you do it?”

I remained silent for some time. It was perilously like assisting a prisoner to escape, though I recognized the distinction; and I wanted to make certain of a few things before I committed myself to an adventure of this kind.

“What would the British Government do if the thing came off?” I asked.

“Nothing,” he replied.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Never mind," he said, but in such a significant way that I saw clearly he knew more than he intended revealing.

After a further silence, during which I looked at the affair from every angle, I said:

"I will see Ibrahim Feridoun Pasha and make my decision then. Will that do?"

"It is now 2.30," replied my friend. "The aeroplane by which I propose that we travel leaves Croydon at 4.0. Can you do that?"

Rather astounded at this manifestation of promptitude I nevertheless agreed and seven o'clock that evening saw me sitting opposite the venerable Ibrahim Pasha in a hotel in Paris.

"Have you told the young man?" he asked my companion, whom he addressed as X. X., having nodded, the old man turned to me.

"There is money, my son, and the gratitude of a father and a mother." The wily old Turk put all his points forward at once, with an appeal to my young manhood as the first bait. We dined together, and at nine o'clock, with misgivings in my heart, I returned to the aerodrome, committed, come what may, to the great adventure.

Next day, accompanied by X., I travelled down to Ticehurst and surveyed the place.

I had thought of another possible danger, and so I arranged a second journey.

We had intimation already that the movements of Ibrahim Feridoun Pasha were being watched, in case he might attempt the rescue of his son, for he had made very strong representations on Seif-ed-Din's behalf to the Egyptian Government before he resorted to such drastic steps as he was now employing. For this reason it was decided that he must remain on the other side of the Channel.

On the afternoon of Thursday, the 31st of August, accompanied by X., I drove quietly along a certain Sussex road in the afternoon. We both kept anxiously looking behind. The car we expected was late. Had something gone wrong at the last minute? It was a ghastly thought! At last we saw the car approaching. At a given signal from me, instead of taking the accustomed turning, it kept straight on, following the car in which drove X. and I. Rapidly we covered the distance to Hastings.

I kept glancing at my watch, for our arrival at Hastings was carefully timed so as not to risk any waiting at the pier. With five minutes to spare, Prince Ahmed Seif-ed-Din and his two attendants boarded a crowded pleasure-steamer for Boulogne !

The journey to Boulogne was safely accomplished and there I witnessed the touching reunion of the Princess Nevdjvani, his mother, with her son. Neither nationality nor rank affects such fundamentals of life as the love of a mother or the loyalty of a true lover, and, standing there on the Boulogne quay, I watched the joy of the mother and witnessed the quiet satisfaction of the aged and devoted lover. I felt myself justified in all I had done.

An aeroplane waited to take us to Paris, and I shall never forget the astonishment of the newly-released Prince at the sensation of the ride to Paris by air. He had seen aeroplanes from Ticehurst, but had never been even near one, much less in one. No wonder he seemed stupified by the rush of new experiences after twenty-four years of routine.

Up to now we had experienced no difficulty whatever. There was no necessity to get the Prince a passport for the Channel trip, and, of course, as a day passenger to Paris from Boulogne the question had not arisen there either.

Now, circumstances were very different. The next morning the Paris newspapers all had headlines about the escape of the Prince and very soon indeed we felt the pressure of the Prince's enemies.

Next day I was informed of the arrival in Paris of fifteen of the ablest private detectives from London, co-operating with French detectives, at the behest of interested persons. We had been promised the co-operation of a certain official in getting the Prince a fully-visa-ed passport. Now not only did this official break faith, but, just in time, I found that he had betrayed us. Had it not been for a certain friend of mine who holds an exalted position in the French Police Department, the flight would have ended there and then.

As it was, by drastic action the net was avoided. At four o'clock in the morning we awakened the Prince, shaved off his beard, dressed him in plus-fours and cap and rushed him out of the hotel, just ten minutes before the detectives arrived.

There is a certain girl not unknown on the English and French variety stage, the soul of good sportsmanship, and,

until I could organise the further flight of the Prince, I turned to her in my need. You see, I had to abandon all our carefully arranged plans because of the treachery of one of my confidantes. This girl stepped nobly into the breach and provided refuge during those dangerous hours.

Having made some tentative arrangements, we set off by two motor-cars for Marseilles. As we drove through Paris I was amused to see a famous London private detective sitting in a car beside a French detective watching the entry to a great hotel in which I had deliberately deposited a "dummy" Prince to hold up the trail for a few hours.

By easy stages and by avoiding towns we reached Marseilles safely. During this time the Prince was fearful and nervous, but his mother was wonderful. Her great age sat lightly upon her and the joy of having her son back again completely eclipsed the possible danger of losing him.

Old Ibrahim Feridoun Pasha caused me grave anxiety. He carried a "gun" big enough to need a handbag, and the way the old chap fingered it in his pocket whenever a car stopped near us was disconcerting. I prayed Heaven we would get a clear run, because I knew that the old Turkish nobleman would certainly not see his plans go wrong for the sake of a little gun-work.

At Marseilles we boarded a steamer calling at Italian ports, all of us travelling second-class to avoid suspicion. We reached Leghorn and then decided both to abandon the ship and the route intended, for we found that agents of the Egyptian Government were examining every Mediterranean vessel in every port. Partly to blind the trail and partly to link up with possible allies, we made straight for Lausanne, where we arrived safely only to find that not only were our friends there betrayed, but that one of them had actually been arrested on a trumped-up charge.

Then it was that old Ibrahim Feridoun Pasha showed his mettle. He went with me to see a distinguished Bulgarian official. I speak French and have travelled extensively in the Balkans and was quite able to follow the conversation.

Never, in the whole course of my life, did I listen to such a tirade. Old Ibrahim threatened vociferously, he cajoled unblushingly—but he won. Under the protection of this distinguished official, to whom the frontier formalities

188 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

even of the Balkans meant nothing, we made Sofia, and there stayed for one day.

Here we came into touch for the first time with the agents of the Egyptian Government. There was a definite attempt to arrest the Prince. Charges were made against him in connection with some transaction dealing with taxation, merely for the sake of holding him, but by the good offices of our high Bulgarian official, every hindrance was surmounted until we were over the Turkish frontier and well on the way to Constantinople!

There, all danger was over. The Prince claimed his Turkish nationality, which he had never lost. His estates had, during the years of his incarceration, been rendering a vast income and immediately Djelal-ed-Din Pasha, the great Turkish lawyer, instituted proceedings against the Governments of Egypt and Britain for the recovery of £8,000,000 damages for detention and revenue from the estates.

Very cordially indeed did the Prince join the aged Ibrahim Feridoun Pasha and the Princess Nevdjvani in begging me to make my home in Constantinople, but that, of course, I never intended, so with substantial marks of their appreciation I returned to a world of affairs from something very like a world of romance.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST CROWN JEWELS

I REMEMBER one day in 1919 being in the famous Tea Room in the crypt of the Law Courts chatting with the late Sir Edward Marshall Hall about a case upon which I was engaged, when I was startled by the managing clerk of a great firm of solicitors coming to me in some excitement and exclaiming :

"Hello, Mr. Woodhall! Where have you been? We have been combing London for you! Then he saw Sir Edward sitting beside me. "I beg your pardon Sir Edward," he apologised. "I did not see you there."

"That's all right," said Sir Edward, who was always the soul of affability. "I was just going; I have a conference in five minutes. Good day, Woodhall; Good day, Thompson."

The managing clerk was quite well known to the eminent counsel for he was engaged by one of the greatest firms of solicitors in the country.

"Well," I said to him when we were alone, "what is it, Mr. Thompson?"

"The Chief wants you immediately," he replied. "Indeed, he has been trying to get into touch with you for over a week. He will not engage anyone else but you. I don't know what the business is, but it certainly is something of the utmost importance. It has made the old Chief buzz about, which takes some doing, as you will agree."

I smiled involuntarily, for the picture of the dignified chief of his firm "buzzing about" was amusing. I shall in this article refer to Thompson's chief as "Mr. Ralph," which, however, is not his name. My readers, I am sure, will readily understand that it is impossible for me to publish the name either of this eminent lawyer or of his firm. Indeed, I shall have to follow this practice more than once in these reminiscences, so delicate have been many of the cases upon which I have been engaged.

I saw at once on this occasion that something of great importance was afoot and I at once accompanied Thompson to the firm's offices.

Arrived there I was more than confirmed in my opinion of the importance of the occasion because instead of having to

wait for some considerable time I was immediately ushered into the presence of Mr. Ralph. In this firm there are several active partners. No client is interviewed without an appointment and only to the chosen few is granted the privilege of access to the great Mr. Ralph. You will thus see that I entered on that case with more than ordinary feelings !

Along the heavily-carpeted corridor I followed the managing clerk, past doors bearing in subdued black on the ancient mahogany the names of the distinguished partners who together composed this great firm, straight along to double doors at the end. Presently I stepped into the presence of Mr. Ralph himself. Again the amazing thing happened ! Mr. Ralph sat in a high, black, uncomfortable-looking chair behind a massive desk.

"Woodhall, I am delighted," he said, rising from his desk and briefly dismissing the managing clerk who bowed respectfully and departed :

"Do you know," he asked, "that I have been searching for you all over the place ? I have been very worried. You may sit down," he invited, indicating a chair.

"Woodhall," he said, after a pause. "I am in a desperate position. We will discuss the position over lunch at my club."

Soon we were driving along Pall Mall and presently we drew up at the doors of a famous club where Mr. Ralph was deferentially received.

"I was called upon some months ago," began Mr. Ralph when we were seated, "by a distinguished personage bearing credentials from my Paris agents. This person represented a still more distinguished personage. Well, there may as well be no secrets about it between us. You will have to know." Mr. Ralph leaned forward across the table and looking over his steel-framed spectacles, said :

"The caller was Count X., and he represented the Emperor Karl of Austria !" I expressed proper and respectful astonishment. Mr. Ralph, apparently satisfied with the effect of this piece of news, went on to describe to me what took place at several interviews.

It appeared that Count X.'s mission was to arrange the realisation of all Austrian investments in this country in the interests of Karl. Negotiations had taken place and Mr. Ralph had found that with the exception of two small estates there was nothing realisable in a personal sense for the

ex-Sovereign. The remaining investments were claimed by Admiral Horthy, the Regent, in the name of the Provisional Government. Then, with great secrecy, was brought to Mr. Ralph for realisation a collection of jewels accompanied by proper authority signed by Karl and the Empress Zita. The famous solicitor had no difficulty in identifying a great part of the Crown Regalia. Satisfied as to title to sell, Mr. Ralph had invited several diamond merchants to view them and several offers were recorded. The method he had adopted was to place the box containing them in the safe deposit at Chancery Lane each night and send for it as it was required under escort of two clerks and a janitor, always replacing it at night.

Then, one day, the Count had arranged to call after four o'clock with a personal friend to whom he wished to show the jewels. As a matter of fact they had not arrived until nearer six and after some conversation and the purchase, by the Count's friend, of a necklace, the time was too advanced for the box to be replaced in the safe deposit. Mr. Ralph's train into the country started in a few minutes, so he decided to take the box with him to his home for the night where in his judgment it would be safer than in the London offices.

On this point I quite agreed with him. True, he had a strong room and several safes in his offices, but, with the knowledge floating around Hatton Garden that he had a great collection for sale, it was quite on the cards that some of the crack burglars were even then watching the movements of the jewels in case the jewels were not returned to the safe deposit. In that event an attempt might easily be made on the offices.

So Mr. Ralph took the jewels home to his country house. He deposited them there in a small safe just large enough to hold the box containing them.

Mr. Ralph was entertaining five guests that night and after dinner the conversation turned upon the States newly arisen in Europe as a result of the Peace Conference. One man, a soldier, considered that the re-alignment of frontiers was temporary; the others thought that some degree of permanency had been secured. The position of the ruling families had later been discussed and when one member of the party, a man whom we will call Lawson, had argued that all the Royalties were, at any rate, tremendously rich, and that they

would all sooner or later get back and that all the treasures of each State were being carefully conserved, Mr. Ralph had not been able to resist the grim contradiction of demonstrating the treasures of Austria, worth a million sterling, before their eyes!

Even now, as he retailed it, Mr. Ralph smiled a little as he reflected upon the amazement he had seen upon the faces of his guests. The next morning he went for the box—but *the jewels had gone!* That was the bare truth. There was no clue. No member of the staff or party was missing. The jewels simply had gone.

Mr. Ralph was beside himself with rage when I asked him why he had not called in the police at once.

"The police!" he said witheringly. "The police! You, Woodhall, who have graduated through Scotland Yard to ask me that! This is a matter of which the essence is secrecy!"

"Well, what do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Get them back," said Mr. Ralph laconically.

I almost laughed. Jewels missing for a week; diamonds which had been viewed by all the merchants of Hatton Garden—or at least some of them, who would doubtless have told others, for Hatton Garden is less than a village. If a jewel is secretly offered at one end of the street in the morning somebody knows about it at the other end in the evening!

I had visions of the stones being long since removed from their settings and sold, whilst the incriminating settings would have reached the melting pot.

"I must confess," I said, "that it seems pretty hopeless to me. Of course, I will undertake the enquiry, but——"

"You remember when we failed to get those blackmailing letters from Paris," Mr. Ralph reminded me. "You got them back, Woodhall."

"Yes," I replied. "I stole them for you."

Mr. Ralph waved a deprecating hand at my crudeness, and I noticed a priceless ruby in a ring on his finger. I could not help wondering if it were not the mark of gratitude of a certain Indian potentate for whom, within my knowledge, the aged solicitor had performed a signal service.

A few moments later I left Mr. Ralph's presence with instructions to regain the jewels at any cost. I might mention

that the matter of my expenses had been treated as a small item and that before I left Mr. Ralph that afternoon I was well-equipped for any financial emergency.

I had taken a full list of the jewels—happily he had one—and then I took exact particulars of every guest at the house upon the occasion when the jewels disappeared.

There was a soldier, at present on the serving staff of the War Office; I ruled him out. There was a Tory member of Parliament, rich and well-connected. Him also I ruled out. There was a doctor, old and well-established locally. I ruled him out. There was a young barrister—him, also, I eliminated. Lastly there was a young man who had held a commission in the war, was supposed to have some private means, had a name which sounded well and was a great friend of Mr. Ralph's niece, Dorothy, a debutante of that season's Court. I put a mark against *him*.

The servants were all apparently above suspicion. Bidding Mr. Ralph farewell, I set off for his country house, where I interviewed all the servants, but none seemed likely to be concerned in the affair. Yet my impression was that it was somehow the work of a servant. The butler, who had been in Mr. Ralph's employ for five years, was an Irishman whose testimonials were unexceptionable. I made enquiries at the local inn and found that the butler was popular there. Something of a racing man and rather given to casting, upon occasion, an appreciative eye in the direction of the fair sex (what man isn't?). He was a man of forty-seven.

I took up the trail of the young barrister upon my return to London. He was desperately poor. Living in remote diggings in West Kensington he eked out a living at hack journalism. His hopes were centred in far-off briefs which might one day come from the great Mr. Ralph, who at present had no great opinion of the son of his cousin—for that was the relationship in which the young barrister stood to him. I made exhaustive enquiries about him, but they led nowhere. He had not changed his method of living, had not travelled, had not called upon any Hatton Garden merchant. I therefore ruled him right out. I took up the trail of the young ex-officer who was aspiring to Dorothy's hand. He lived at a Service club. Discreet enquiries revealed that his bills sometimes went for five weeks without being met, but that he

always paid. The more I inquired about him the more suspicious I became.

I found that there was a lady of position and wealth who lived in the Victoria area who had employed him as a private secretary on a sort of part-time basis, and she had recently had a mysterious robbery. The contents of a hidden safe had gone and no arrests were made. But the thing which worried me was this: How on earth COULD he be the man? There was no notice that the jewels were coming down that night. How could he possibly have got the key of a safe—a key which never left Mr. Ralph's chain?

Nevertheless, I followed the trail of the young man, whom we will call Cunningham-Vicars, very closely. There were stories of an Indian Princess to whom he was a dancing partner losing a valuable bracelet. He was at present in Paris. That decided me. I set off by air for Paris without delay.

Cunningham-Vicars was installed in a well-furnished expensive apartment on the Champs Élysées. Evidently he was well-funded. I did not quite know how to tackle the matter until next day, when I saw him take a well-known jewel-merchant to his rooms. That was sufficient for me. I approached an ex-detective of the Paris Sûreté and acquainted him with all the circumstances.

My friend laughed.

"Nothing easier," he said. "We'll deal with him." Then he added. "Mind you, it might cost you a good deal. How are you situated as regards expenses?"

"Very generously," I replied.

"Good, then he'll be in our hands to-night!" announced the French private detective with decision.

The French police can, upon occasion, use means foreign to our more meticulous tastes, but they are exceedingly effective. Mr. Cunningham-Vicars found himself arrested that night for infringing the law to Aliens in respect to his Alien's Book, also his Identification Card. Accompanied by my friend, I was able to make a thorough search of his flat. In the false bottom of a trunk we found the jewels—all except one necklace which was never traced. Mr. Ralph was "wireless" and came over the next day to identify the regalia.

Mr. Ralph, in company with myself, visited the police

cells and saw Cunningham-Vicars, who quailed when he saw us.

“ Give me a chance ! ” he begged of Mr. Ralph. “ Give me a chance ! ”

“ Tell me first of all exactly how you did it,” replied Mr. Ralph. Then the story came out. The butler, it appeared, was an old associate of Cunningham-Vicars. They had met years before in one of His Majesty’s gaols. The butler had provided himself, months before, with a key to Mr. Ralph’s safe, in case it might come in useful. When Cunningham-Vicars had seen the jewels he had immediately conferred with the butler—after which the rest was easy. The butler had buried the packet containing them in a place pre-arranged with Cunningham-Vicars, who went next night and recovered them.

Mr. Ralph and I brought them back to London where they were sold within a week and the proceeds handed over to Count X. I say they were sold, but not quite all. There remained a royal anointing spoon and a quaintly designed coronet to which great sentimental value was attached. I was therefore despatched to Switzerland to hand them over personally to the Comptroller of the ex-Emperor’s household.

Without untoward adventure I arrived at Geneva. When I presented my letters, a little, fat, pompous-looking man, who seemed startled, explained that the Comptroller was away and that I had better wait for a time.

Presently he came back, beckoning me to follow.

“ You have been presented before to Royalty ? ” he asked me in French, and before I could reply went on : “ You bow three times in entering and leaving, keeping your face in the direction of the monarch all the while.” I had scarcely understood his meaning before he crossed a barely-furnished room, threw open two doors and announced me. Sitting at a table was a tall dark man, gloomily examining a large map. Two officers were sitting on either side of him.

As I approached, making my bows, he looked up without speaking. I handed him the parcel and the letter. He read the letter, looked at me and said, “ Oh !—thank you ! ” He then set the parcel aside without opening it and gave me a slight smile and a nod of dismissal. The interview was over.

196 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

A few weeks after that began the ill-fated move of the ex-Emperor Karl for the recovery of his throne, and I could not help thinking at the time that if I had not recovered the jewels, the funds might not have been forthcoming for that abortive bid for a lost dignity.

CHAPTER V

THE DIAMOND OF DISASTER

I CAN think of no more fascinating subject for investigation and study than the history of certain precious stones throughout their vicissitudes—their oft-repeated changes, re-cuttings, re-settings, new owners and sometimes ignominious loss.

I will now relate the story of a certain diamond as an illustration of the curious fact that there are stones which seem to carry with them a malignant influence. Everyone has heard the story of the famous Hope diamond and of the long chain of disasters with which it seemed in some mysterious way to link all its various owners. The diamond of which I now speak is not so famous as the Hope diamond, but it also has a sinister history.

In the autumn of 1919 a great friend of mine (a famous financier, now dead, but whose name, in deference to his surviving relatives I must ask to be excused from mentioning), sent for me through his lawyers and asked me to trace a diamond which formed the centre of a pendant. It was a large, pure white Brazilian diamond and had been recently reset at the financier's request in a platinum pendant. The financier had presented it to a famous musical comedy star then appearing on the London stage. She had worn it at a dinner given in her honour by the financier at a West End Hotel and, during the dinner, pendant and stone mysteriously disappeared.

To avoid scandal no alarm was given; further, the insurance company covering the actress's jewels had not been communicated with, nor had the police been acquainted with the loss.

At the dinner four people had sat down—the actress, her patron and a certain sporting peer, with another lady. The party had been waited upon by one of the oldest waiters in the hotel who was quite beyond suspicion. I made a complete investigation into the circumstances and characters of all at the table that night and I was simply mystified. The waiter was comfortably situated. He had a grown family and owned four houses, was the soul of honour and a devout Roman Catholic. The actress was receiving a salary amounting to nearly a thousand a week, the millionaire was a

millionaire, the sporting peer was immensely rich and his lady friend had a villa on the Riviera and owned three race-horses !

The millionaire had happened to notice the pendant when the fish was served, but when the lady's cloak was brought it had gone. She had never felt the breaking of the chain and the fastenings had been perfectly secure. Her dresser vouched for that.

A most diligent search of the room revealed nothing at all.

I enquired most closely into the source from which the diamond came and the millionaire told me he had bought it from a certain well-known Hatton Garden diamond merchant. I interviewed the merchant, producing the credentials of the millionaire. He told me the jewel had formed part of a parcel bought by him in Paris and gave me the name of the vendors. Then I went to the former owner and found him to be an old man of Jewish nationality with a great name for obtaining rare stones. To him precious stones were like children. He treated them as a schoolmaster would treat a school full of boys, tending them carefully, polishing this one, re-setting that, peeling a layer off this pearl, altering the shape of that diamond and eventually grieving over them when they left his control and departed on their careers of adventure through the world. To him in confidence I told the story of the loss.

" Ah ! H'm ! " he exclaimed in a curious sing-song drone. " Ah ! H'm ! Lost now ; but she will reappear. You cannot lose her like that. No, no. She will not be lost, that one ! "

I wondered if the old man were not a little senile, as he laughed more to himself than to me and seemed to fall into a reverie.

" What do you mean, M'sieu Gottsburg ? " I asked. He started.

" Ah ! forgive me my friend," he apologised. " With age comes either garrulity or meditation. You ask me about the Lipman diamond ? Ha ! ha ! She is a particular one, that Lipman. M'sieu Woodhall, I will tell you of the Lipman diamond. I have her record here." The old man took down a heavy leather and brass-bound tome and turned to an index, quickly glancing at the number of a page written there in his beautiful copper-plate handwriting. He turned up the place he wanted, glanced at the page, then turned to me, one hand resting on the book.

“ M’sieu Woodhall,” he declared. “ I am going to tell you one of the most astounding stories you ever heard, and here I have a record of dates and times and places and persons.” He certainly spoke truth. The telling of the story took a long time, and I do not intend to go into all the details of it here but, put briefly, this is the summary of the old diamond merchant’s story.

The Lipman diamond was mined in Brazil in the year 1865 by a miner called Lipman, who mined his own concession at Santa Dolivia. It was cut in Amsterdam and sold for a great figure. The miner Lipman was so proud of his diamond that he had it exhibited in Rio de Janeiro, after it returned from Europe following its cutting. Thieves, thinking the miner still had the diamond in his possession, followed him out on the long lonely trail to his mountain concession and there murdered him. That was the beginning.

The stone by now had come into the possession of a well-known Spanish-American horse breeder, named Don Pedro Esbanzia, who was a strong supporter of the ill-fated ex-Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. When that misguided member of the Hapsburg family went over to conquer Mexico, Don Pedro Esbanzia met him at Chihuahua and presented him with the diamond to form the centre stone of the crown of Mexico—when it was won.

When the officer commanding the firing party who shot Maximilian examined the body of the dead would-be Emperor he found tied on a ribbon round his neck a small bag. Inside the bag was a small packet wrapped in a piece of parchment on which was written in tiny French characters :

“ The two things for which I will live and die ; my crown and my wife.”

There, enclosed in this piece of parchment was a tiny miniature of his devoted wife and the symbol of his crown—the Lipman diamond !

The officer, who was not of the usual type of Mexican bandit-adventurer, sent the packet with a personal messenger to the newly-created President who, in turn, sent the package intact to the Princess Sophia, then living in Brussels. This unfortunate lady went mad shortly after she heard of the tragic end of her husband and only recently died in Belgium.

There were times when, the mad Princess was quite sane enough to receive distinguished visitors and upon one such

occasion a member of the Russian Royal Family visited her and she sent a message of friendship and good-will to the Czar, insisting that he should accept the diamond—the symbol of her husband's crown, as a mark of her great esteem. There had been some demur about accepting the present but ultimately the Princess had her way and the Czar came to own the fatal diamond.

Immediately after he came into possession of it the disastrous Russo-Japanese War broke out, and was followed by the Revolution of 1917. The stone remained in his possession until the overthrow of his dynasty and the tragic massacre of his family and himself. Then it came into the possession of Gottsburg who was relating its history to me. He had bought it with others from once-wealthy Russian refugees, and in turn had sold it to a Hatton Garden merchant.

I had listened to the amazing story of which I have merely given the summary, with something approaching awe, because the old man did not relate the story as I have done but centred it in a curious way round the diamond, making the diamond appear the principal actor throughout. He would say, referring to it in the feminine gender :

“Then she turned her thoughts to war again and the result was the marching of armies to the East,” and so on, always making it appear that the diamond was directly and definitely responsible for the sequence of events.

“Well,” I said, after he had finished and I had somewhat recovered from the eerie spell of listening to this weird old man. “How is it that you did not suffer at its hands.”

“Ah!” he said, “that is because I understand stones. They never strike without giving a warning. The first day I displayed the Lipman, I dropped my glasses and broke a glass. ‘Ha! ha!’ I said, ‘You do not like to be displayed. Very well, you know best,’ and I covered her up, only displaying her when I sold her—and I told my friend in Hatton Garden of her little peculiarity.”

“But,” I said laughing, “do you seriously mean to tell me that an inanimate object like a diamond can have whims and moods, that it can influence events and sometimes prefer darkness and sometimes light, sometimes want to be shown and sometimes to be hidden?”

“The laughter of a fool,” quoted the old man, “is his appreciation of wisdom.”

"I beg your pardon," I apologised contritely, "but your theory seemed so amazing to me."

"Inanimate objects!" The old man repeated my words scornfully. "Do you call that an inanimate object?" He drew from his pocket a magnificent diamond wrapped in chamois leather and I gazed into it. I had never seen a diamond so large and so truly full of fire. Little flashes came from its inner intricate facet-reflections and, indeed, after listening to the old man's story I began to feel a sort of creepy feeling that the thing was alive after all.

I left the old man after tracing the history of the stone and returned to my hotel to think it out.

"What would you do if you had such a stone?" I asked myself and answered at once.

"Either get rid of it or hide it." Then I thought to myself: "If our actress friend knew the story she also would either get rid of it or hide it."

I returned to London determined to investigate the new line of thought. I saw the diamond merchant in the afternoon in Hatton Garden. The actress was at a *matinée*.

I told him that I had seen old Gottsburg in Paris, and he laughed:

"Queer old chap, isn't he?" said the merchant, sweeping a handful of diamonds into a chamois leather bag. I agreed and chatted with him a few minutes about the story of the diamond.

"I had not gone into the whole history," he said after he had heard the story, "but I knew it was from the Russian collection of course. Cunning old devil, Gottsburg, he didn't tell me the full story though he certainly told me it was a stone that liked the dark!"

"But, seriously, is there anything in that?" I asked.

"What?" he said, "certain stones liking the dark? Oh! heaven, yes. Didn't you know that?"

"I certainly did not," I replied. "I don't see how that can be. A moment ago you said that old Gottsburg did not tell you the full story of the stone and you spoke as if you rather resented his reticence. Do you mean that it would have affected your purchase?"

"Well, it depends," the merchant replied slowly. "In this case I don't think it would, because I was buying on commission for our mutual friend the financier, but I should

certainly have told him its history. If I had been buying speculatively, well, I simply wouldn't have bought, that's all."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, damn it all, man," the merchant was annoyed, "you heard the yarn, didn't you?"

"Yes," I replied. "I certainly heard it, but I can't possibly credit such an absurd superstition."

"Then don't, my dear chap," he said, rising. "You believe in what you like and be governed by your actual experience—that's my motto. Now I must get on with my work." I left him, wondering still about the strange stone. After thinking the matter carefully over I came to a certain conclusion and I had an assistant to shadow the actress. He reported the usual visits to West End shops, then a visit to the St. James's safe deposit, and a visit to a certain seer and spiritualistic medium. I was certain now that she had the stone all the time, and had by some chance come to hear the strange history of it and was afraid of it.

That night, the second night after my return from Paris, I visited her at the theatre.

"Well," she greeted me with a charming smile. "Any luck?"

"Yes," I replied. "I think I've found the diamond."

"What?" she stared at me in bewilderment. "Where?"

"In the St. James's safe deposit," I replied, watching her closely and noting the change of colour in her face.

"How did you get in?" she asked at last, knowing that I had by some means got possession of her secret and being too sensible to keep up a useless bluff.

"Never mind that," I said. "Tell me why you hid it, or rather what particularly caused you to fear the stone?"

"How perfectly wonderful," she said. "How on earth did you find out that I feared the stone?"

I repeated to her the story of the diamond. As I did so her eyes opened wider and wider. Three times were we interrupted by her dresser announcing callers, but three times was she sent away. Too engrossed was the actress in listening to the story of the Lipman diamond.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed when I had finished. "I knew that it must be an unlucky stone, but I never dreamt that it was as evil as that. On the day that I got it I was admiring the effect of it in a mirror when I happened to catch a glimpse

of "Tom," my mascot. You know, a great Persian cat. His eyes were staring widely, his fur was all ruffled up, and his tail twice too big. I thought it was a dog or something disturbing him and I turned to stroke him; but no, he jumped back, spitting. My dear Mr. Woodhall, his eyes were fixed on the diamond!

" 'Tom,' is a lucky cat and all the things that he likes are lucky. I was disturbed. I visited Madame Zaza, the palmist and seer, who is wonderfully good. She told me that I had obtained possession of something to which was attached tragedy and bad luck. She said I could minimise the effect by not displaying it. Immediately after my visit to her I met my great friend, who had given me the diamond by arrangement at the X. Hotel.

" Now this is very secret." The actress leant forward and cast a furtive glance in the direction of the door.

" When we crossed the foyer of the hotel," she whispered, " I saw standing there a woman whom I detest. She is not pretty, but has a strange fascination for men. Frequently she has tried to attract my friend, but he told me that he disliked her even as I did. But that night, Mr. Woodhall, I saw his face in the mirror as he turned to look after her. Then I knew that the stone was, indeed, unlucky! I determined to hide it in my bag, to begin with, and in a safe deposit afterwards. I did so. It remains in the St. James's safe deposit."

Before I left her she decided to tell the financier the reason for her deception, using, of course, the mirror incident, not that of the hotel foyer. Two days later he sent for me and, in his characteristic way, dismissed the whole affair with a few words and a laugh.

" Keep it to yourself," he adjured me. " These women can be damned silly about old witches' tales and the like. I'll keep the stone and get her something else. I'll bet I know some one whose greed will be stronger than her superstition. How much do I owe you? "

We settled my fee and I left him.

In 1926 I met him again in connection with another and much more serious matter, and I reminded him about the stone.

" Oh, yes! " he said, " the stone! Well, do you know, Woodhall," he said quietly, with an unusually sad look in his eyes, " if I were inclined to be superstitious I would

certainly put that stone amongst the unlucky ones. I gave it to a little girl some time ago who did rather well in one of my shows. She subsequently went on tour with a company and in Manchester underwent an operation for peritonitis—and at her request the stone was returned to me after——” The millionaire did not finish his sentence and I could see that he was strongly moved.

Certainly the Lipman diamond brought him no luck! From that time onwards everything went wrong with him.

Financial disasters followed one another in quick succession.

Inside a year of our meeting—he was dead.

I often wonder if I shall come across that baneful stone again ?

CHAPTER VI

WHO WAS FRAU TCHAIKOWSKY?

WHO is Frau von Tchaikowsky the Russian invalid who recently landed in America?

That is the question which the whole world is asking to-day. It is a question which already caused one big sensation in the European Press and Society a couple of years ago. A full answer has never been given to the question nor am I in a position to make that complete answer now, but I certainly am able to relate some facts about the mysterious personage whom I personally attended for a time. These facts may suggest a solution to the mystery in the minds of my readers.

In the year 1925 I was sent for by a very eminent and exclusive firm of solicitors. This firm's name is unfamiliar to the public, yet inside the sanctum of the principal—there is only one solicitor in the firm—there are despatch boxes bearing illustrious names. Amongst the clientele of this remarkable firm are members of our own Royal House and members of the great Ducal families. When the aged principal dies there is a man waiting to take command, but at present he is a partner in another great firm of solicitors which occasionally handle the litigious business of the firm over which this partner will ultimately preside.

The firm I speak of have never pleaded in a court in its history, and never will. It permits itself to be represented in the contentious atmosphere of the Law Courts by lesser lights. Its forte is to control and govern the interests of great estates. It is a very old-fashioned and exclusive firm. I know of none like it.

I presented myself to the Principal.

"Mr. Woodhall," he said, "your name has been given to me by my friend Sir John X., of X. X. and X., Lincoln's Inn, as a discreet ex-officer of Scotland Yard with some foreign experience. What foreign experience had you, Woodhall?"

I told him that I had been in the Special Political Branch of Scotland Yard, and that I was for a time attached to the Secret Service.

"Have you travelled in Russia at all?" he asked, and I replied that I had never crossed the frontier. He asked me

several questions about my knowledge of Europe and astonished me with his intimate acquaintance with France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Spain. Finally he made up his mind.

"Very well, Woodhall, I'm going to engage you," he said, "upon a somewhat unusual project. You have acted as body-guard to the late King Edward, and various Cabinet Ministers, now I am going to appoint you to similar work. A lady is visiting this country, indeed two ladies together are about to visit this country, but it is about the younger one that I am chiefly concerned. Her name is Frau von Tchaikowsky, and she occupied such a position in the days of Imperial Russia that she is something more than a mere name. She represents, in a rather curious sense, a cause. Her life has been several times attempted, hence the guard which it is necessary ever to maintain. Now, when attempts are made upon her life, it is of vital importance that no publicity is given to such attempts.

"There are several reasons for that. One is that publicity would probably increase the danger of attacks and the other is that it is most desirable that the movements of Frau von Tchaikowsky are as secret and as free as possible.

"Frau von Tchaikowsky must never be placed in such a position that she would have to enter the witness-box and give evidence on oath. Do you understand that?"

"Very well," continued the old man. "Now these are your instructions." He drew out of his desk drawer a large envelope and opened it, unfolding some ribbon-bound papers. Then he gave me my instructions. I had to meet Frau von Tchaikowsky at a house near Paris, and accompany her and her friend to London, where a house was already at their disposal, furnished and staffed, in Kensington. I had to engage what assistance I required and drew my expenses on a generous scale.

I set off for Paris and duly presented myself at a house on the outskirts. Members of my profession become endued with certain instincts after years of experience, and I knew that as soon as I approached the house I was being closely observed. I entered the hall where the number of liveried men-servants was a singular feature. A butler examined my card, then consulted for a moment with a footman, who came forward.

"Well, Mr. Woodhall," said the footman, "how are you?" I was flabbergasted to recognise an old friend and colleague on the Allied Secret Service staff, Paul Pinel. The butler was quite satisfied when he saw me so readily recognised, and invited the footman and myself into his pantry where we celebrated the meeting with a quiet glass of sherry.

The butler presently left us and then I asked my friend, Paul Pinel, what the whole affair was and what was his connection with it.

"Well," he said, "I left the Sûreté after the war to take up private work and I was called in to guard this Frau von Tchaikowsky. I am so well-known in Paris that I have employed a couple of fellows to watch her outside whilst I take the inside. Mind you, in my opinion, it is the inside work which is most important in this case. I never sleep at night without somebody near me to awaken me in case of alarm. I usually sleep through the day. I have a system of bells throughout the house to give an alarm and yet I have had two attempts upon her life!"

"The devil!" I could not help exclaiming. "How was that?"

"One," he replied, "was in the middle of the night. Someone threw a gas bomb through her open window. By a merciful Providence it fell on an eiderdown and didn't burst. The other attempt was by a fellow who came here to see her in the name of a Russian Admiral. I was behind a curtain beside the chair my colleague placed for him. I grabbed his arm just as he was drawing a gun at the moment Frau Tchaikowsky entered the room!"

"I say!" I exclaimed, again astonished. "What did you do?"

"Gave him a good hiding outside," the detective grinned.

"Who exactly is Frau Tchaikowsky?" I asked presently.

"Hsh!" he replied, with a finger-tip to his lips. "That is the unpardonable question. I have an idea. You will also get an idea; but that is all. These attacks come from the Soviet Secret Police—the Cheka. I've satisfied myself on that point." We had some further conversation and then we discussed the detail of next day's journey to London. Pinel and another would accompany me as far as Calais.

The next morning I was taken to a charming little pink

boudoir and presented to "Frau von Tchaikowsky." She was a tall, dark, tragic-looking girl of about twenty-three. Her eyes wandered around the room continually as if expecting to see some horrible thing of which she was afraid. She smiled a little, as I was presented, in rather a far-away manner and nodded. Beside her stood an elderly woman, very self-possessed and dignified.

"You look rather young!" said the latter eyeing me. "Is your experience wide at escort duty?" The question, and the manner of putting it, made me look up quickly. This woman had undoubtedly been associated with Court life.

"I have had the honour," I replied, "of escorting His late Majesty King Edward the Seventh and King George. Also I have acted as personal body-guard to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales."

"That seems sufficient to guarantee experience," the elder lady said, smiling. "I am glad we have your services, Monsieur Woodhall." I bowed and was just about to leave the room when the girl suddenly sprang forward and seized me by the arm:

"You will keep them from me?" she whispered. "You will not let them near me?"

"So long as I am in charge," I replied, rather boastfully to reassure her, "nobody will get near you." The elder lady smiled her approval and gently laid her hand on the girl's arm and began to speak to her in Russian as I left the room.

The journey to England was uneventful. We arrived at the Kensington house and were duly installed there.

Then began a course of routine work. I had examined carefully the arrangements in defence of burglars and had a new and exceedingly efficient system of alarms installed. I had two selected persons assisting me and, wherever the Frau went, she was accompanied either by myself or one of my assistants. I generally slept in the forenoon, because she rarely went out before lunch; then I slept again from five until eight o'clock in the early evening and stayed awake all night.

It was over a fortnight before the first attack came. I was sitting up in my room before a fire, fully dressed, reading a copy of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, when an alarm went off in the cupboard above my head. I glanced up. It indicated Frau



A PHOTO TAKEN IN MOMMSEN SANATORIUM OF
H.R.H. PRINCESS ANASTASIA
After Ekaterinburg

Tchaikowsky's bedroom window ! Cursing the man, whoever he was, I rushed for the girl's dressing-room, which was next to her bedroom and unoccupied, because since the gas bomb was thrown the elderly companion always slept in the same room.

Rushing through the dressing-room, I pulled aside the curtains and flung open the window. There, on the next window-ledge, holding precariously with one hand while he worked away quietly with some instrument with the other, was a man. He turned, startled, as he heard the window open and immediately jumped down a distance of perhaps twenty feet into the garden. Quick as lightning I flung two plant pots after him. One struck him behind the head and he fell. To make sure of him I dropped another on him and then rushed downstairs just as the door of Frau Tchaikowsky's room opened and the startled companion emerged.

"What is it ? What is it ?" she whispered and I knew that, happily, Frau Tchaikowsky had not been awakened. I pointed to the door and rushed towards it, just in time to see two men assisting a third into a motor-car which rapidly made off !

I consulted with the elderly companion and we decided to say nothing to the younger lady about the incident. The companion congratulated me on the efficiency of my alarm system, which was made to sound quietly in my room, lest it should frighten Frau Tchaikowsky.

Then I got another shock. We were to travel to Cannes, on the day after the following incident, to remain for a while as the guests of a Russian nobleman living in the South of France. A day or two before we left, Frau Tchaikowsky was strolling through Kensington Gardens with her inseparable companion. As usual, she was looking apprehensively here and there, her dark eyes dull with a strange undisguised fear.

I saw an elderly, rather ill-dressed man look at her and then move away. Later on I saw him again coming towards us and I knew that he must have made a circuit deliberately to meet us the second time. Why ? It might be, I thought, one of the elderly gentlemen known only too well to Park patrols, who seek to use the amenities of the parks to make casual acquaintances, but, on the other hand, it might be——?

His hand went to his inside pocket as we drew level and immediately I grabbed him. He gave a startled shout as I

dragged out his hand. He struggled for a moment but I put a grip on his wrist which caused him to writhe in agony. Then, from his hand fell a hypodermic syringe ! I let go his wrist prepared to fell him if necessary, but he made away with astounding alacrity. I picked up the syringe, pocketed it and set about getting the ladies clear of the little crowd which collected. Frau Tchaikowsky was almost in hysterics ; her trembling and her apprehensive little exclamations were maintained until I got them out of the park and obtained a taxi in the Bayswater Road.

The next day we travelled South and upon arrival at the nobleman's residence, I was astounded to see, in the spacious hall, two files of uniformed and much be-decorated men, chiefly generals, who stood at the salute as Frau Tchaikowsky passed. This made me think, I assure you.

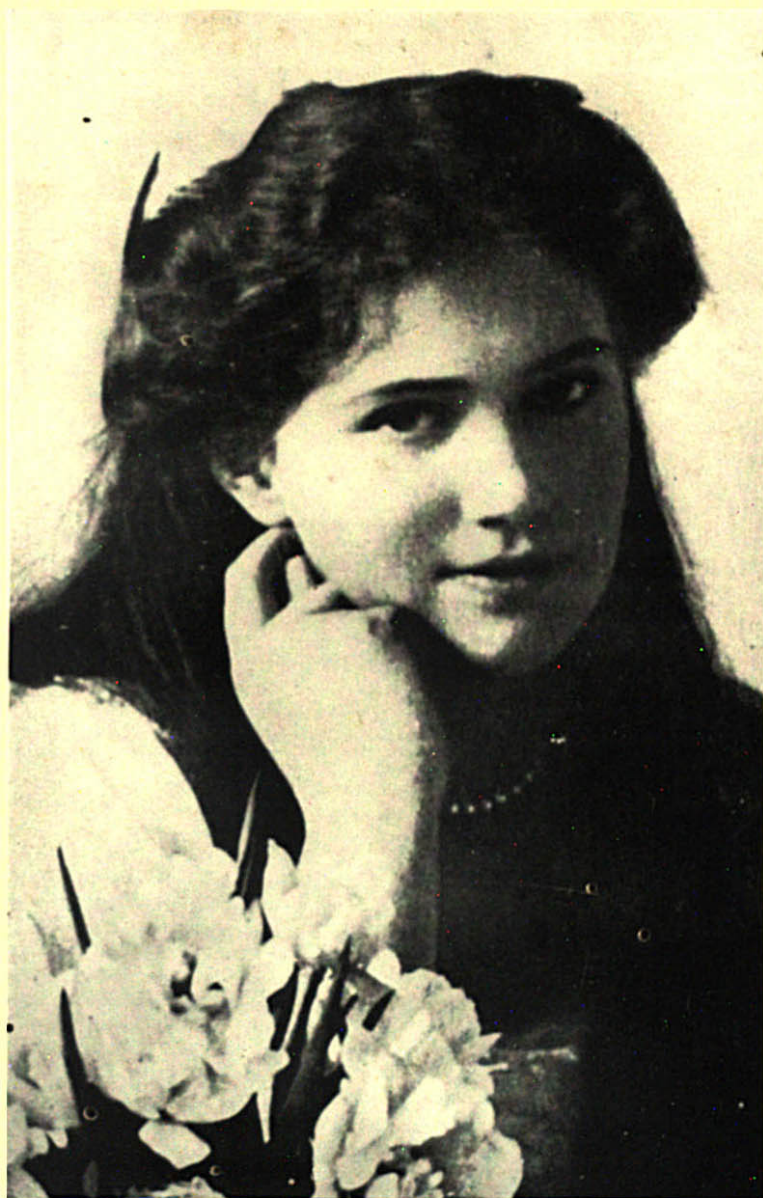
The stay in France was a very happy one ; no incident of an untoward nature occurred, whilst the precautionary measures were tremendous, our host having his own secret service with patrols of police taken from the old Russian Service.

Following this visit we went to Berlin where the lady was the guest of a member of the Royal House of Saxony. It was in Berlin that a very unexpected thing happened which cause a flutter in the White Russian dovecotes. Frau Tchaikowsky became suddenly very ill and had to be taken to hospital for a possible operation. In the hospital, fearing that she was going to die, she made several statements in the presence of doctors and members of the staff. She announced that she was really the Grand Duchess Anastasia, daughter of the late Czar.

The elderly companion was in a panic. The newspapers began to print paragraphs about the mysterious " Frau Tchaikowsky," and the companion cabled for the Russian nobleman whose guests we had been in the South of France.

This gentleman did not come himself but sent an aide-de-camp, who was able to settle questions of identity. Shortly after the arrival of the aide-de-camp in Berlin, an official statement was issued, with his sanction, and by then Frau Tchaikowsky had partially recovered.

The statement was that Frau Tchaikowsky had been the companion of the Grand Duchess Anastasia whom she re-



A PHOTO OF H.R.H. PRINCESS ANASTASIA
Before Ekaterinburg

seemed in a most extraordinary degree. She escaped with a female cousin of the Czar after the night of the murder of the Imperial family at Ekaterinburg. It had then been suggested by certain Russian refugees to ask Frau Tchaikowsky to impersonate the dead Grand-Duchess and to make herself a rallying point for White Russians wherever she went, stimulating their efforts for the coming counter revolution.

That was the explanation made in the statement. To me, who interviewed him upon several occasions, the aide-de-camp amplified it to some extent. He told me he was actually present when the Czar was dragged from his library to be taken downstairs and shot. As a result of his defence of His Imperial Master he carried a bayonet wound in the cheek and a scar on the side of his head. Unconscious, he was probably left for dead and, when the massacre was over, and hours went by, he recovered, by which time the blood-lust had been satisfied. The General told me that even the Soviet Authorities were horrified to some extent and too late took certain measures against the blood-thirsty scoundrels responsible. Anyhow, he was able to go free.

"Was the Frau von Tchaikowsky very devoted to the Grand Duchess, whom she so closely resembled?" I asked the General, for I held very strong views that he was misleading me, and the world in general.

"Oh! worshipped the ground she stood on!" he replied at once, "poor, devoted, brave girl!" As he made the last remark off-guard, with set face and a movement of his fingers to an ikon which he carried under his waistcoat, *I thought that perhaps I had come as near to solving the mystery of "Frau Tchaikowsky" as I ever would.* In my opinion it was Frau Tchaikowsky who was brutally murdered on that grim night in Ekaterinberg, the murderers mistaking her for the Grand Duchess Anastasia.

I could visualize a drama enacted in that fearful residence—a drama within the terrible drama that the world knows all about, the Russian Revolution. Yes, I think I understand why the General referred to the companion as "Poor, devoted, brave girl!"

When the "Frau von Tchaikowsky" fully recovered her health she decided to live permanently in the vicinity of Berlin.

212 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

As soon as it was decided that the lady was to remain permanently in Germany, arrangements were made for her personal guard to be taken over by German detectives and I returned to London. At the time of writing, she is residing in the United States of America.

CHAPTER VII

A GRIM FRAUD

IN the year 1923, I received a call from the London agent of a great Viennese firm of attorneys, who asked me to undertake an enquiry for them. I must say, in the first place, that their call to me was not because I am specially well-known in Vienna or so very important as to be naturally sent for from such a distance. The reason I was called in was that I had, upon a previous occasion, rendered a service to one of the heads of the firm, in connection with a matter of the exiled Royal Family.

The story I listened to was a strange one and in very few words I shall relate it here.

There was a woman, it appeared, living in abject poverty in London, named Princess Sylvia Orloff. She was over sixty years of age and was the divorced wife of a nobleman killed in the Russo-Japanese War. Her story was a romantic one. Her late husband, who was a very old man when he was killed, was descended from the reigning Romanoffs and the marriage of the Princess years ago had been arranged by the Czar himself. Perhaps it would have been better if the Czar had let the young Princess manage her own affairs of the heart for the marriage had been a dismal failure. Within a few years the Princess was philandering with a Colonel Ivanoff of the Soumskv Hussars. A scandal was created, and a duel fought between Colonel Ivanoff and Prince Dmitri Orloff in December 1893, in the grounds of the Royal Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, outside St. Petersburg. The Colonel was seriously wounded and incapacitated for life.

The Princess had been then informed that she was no longer *persona grata* at Court and the Colonel was advised to resign his Commission. The Princess came to London, followed by the Colonel, with whom she lived in London until the Colonel died three years later. They never married because the Colonel's wife refused to divorce him; otherwise they certainly would have done because Colonel Ivanoff was deeply attached to the beautiful young Princess who had sacrificed so much for him.

In those three years the couple were received unofficially at the Russian Embassy, whilst the Russian colony in London, ever broadminded, knew all about the unhappy circumstances of their irregular union and received them openly.

After Colonel Ivanoff's death the financial affairs of the Princess became more and more precarious. She started with about a hundred thousand pounds' worth of jewels which were gradually pawned and lost, for she was desperately extravagant and lived in high style. Colonel Ivanoff left her all he had, which was not much, and she soon got through that. From that time onwards she was always short of money. Still received at Russian Society functions, she met an elderly man named Edward Pearson, and a deep attachment sprang up between the two who were both much alone in the world. Their result was that they married.

Living now in much quieter circumstances, her jewels gone, her elderly husband possessing only a small allowance, the Princess began to look shabby. Her clothes were carefully repaired and she lived in remote lodgings in the back streets of Mayfair.

Then came the war, and the Princess had word that her son, whom she had left as a child and whom she had never been permitted to see again, was appointed to the staff of General Rennenkampf on the Russian Western Front. The Princess had continually corresponded with friends in Russia who had kept her posted with photographs of her little son, and she had indeed a whole series covering all the stages of his boyhood and cadetship.

Then in October 1914, following the great battle in East Prussia, young Dmitri Orloff was killed and his mother—who still thought of him in terms of the two-year-old baby she had left—was distracted. She never recovered from that blow. The boy's private papers and his sword were sent by the German Government to London instead of to St. Petersburg to be handed to the mother. She thus received her only legacy from either her first husband or her son.

As a matter of fact there was a little story behind that. The solicitor engaging me had it from his Austrian friend, Mr. Zeiss, that the German General in charge of records recognised in the identity of the dead boy the son of his old friend Princess Orloff. The General had been an attaché at St. Petersburg in the old days and knew all about the romance of the Princess and her consequent exile, and, in a moment of compassion for the lonely woman, decided that she would be more comforted with the property of her dead son than would be the aged father in his remote Caucasian castle.

But it appeared that young Dmitri Orloff had had a little affair with a pretty English girl, called Veronica Camberley, whom he had met in Vienna, where she had been a governess at a school. There had been hectic love-making and an attempt by Dmitri to get his father's consent to a marriage. There came a definite refusal, and the girl was compromised. The war broke out and the young officer was recalled from Vienna to rejoin his regiment in Russia and from there was taken on the Russian General Staff. Before he went he had told his father of the disgrace in which he had involved the English girl and beseeched him to permit the marriage by proxy before it was too late.

His Serene Highness Prince Dmitri Orloff, however, would not tolerate the idea.

When the lad was killed in October 1914, the aged Prince, after his grief was somewhat assuaged, thought of the girl in Vienna—then shut off from him by living walls of fighting legions. But to the rich and the exalted there are ways open when all seems closed, and, by the good offices of a neutral ambassador, the Prince got in touch with Veronica Camberley in Vienna. He sent her a letter and offered her the sanctuary of his ancestral castle. She refused. A child had been born but had died, and she sent a rather ungrateful but perfectly understandable letter to the Prince who had prevented the marriage between her lover and herself.

Prince Orloff made no further attempt to get the girl to Russia, but instructed his legal advisers to establish contact with lawyers in Vienna and settle a certain sum upon her for life. The terms of the settlement were that Miss Veronica Camberley should receive one thousand pounds per year for her life and that should she die before Princess Sylvia Orloff in London, then the allowance was to revert to the latter. When both died the money was to revert to the Orloff estate.

Now, when the revolution came, that money was still intact in Vienna and though all the Orloff estates were confiscated by the Soviet Government, the capital sum from which the thousand a year was taken still remained in Vienna and was administrated by Mr. Zeiss's firm. The girl Veronica lived in some considerable style and was often seen in the company of Austrian officers as long as the war lasted. She had never been interned and was popular in quite high circles in Austria.

216 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

When the war ended she left Vienna and lived in the South of France, but still the income was paid to her. In order to satisfy himself that she was duly receiving it Mr. Zeiss either visited her himself or sent a representative to see her once a year.

The reason for my being called in was that Mr. Zeiss had received an anonymous letter giving him the amazing intelligence that Veronica Camberley was dead ! The letter stated that she had been dead for three years !

I went over to Vienna immediately and had a long talk with the lawyer, who told me that the girl had been living with an Austrian ex-officer, named Karl Falkenhayn (fictitious name) in a small villa outside Nice. Two years ago Falkenhayn had written on the girl's behalf for her money. This had been sent and its receipt acknowledged by the girl herself. Later on Mr. Zeiss had sent his managing clerk to see the girl and he had been allowed to see her for a moment in bed. She was alleged to be ill.

The following year Mr. Zeiss had gone to Nice himself to see his client and he had called twice at the house. He insisted upon seeing her and, when he did so, he was quite satisfied that it was Veronica Camberley.

When the anonymous letter had arrived he thought of all the circumstances, the evasions, the lack of correspondence—and was disturbed !

What he wanted me to do was to probe the affair to the bottom, to visit her relations in England and to see the girl himself. Incidentally I had to enquire about Princess Orloff in case the reversion had to be made in her favour, assuming the death of the girl.

I returned to London and had no difficulty in finding the Princess Sylvia Orloff—in circumstances which shocked me, even appalled me !

The once aristocratic beauty of the most magnificent Court in Europe was living in a single filthy room in positively loathsome conditions ! Still in Mayfair, true, but in what a house ! She lived in a small room in a back street with the old man, her husband, Edward Pearson, who was over eighty years old. Rats and mice scampered about the room without let or hindrance. The bed was covered with verminous rags ; there was no food in the room ; the old man sat huddled in his chair by an empty grate and the old woman

—she was over sixty and looked twenty years older—muttered in semi-senile fashion. With pathetic dignity she motioned me to a chair in the place of honour—under her son's sword which hung on the wall !

Having verified her existence I made some excuse and left her five pounds. Later I discovered that she lived entirely upon charity. I wrote immediately to Mr. Zeiss and told him what I had found. He sent a little money but pointed out that he could make no provision from the Camberley estate ; nevertheless, he said he would write to Veronica Camberley and tell her in what dire straits the mother of her one-time lover was placed.

In the meantime I continued my investigations into Veronica's family history and found that her mother lived outside Blackpool. I interviewed her and found she was living with a man who was married and had a family of three children who lived with them. She had not heard from Veronica for several years, but the last she had heard of her was that she had married a highly-placed Austrian named Falkenhayn and lived somewhere in the South of France. Veronica, she thought, was ashamed of her mother.

I set out for Nice and went to the little villa where the Austrian lawyer had seen Veronica, but the place was closed. Local enquiries elicited the fact that it was only occupied for a few days a year for the last several years ! By taking a note of the dates from the local tradesmen I got the significant fact that the villa was only occupied for a few days before Veronica's allowance became due.

I discovered that when the Villa was occupied there were usually four or five people present, with a couple of servants.

At one time the villagers had seen a beautiful girl, fair-haired, and with laughing eyes, who was ever the centre of life at the villa when it was not closed all the year. Of recent years Mr. Falkenhayn had announced that his wife was an invalid. Though she was sometimes seen at a distance, she never left the villa.

Letters were forwarded to an address in Paris, but when I investigated I found that it was an accommodation address.

To invoke a response I wrote a letter to Miss Veronica Camberley telling her there was a large amount due to her and asking her to grant me an immediate interview. In the

course of a few days I received a letter from Falkenhayn asking me to meet him in Paris at the Grand Hotel. I went and confronted a tall good-looking man of the officer type who spoke English and French as perfectly as he did his native language.

His "wife," he said, was seriously ill and could not be interviewed under any circumstances. I pointed out that the money could not be supplied until she had been interviewed. He ultimately suggested that I should see his medical man and I agreed to an appointment being made. The next day I was introduced to a man who called himself Dr. Fausset and he told me that he could give a certificate that Veronica Camberley was paralysed and at that moment in a nursing home suffering from an illness, and in such a condition that any excitement would be most dangerous. He definitely forbade a stranger to see her.

I took up his credentials and found that there was no such person as Dr. Fausset in Paris—he was obviously a fraud. Meanwhile, Falkenhayn wrote to Mr. Zeiss and asked for particulars of this large sum of money and claimed it on Veronica's behalf with properly drawn authority from her. The girl's signature was correct on the Power of Attorney which Falkenhayn ultimately produced for the Vienna lawyer's inspection. I saw it myself when I attended Mr. Zeiss's office.

All enquiries entirely failed to locate the missing girl. Falkenhayn said that she was in a nursing home and utterly refused to reveal the address. At last, when Mr. Zeiss had made it clear that there would be no further instalments of the allowance paid until she had been seen, Falkenhayn said that as soon as she could be moved she would be taken to the villa outside Nice. In the meantime she was to be kept absolutely quiet. He loved her too much to risk her life, he said.

I had an uneasy suspicion that the girl was at the villa at that moment! After Falkenhayn had gone I voiced my suspicions to Mr. Zeiss, who agreed to a certain course which I suggested. He gave me an authority to search the villa on behalf of his client, Miss Veronica Camberley, in case I was prevented or interfered with in any way. I left for Nice and determined to make a thorough search of the villa. I intended my search to be as secret as possible so as not to raise the

suspicious of Falkenhayn, in the event of his having correspondents.

Late one afternoon I entered the villa from the rear just as night was falling, and examined it from cellar to roof. The rooms were all dusty and neglected and close in atmosphere. Not a sign of life was about the place. I examined the villa carefully but there was no trace of the missing girl. It was all very mysterious—where was Veronica Camberley? Why was she only produced at the villa? The answer was that she was at the villa now!—but where?

I was completely baffled. Christmas came, and another year, and still my enquiries were pressed forward. I searched many places and followed many false clues, but it was not until the summer of 1924 that the mystery was solved. The usual letter came to Mr. Zeiss asking for the allowance, and he and I went to Nice without notice immediately.

In the evening we called at the villa and enquired for Miss Veronica Camberley—asking for her as Madame Falkenhayn, the name which she used. We were told by Falkenhayn that she was too ill to see us. He asked for the money and enquired anxiously about the large amount I had previously mentioned. Mr. Zeiss said he must have a word with his client herself. Falkenhayn said that was impossible, that a doctor was in the house at that very moment and would say that his patient could not be seen.

Mr. Zeiss was equally definite that he would pay no money until he had seen her. Finally "Dr. Fausset" was produced again to say how ill the lady was and ultimately he agreed that the lawyer and I might just peep into the room to assure ourselves of her identity, but we must not make a sound. So we went upstairs, and the doctor opened a bedroom door. Instantly, there came to our nostrils the unmistakable odour of a sick-room. The light was dim, and the window heavily curtained as the doctor said the light disturbed his patient.

On the bed, apparently peacefully sleeping, was a beautiful girl; there was a rather hectic flush on her cheek, and she lay on her side, very still. A nurse stood beside the bed. Mr. Zeiss would have stepped forward, but the doctor restrained him.

"H—sh!" he cautioned, and gently moved the lawyer towards the door. I followed, but I had noticed several things. In the first place the "nurse" gave a look towards us which

was unmistakable—a look of quick appraisal, apprehension—a glance never dissociated from the anxious crook! I determined on my course of action.

Mr. Zeiss said he would send the money that night, and we left the villa together. I went straight to an old associate of mine in the Allied Secret Service during the war, whom I knew to be resident in Nice and in private practice, and as the result of a conference between him, Mr. Zeiss, and myself, two temporary and amateur burglars set out that night for the little villa—they were my good friend Gillard, and myself. Very carefully we entered through a window on the ground floor and in our rubber-soled shoes crept silently to the “sick-room.” Very gently we opened the door—the room was in total darkness! A carefully directed sweep of an electric torch revealed the room to be unoccupied except for the occupant of the bed—it was still the same beautiful girl.

We crossed the room and stood by the bed and I leant over her. She was very still, very rigid. I touched her—she was as cold as an icicle—she was dead!

We stood there in awe! The light from our torches revealed a face of singular beauty, the hair was beautifully waved, the lips touched with carmine, the face rouged.

“A fine specimen of embalming!” muttered Gillard, and I agreed with him. A shriek from the door disturbed us. There stood the “nurse” of the afternoon in very *décolleté* night attire, her hand on a switch with which she had flooded the room with light. She stood for a moment and then flew off, shrieking!

Doors were opened and presently the “doctor” and Falkenhayn appeared. Whatever may be said against Falkenhayn, one reproach can never be made against him. He was no coward! He was also a man of quick decision.

He had that nurse out of the way in two shakes! He flung a heavy vase at Gillard and the next moment with his left fist caught me a beautiful crack right on the point!

I woke up, trussed like a turkey on the floor of the bedroom in which the body of the girl had been. Gillard had a cut down his face, and was similarly trussed. It took me three hours to free myself and assist Gillard, then we washed and tidied ourselves up and went back to report. The body was in the bed, but all the other occupants of the villa had gone—there were signs of hurried packing.

Of course Mr. Zeiss informed the authorities and there was an enquiry. It was revealed ultimately that the girl had died two years previously perfectly naturally of pneumonia. A doctor was found who had attended her and he produced a certificate. She was supposed to have been embalmed with a view to carrying her to Vienna and the body had left the nursing home in which she had died, for that purpose.

Falkenhayn and his confederate "nurse" and "doctor," who were both friends of the dead girl, had hit upon the method of still drawing her allowance by producing her once a year. We found a cavity under the cellar in which was her coffin! Never in all my life have I ever seen such wonderful embalming—you could almost fancy you saw her breathe!

Falkenhayn and his friends were never seen again, and now pretty Veronica Camberley rests in the little churchyard quite near the villa where she spent happy years with her big Austrian lover in the years gone by.

There is tragedy behind this story of the dead girl's allowance!

When the Princess Sylvia Orloff could have come into her own she was dead!

She died in abject and frightful poverty and misery in Mayfair—in a foul room, three weeks before she would have come into a thousand a year!

The money went to a connection of her first husband's by testamentary direction.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KAISER'S "COMMISSIONER"

ONE of the most interesting investigations I ever undertook was introduced to me by the philanthropist, the late Sir X., through an intermediary.

I received one day a communication from the said Sir X. asking me to visit him in Bournemouth where he was staying, and I went down immediately. During the war I had recommended a friend of mine, engaged upon enquiry work, to undertake a case of attempted blackmail for Sir X. as I was at that time engaged on Intelligence Police Service at the front. Now, being free, I lost no time in placing myself at the baronet's service.

It was an amazing story that the great philanthropist had to tell me, and I shall give it in as nearly his own words as I can remember.

"Several friends and acquaintances of mine have been approached," he said, "by a secret organisation of German origin formed apparently for the purpose of assisting in the work of reconciling Anglo-German relations. The society has a distinctly Royalist tinge and the Kaiser is alleged to be its creator and President.

"I have had a visit from a man whom we will call Oppenheimer, a man whose mother is English and of an excellent family and whose father is German. This man Oppenheimer served in the German Red Cross during the war. Now Mr. Oppenheimer began his interview with me by binding me to secrecy, a pledge which I intend to keep. I am employing you for the sole purpose of investigating Mr. Oppenheimer's claims and I do not need to take an oath of secrecy from you. I need my note book, excuse me a moment." The aged gentleman left the room and soon returned with a black square book. Adjusting his glasses he turned up a page, then continued his narrative.

"Yes," he said, "Mr. Oppenheimer gave me some particulars of the Bolshevik danger in Germany. That I believe is very real, and that part of his story I have confirmed from a variety of sources including friends of mine in the banking world. He pointed out that the conception of a Republic is a very nebulous thing to most Germans, entirely negative, and that should a great crisis ever arise when the

forces of Law and Order would have to fight with their backs to the wall against a rising tide of Communism, then it would certainly have to be round the Kaiser or some other royal personage that the sane forces must rally.

" Then he showed me a document signed by the Kaiser, or purporting to be signed by the Kaiser. I have several copies of Wilhelm's signature here—I will show you one." Sir X. produced a letter signed by the Kaiser.

" That signature," he said, " was an exact replica. If it was a forgery then it was a masterpiece, but I don't suggest that it was a forgery. Well, the gist of the document was that His Imperial Majesty was much more concerned about the fate of his country than about his own. If the Treaty of Versailles could be revised more in favour of Germany at the expense of his placing himself at the Allies' disposal here in London or elsewhere, he would be only too happy, and a lot more in the same vein.

" Then the Kaiser pointed out with unerring instinct the intense dangers to Europe in general, and Britain in particular, of a Bolshevik Germany, and very rightly suggested that the Monarchy was the only real safeguard because of its appeal to the German instinct of patriotism. He touched upon the necessity of cordial relations between England and Germany commercially, both to assist Germany to recover and England to renew her export trade. He gave a little sting, typical of him at his best, about America. He said that if England neglected her interest and her duty now, there was a power waiting on the other side of the Atlantic, full of money and vainglory to take her place.

The document wound up by an appeal *for assistance, financial and moral*, to re-establish the Hohenzollern Dynasty, and promised immediate patents of nobility to be conferred by himself, on those who answered his appeal."

" Certainly the story was amazing. I waited in silence for Sir X. to continue. After a pause, he said :

" Now it is not necessary for me to tell you that titles of nobility from an exiled or a re-instated Kaiser are of no moment to me.

" Quite apart from rewards, I am impressed with the urgency of this matter. The facts about the Bolshevik danger are true enough. This man Oppenheimer says he is receiving a splendid response from Anglo-German trading

interests. I want you to find out—never mind about the expense—whether his representations are genuine, what he is doing exactly, with what success he is meeting, and what the organisation is doing in Germany. Then report to me.

“Oppenheimer is staying at the Carlton Hotel in London, and his Berlin Office is here.” Sir X. handed me a card which was printed in gothic characters, the English version of which read :

KARL OPPENHEIMER
FOREIGN PROPAGANDA SECTION
IMPERIAL NATIONAL PARTY

BERLIN.

REFERENCE “O.L & D 778”

I had some further talk with Sir X. and lunched with him, then, armed with a letter of introduction to Mr. Oppenheimer to use if and when I thought fit, I returned to London.

A discreet enquiry or two soon revealed to me that Mr. Oppenheimer was in the habit of staying a day or two in the country and then returning to his hotel. I waited about until one day I saw him. He was a well-built Teuton, his fair hair stood on end from a square forehead and he wore a short blond moustache. He was a typical German ex-Cavalry Officer.

I kept him under surveillance for three days. On the third day I saw him visited by one of the foremost of our ship-owners, a man who previously had done a very large coal and shipping trade with Germany. The German and the magnate lunched together in the Grill Room and then retired to the private sitting-room of Mr. Oppenheimer.

The next day Mr. Oppenheimer left for Bradford and I followed him. He stayed at the Midland Hotel, and on the day of his arrival made no calls at all but left the hotel about ten o'clock at night, walked over the square to the General Post Office and posted a number of letters. The next day he set off on a round of visits in a hired car. I followed in a taxi and took note of every call he made. At one place he called at he evidently met with a most hostile reception, for I saw a red-faced typical Yorkshireman come to the door of his offices and say to the German as he descended the steps :

“And if you have the damned effrontery to come here



THE EX-KAISER TREE-CUTTING UPON HIS ESTATE AT DOORN

again, I'll have you kicked out. And you can tell that to your Kaiser as well !”

I took a note of this address and still followed the German. Just before the bank closed he drove up to a large branch of the Midland Bank in Market Street, and as he came out I saw him put a stiff wad of bank-notes in his pocket with a satisfied smile.

Then he drove to a cigar shop, obviously to make purchases, and drove up to the suburb of Manningham, where he made a call which occupied him for three hours.

As he came out of the house I saw two charming girls and an elderly lady politely see him off. He drove back to the hotel, rushed straight to the writing room on the first floor, wrote furiously for a few minutes and then ran out to post the letters himself. After this he returned and appeared from his room in about half-an-hour fully dressed and wearing a semi-Inverness black coat over his evening dress, and carrying a stick in his hand. He drove to the house where the two girls and the elderly lady had stood on the steps waving him adieu earlier in the afternoon. I went away after waiting some time.

I took a note of the address. He returned at 1.0 a.m. from there. The next day I saw him meet one of the two girls in the Market Street in the morning and escort her on a round of shopping, afterwards giving her lunch at the hotel.

She left him after lunch and I followed him again as he went round and made three calls on business people.

The day following he left Bradford for Manchester and the two girls saw him off at the L. & Y. station. I noticed the one he had taken round the previous day seemed rather fond of him and kissed him as the train moved off. Evidently Mr. Oppenheimer was mixing business with pleasure.

The same thing happened in Manchester as far as the round of visits was concerned, then he returned to London.

There I determined to interview him. I presented myself to him with Sir X.'s letter of introduction and authority. He looked at me suspiciously.

“ I only deal with principals,” he said. “ Sir X. is wrong to have mentioned our matter to you at all. I am sorry I have nothing to say to you. Good day.” He bowed stiffly from the centre of his back and gave ever such a slight nod in the direction of the door. Certainly he was the true type of unrepentant Prussian Officer. But I was very suspicious by

now. It wasn't the fact that I was so unceremoniously "chalked off," although I felt it a bit hard to swallow being treated like that by a German after what I had suffered at their hands, but an instinct told me that there was more than normal caution in his refusing to discuss the affair, with me at all.

Now when I am sure of my ground I don't mind taking a chance. Perhaps that is why I find myself often engaged upon cases where solicitors and others are afraid to trust the average advertising private detective. They know they can trust me and that I will "take a chance." So I got hold of old "Vic Doolan," smartest "Whiz" man or pickpocket in London, whom it had been my duty to run in once or twice in the old days when I was in the police and I told him I wanted the German's wallet.

"Can I have the doings?" This was Vic's way of asking if he could keep what money there was in the book and I told him he *could not* but that in any case he could have a straight twenty pounds and I would cover him as well as I could against risk of prosecution. I was able to assist him considerably by dressing him properly and slipping him into the German's hotel. Vic did his work like a true artist. The German was walking along the corridor when Vic pretended to stumble just before him, flung out his arms widely as if to save himself and grabbed the German. The German pulled himself upright, indignant, and the next moment Vic apologised profusely. The German bowed and passed on and Vic turned to me.

"Here you are, my boy,"—and handed me a fat pocket-book.

I gave Vic his twenty pounds and he stood not upon the order of his going, I assure you. I took the book to my room and opened it. There were fifty pounds in five-pound notes, a few Treasury notes, a cheque signed by someone in Manchester made out in his favour on a Manchester Bank for ten thousand pounds and crossed. Attached to this cheque was a slip of paper with a pencil note in German, "Confirm a Barony promised."

There were three or four letters, one from a girl in Bradford telling him a lot of local chit-chat and finishing with one tiny cross representing a kiss. The girl added a postscript that that would have to do until— Evidently our Prussian friend

had made an impression there. I suppose we will forget all these things in time but I don't mind admitting that I felt a little sensitive about that girl—however, that had nothing to do with the case.

There was a letter from Berlin in code. I carefully copied that. There were two other letters from important people in the North, one saying that the writer was going to Holland, would the Kaiser receive him? and the other promised a subscription in the course of a month and wished Mr. Oppenheimer success.

Having digested the contents I gave the book to a chambermaid and told her to say that she found it in the corridor so that she could get the reward if reward there should be. Then I went to Bournemouth and talked the matter over with Sir X. We decided that I should go to Berlin and investigate the exact position of Mr. Oppenheimer.

I left the following day while Mr. Oppenheimer was still in London. I stayed at the Hotel Adlon where I arrived late at night, and the next day I made my enquiries. The ramifications of the National Party are weird and wonderful. There are about thirty branches of it—each having a separate function to perform throughout Berlin, but none of them acknowledged Mr. Oppenheimer.

My German is good, I think, but I suppose it would be easy to recognise me as an Englishman and I was everywhere received with suspicion whenever I made any enquiries, however indirect. I looked up an old friend of mine who was engaged on the Inter-Allied Commission of Control and asked him if he could give me the address of a certain German detective to work with me.

In due course I got into touch with my German companion who had received large rewards from the Inter-Allied Commission for discovering stocks of hidden arms. I afterwards became very friendly with this chap who was a jolly fellow with an excellent sense of humour and not a little ingenuity. I remember he told me one night when he had taken much more than his quota of "Johannisburger" that whenever he found a large dump of hidden arms he invariably had it split up and moved into four separate places, so as to get four rewards!

However, he certainly helped me. He told me that the National Party was exceedingly difficult to assess fully.

Part of it was in constant communication with the Kaiser, part of it denounced the Kaiser, part of it was directed to inculcate Monarchist sympathies in the army and navy, part of it was directed to influence children in a Monarchist direction and part of it was directed to foreign propaganda. Their agents in the latter case were nearly all ex-secret service agents of the old régime and very difficult to locate. I told him about Oppenheimer and he set off to make enquiries on his own.

Within two days he had important news for me. It appeared that there was an organisation, not a part of the Nationalist Party, but sometimes used by the Nationalists for their more unscrupulous work. This organisation had an office in a quiet suburb and had agents abroad. One of these agents was undoubtedly Mr. Oppenheimer. He brought me a photograph of a man called Oppenheimer, and I at once recognised my man. The detective had discovered that Oppenheimer had been at one time an agent of the Nationalist Party, but there had been a scandal about funds and he was cast into the outer darkness, completely discredited. He was used by this separate organisation, which had a most unpleasant name but which had been occasionally used by the Nationalist Party. I determined to call on this office in Potsdam and see who was in charge, for whoever he was he had a wonderful knowledge of people in England with certain German sympathies. I drove out and presented myself as a prospective agent for any work that they might want done in England. I was kept waiting for perhaps five minutes and then was ushered into the room of the Principal.

I nearly shrieked with laughter. Sitting at a desk set before a good fire was none other than our old friend, MR. TREBITSCH LINCOLN!—the notorious ex-M.P. for Darlington, who served a sentence for forging Mr. Rowntree's name to a cheque and was a self-convicted spy.

"Hah!" he half-exclaimed, half-snarled. "I have no use for you at all. I want no Englishmen here. I know! Go away."

So, my short interview over, I left him and returned to London, where I reported to Sir X.

"It is all perfectly amazing," said the old gentleman. "But we will get to the bottom of it. You must go to Döorn!"

So the next day I was off on the Flushing boat, armed with certain credentials, to try to see the All-Highest himself.

I stayed one day at The Hague where was a mutual friend of Sir X. and the Kaiser's whose good offices I sought to obtain the interview. He put himself into communication with the Royal exile's household and his instructions to me were :

" You may proceed to Doorn. I do not know whether His Imperial Majesty will interview you, but you will be interviewed by someone who will be able to give you the information you want anyhow." So to Doorn I went.

The guards surrounding the old castle that is now the home of the ex-Kaiser remind one of war days when important headquarters were guarded by screen after screen of sentries. Four times did I have to show my papers before I was at last escorted by a non-commissioned officer through the grounds towards the castle itself. Without a word when we were crossing the avenue of approach, my guard nudged me and pointed to a spot through the trees. A little group of three men were standing by a tree, two looking on while one with doughty strokes was wielding an axe. He was a bearded man, coatless, and each stroke fell with vigorous determination. I looked again and felt a little inward gasp of astonishment—
THE WOODMAN WAS THE EX-KAISER OF GERMANY !

Arrived at the castle, I waited in a hall at the behest of a green and black liveried servant and then was taken into a room furnished in black oak, its walls panelled, and quartered with the Imperial Arms. Sitting at a table was an old man in Military undress uniform, who looked very tired.

" General Von F——" I could not catch the guttural name the servant announced to me as I entered.

" Sit down ! " said the General in English, " and tell me what you want ! " I complied, laying before him my report and my credentials from Sir X.

The General nodded and resumed his reading of the report. When he had finished he removed his pince-nez and gazed before him for some moments in silence. I could hear the tick-ticking of an old clock on the wall like heart-beats in the silence.

" Will you wait a few minutes ? " said the General at last, and left the room. When the door opened again the figure who came through was none other than the bearded wood-cutter—the ex-Kaiser himself. Over his shoulder the old General announced rather anxiously :

“ His Imperial Majesty ! ” I rose at once and bowed.

“ Sit down again,” said the Kaiser. “ These people are adventurers—completely unauthorised ! ” he announced after he had finished reading the report. “ We will write to Sir X. ourselves.”

He inclined his head gracefully but imperiously towards me, smiled—and my interview was over.

I returned to Sir X. and reported. There was no prosecution, but I know that all the people whose names were on my list got a note from a certain organisation informing them that no one in England had the right to attach the Kaiser's name to anything, that he was not interfering in the politics of his country until his country called him, and that Mr. Oppenheimer or anyone else who stated otherwise was a rogue.

CHAPTER IX

A BANK IN TROUBLE

IN the year 1919 I was called in to try to elucidate a mystery. A young man, third son of a baronet, had disappeared in most peculiar circumstances.

It is, of course, impossible for me to give his family name here. We will therefore call him Strange. Young Strange was twenty-five years old, had served with distinction through the war, in which he had been twice wounded and once gassed. The fact that he possessed the D.S.O. and the M.C. was a tribute to his service to his country.

He was married, had married in 1915 when on leave from France.

Harold Strange held a position of trust in a fine old firm of which his father had been chairman, and the present chairman of which was his eldest brother, Sir William, with whom Harold was not on the best of terms. Nevertheless, it was Sir William who called me in to try to find his brother when he so mysteriously disappeared.

Harold suffered slightly from shell-shock. It was told me that if a door banged too noisily, or a railway engine whistled discordantly, he would shiver like a whipped dog. He appeared to be absent-minded at times, but all, including his wife, had noticed a great improvement in him as the months went by and he gradually readjusted himself to normal conditions.

Harold and his wife and child lived at a little cottage near Bishop's Stortford, and from there every morning Harold travelled to the city where was situated the family business.

On a day in September he travelled up to town as usual, in the morning, presented himself at the firm, lunched at his usual city club, appeared to be in every way his usual self, then, at five o'clock, left the office with other colleagues—and was never seen again.

When midnight had come Louise Strange had telephoned to Sir William, who had a house in Park Lane, and informed him that his brother was not home and asked if he could explain it. Sir William had replied that he certainly could not. It was a Wednesday, which was not one of his days for visiting the firm, and he had not, therefore, seen his brother that day. The baronet suggested that probably Harold had

been detained, for some reason or other, had missed his last train and would communicate as soon as he could in the morning. Louise pointed out that unless something had happened to him he could surely have telephoned. The baronet said that he really could not profess to know the movements of his brother and in some irritation told his sister-in-law to get to bed and not to worry. She could give him a "ring" in the morning and let him know if Harold had arrived.

Sir William did not forget to add that he himself would add a word of admonition to his brother for causing this anxiety.

Morning came and nothing was seen or heard of Harold. The firm was communicated with, but there Louise learnt from the manager that Harold had not appeared. That was all. He had left on the previous day full of good spirits, apparently to go home. For several days friends were quietly communicated with, in case they had seen anything of Harold. But no one had. And then had come a serious shock!

Sir William in great perturbation had gone down to see Louise Strange and had asked her a lot of questions about the mode of life that Harold had been living. His interrogations appeared so strange that Louise was bewildered—almost hysterical, in fact—when the baronet had brutally blurted out:

"Well, we've found out why the young hound went, anyhow. There is a deficiency of one hundred and fifteen thousand pounds at the firm and, for the sake of the family, I have had to make it good. What the devil has the young scoundrel been spending his money on?"

Louise Strange told me that when the baronet said this, so far from it being the last straw, it became a tonic to her. Not for a single moment would she believe it. She told the baronet that they lived well within their income, that on three nights out of the week she and Harold were out together and that on the remaining two he merely attended functions or met his men friends.

That was the position when I was called in. At no stage were the police notified because, in the course of their enquiries, the matter of the alleged embezzlement would certainly have come out, causing scandal to the family and discredit to the firm. It must be remembered that Harold occupied a minor

seat on the board by family inheritance, and that the scandal would have been unthinkable.

Sir William received me in his private room at the firm. He was a tall man, good-looking, with a fair wavy moustache and curly fair hair just beginning to grey. His eyes were a blue-grey tinge and his lips, whenever one saw them under his rather heavy moustache, were distinctly thin and uncompromising.

He recapitulated the story to me and then I asked him a few questions. I asked him if he were on the best possible terms with his brother. He replied affirmatively to the effect that, since the war, they had been better friends than ever they had been. When I pressed him closely as to their relations in the past he seemed a little diffident about discussing them, and appeared to think the matter irrelevant. But I told him that I was asking no question carelessly.

Then he told me that some years previously, when their father had died, and during Harold's first year at Oxford, he had found the youngster in company with an Eastern prince, who was at Oxford with him, staying somewhere in the country with a couple of ladies. This had caused a very serious "row," because the whole thing was so perfectly disgraceful, as the baronet pointed out, the time of this adventure being only one month after their father's death!

Harold had seemed to resent Sir William's discovery and had been extremely sensitive to his criticism. Then had come the war when, without consulting his brother, Harold joined the University O.T.C. and was quickly given a commission.

Later the two brothers had become reconciled and the unpleasantness of 1914 was relegated to the past.

So far as his brother knew there was no woman save his wife in Harold's life. He seemed to be genuinely in love with Louise, and the pair worshipped their child. I left him to make certain enquiries of my own. I traced the whole war-record of Harold Strange, hunted up certain brother officers, and interviewed his Commanding Officer. All spoke in glowing terms of the young man. He had been a "sport," had enjoyed a mild flutter on a race, could play a decent hand at bridge, but was not a gambler. He was essentially a man's man.

The whole thing was mysterious. After a week of fruitless enquiries I returned to the bank. I enquired into the exact

circumstances of the deficiency and whether it could have been the work of anyone else but Harold.

"Certainly not," said the irate Sir William. "You are wasting time. No one under Harold's authority would have access to the various books which had been carefully cooked. No one less than he in the office could have issued drafts on other banks and had them collected abroad. Leave that part of it alone—there is not the slightest doubt about that, I regret to say."

Then a death-blow came to the remaining hopes of finding Harold Strange. An official of a little suburb of Rouen called Le X. got into touch with Sir William and informed him that a suit of clothes had been found beside the River Seine bearing his address. There also was certain property, including a watch and some photographs. The photographs were of Louise and the baby!

Sir William and I hurried over to Rouen and thence to Le X. There we found that the clothes had been found hidden away under the roots of a tree which overhung the river at a place near a linoleum mill. There were several deep holes in the bottom of the river at this place and they were now being systematically dragged for the body.

The clothes, the watch, personal jewellery and all else were easily identified as those of Harold Strange, but no body appeared. It seemed as though the body was either deeply buried in the mud or had been carried out by the tide, for it was now the time of the October high tides.

On the other hand it might have been a deliberate attempt to blind the trail. Yet why should he try to blind the trail in this little remote place near Rouen? Why not in England? Possibly because it would open the whole affair to scandal in his own country. Still, it was strange. I showed a photograph of Harold Strange to every villager in Le X., but from the curé down to the concierge at the Château Rondeaux, who knew everything about everybody, there was not a single person who had seen Harold Strange in that French village. I began to suspect conspiracy. There must be other people with a hand in this matter. Why should these clothes have been put just where they were? Obviously they were so placed by someone who knew the little French village. Very well, I decided upon two courses.

First of all I insisted upon Sir William allowing me to

place into the firm an independent concern of auditors to get their report as to whether the depredations could have been the work of one man. He bitterly opposed this, but finally I convinced him that in justice to his brother he owed this much to him. Therefore, one of the greatest firms of auditors in the City of London sent their most experienced men and went through all the books, afterwards delivering their report to Sir William and myself personally.

They were of the opinion that, from the peculiar arrangement of book-keeping prevailing at the firm, it would have been just possible for a minor director to have done what it was suggested Harold had done, but that, nevertheless, it was much more probable that he had had some very highly-placed assistance. If the manager had been a party to it then it could much more easily be explained.

"Well, you can put that right outside your calculations," said Sir William. "I will vouch for Hutchinson. He has been with us since he was a boy. He was my father's confidential secretary. Then, for a while, when my father was in the House, he became his political private secretary, and has been general manager for the firm since my father died. During and after the war he saved the firm no end of money by his astute dealings. He is of the utmost integrity."

That closed that chapter. There remained only one thing, which I determined to do, and that was to show photographs of everybody connected with the firm to the people of Le X. I did not tell Sir William why I wanted the photographs, but, after some difficulty which took me over a month I had every one of the staff secretly photographed, and I set off again for Le X.

"I have seen this man," said the old curé, picking out the manager, a tall, brown-moustached man with spectacles and slightly stooping shoulders. I pressed the curé as to when and where he had seen him, but all that I could get was that he had seen him walking down the village street and taking the bus for Rouen. The concierge at the Château thought she had seen him. This was significant because none of the other photographs were in the least recognized. I went to Rouen and made enquiries. I found that such a man giving the name of Jackson had stayed one night at the Hotel de la Post in October and then gone away. The English chaplain had not met him and none of the station staff could recognise him.

With this slight clue I set about shadowing the general manager. He lived in a house at Richmond, had two motor-cars, one used by his wife and a larger one which brought him in and out of town every day. After about four days' work I made up my mind that Mr. Hutchinson was leading a double life. He drove one day to a house in Bloomsbury at one o'clock and remained there until after half-past two. A few minutes after his arrival a boy came to the house with a basket from a restaurant, out of which was sticking a bottle of champagne. After I watched the departure of the manager I shadowed the house, then got hold of a maid-servant, and, after giving her a substantial tip, questioned her discreetly.

There was a very pretty Spanish-American actress living there. She had a lover, a Mr. Thompson. Mr. Thompson had just been, a tall man with brown moustache and spectacles!

I found within the course of a fortnight that Mr. Thompson in Bloomsbury became Mr. Edgar in Highgate and again Mr. Nicholson in Bayswater, *but ever remained Mr. Hutchinson at the firm!* Finally I decided to take Sir William into my confidence. He laughed my report to scorn. I insisted upon dragging him round with me and, after he had watched Mr. Thompson in Bloomsbury, and on another day had watched Mr. Nicholson in Bayswater, he was furious. We drove back to the firm together and, though I begged and prayed of Sir William to follow my advice, the hot-headed baronet sent immediately for his general manager.

"Look here, Hutchinson," he began, in a cold voice. "This is perfectly disgraceful. This private detective and I have watched your amorous performances in Bayswater and Bloomsbury. It is damnable, unthinkable," and so on and on and on. The manager turned pale and looked apprehensively at me, and I knew as well as I knew my name, that he had some guilty knowledge of that deficiency! At the end of an hour, after watching the manager's distress, I saw Sir William soften, accept the manager's assurance that such conduct would not occur again, and then he turned to me:

"I think this enquiry might as well end now," he said. "We can't do any good. The money is paid and if my brother turns up, then he turns up; if not, well, I don't see what we can do to make him."

So the enquiry ended on a most unsatisfactory note. Louise Strange lived on in her little cottage near Bishop's Stortford, still hoping for the tall, fair man, who had loved her and whom she loved and still believed in, to turn up again. Old fishermen kept giving an eye now and again to the deep waters of the Seine at high tides, in case the mysterious stranger, whose clothes had been found, should be at last thrown up. But he never was.

I went about other business.

Now it happened in January 1923, that I was briefed by a well-known firm of solicitors to act in a very prominent divorce case, then in the lists. In connection with this matter I travelled to Pontresina and stayed at the Hotel des Alpes. As a matter of fact my mission in connection with this divorce case was absolutely abortive. The person suspected was absolutely above suspicion. It had been thought that a guilty liaison was proceeding but there certainly was nothing of the sort, and I so reported, and prepared to come home, when suddenly I got the shock of my life! There, standing before me in the wide lounge of the hotel, was Hutchinson, manager of the London firm, talking to a tall, fair man still wearing his overcoat and who had a car waiting at the door. *The young man was Harold Strange!* Quickly getting my thick coat I made my way to the front of the hotel by a side entrance and waited where I could watch him. Ultimately he shook hands with Hutchinson and came out:

"Harold Strange!" I said, "I want you."

I thought he would have fainted. His hand went to a side pocket and I grabbed it.

"Will you please believe," I said, "that I am not here to cause you the slightest trouble. You are in no danger. I am here to help. Come with me." In obvious fear he walked by my side and we re-entered the hotel by the side entrance and went to my room.

"Now," I said, "I want the full and true story of the trouble at the firm and the connection between you and Hutchinson."

"I thought you said there was no trouble," he objected and a long argument developed. I told him that there was nothing to fear and that the money was repaid, but I wanted to know the truth.

238 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

"But what money?" he asked, "what money are you referring to?"

"I mean the deficiency of £115,000."

"Never heard of it!" said Harold with decision. Then after much hesitation and binding me to a thousand oaths the whole story came out. He had been on good terms with Hutchinson, and one night Hutchinson and he had dined in the West End where they had met two pretty girls, friends of Hutchinson's. There had been a lot of wine and a visit to a flat in Maida Vale, an excuse rung through on the telephone to Bishop's Stortford, and a very penitent young man with a heavy head in the morning.

The girl was the daughter of a rector in the country, and got into touch with young Strange at the firm, through Hutchinson, after some weeks, to give him some very startling news indeed! In despair he consulted Hutchinson who promised to come to his rescue. There was mentioned a certain private nursing home.

In terror and shame young Strange fled the country sooner than confess to his wife. His faithful friend Hutchinson was to keep him posted and keep him financed. All this he did. He did not forget the finance nor did he forget to tell him about the quiet enquiries the firm were making and he, Hutchinson, had worked a master-stroke by leaving the clothes by the Seine, but he certainly forgot to tell him all about the deficiency at the firm. *I did not.*

The end of it was that in two days' time Sir William Strange got the shock of his life when his brother and I walked into his office. Explanations, long, weary explanations followed. Then with a grimly set jaw Sir William rang the bell:

"I want Mr. Hutchinson!" The clerk withdrew.

It was pitiful to watch the discomfort of the general manager as he entered the room and took in the situation. He swayed on his feet for a moment, then staggered backwards.

"One moment," he said, recovering himself. "One moment, I want to get something which will prove you are wrong." Whatever it was he wanted to get was outside the firm, for he left it never to return! The next morning his grieving wife and daughter got into touch with Sir William to break the dreadful news that his faithful servant had taken an overdose of veronal!

The death was recorded by the Coroner as "Death by

Misadventure." The employer and wife were both duly sympathised with by the coroner !

I have always considered that a man who could plan such a diabolically clever hoax should have used his talents in some other and more righteous direction.

CHAPTER X

THE WHITE CAID

IN the year 1922 I had an adventure—which nearly cost me my life—with one of the most dangerous criminals I have encountered in the whole of my career.

The circumstances were interesting, and I will relate them. To begin with I was approached by a solicitor to investigate the strange recent doings of an elderly spinster who lived at Winchester. Her family were most disquieted about certain things, including the spending of a lot of money on the old lady's part and then, worst blow of all, the announcement of her approaching marriage to a man of whom the entire family disapproved.

The lady, whom we will call Miss Armstrong, was reputed to be worth over two hundred thousand pounds. Her nearest relatives were the children of her deceased brother and sister respectively. There were two sons aged twenty and twenty-three, who were the children of her dead sister, and there were three sons and three daughters who were the children of her dead brother.

The other parent in both cases was living, but the families were in rather poor circumstances, having incomes which barely covered their expenditure and I think all were extravagant. Certainly I know for a fact that all the sons in both families were definitely waiting with what patience they could muster the welcome arrival of the thousands which would come when their Auntie Armstrong soared off to realms above.

Now it appeared that, some six months before the time of which I am writing, Miss Armstrong had gone for a short holiday to Algiers, and there had met a mysterious individual who possessed in himself all the component parts of the aged spinster's true ideal of "her hero." The great love of a lifetime, built round a myth, was realised. The stranger was lean, taciturn, mysterious. There was a strange, far-away look in his eyes, as if he had lived long on the mountain tops or in boundless deserts where the eye was ever fixed upon great distances.

Aristocratic in his bearing, a little eccentric in his tastes, arrogant to the staff of the hotel at which he stayed, rich, apparently, from the style of his living, and gifted with many tongues—for the spinster had heard him speak in several

languages with fluency—he seemed to be the very incarnation of romance.

The old lady determined that, come what may, she must speak to him, and she did so, finding some excuse or other in the lounge several days afterwards.

All this was subsequently told me by the lady herself.

She got into conversation with the mysterious stranger and then she found that if he had fascinated her before, he doubly did so now. No Othello of Shakespeare's immortal creation ever told stranger tales than the mysterious stranger, and I am afraid the aged Desdemona hung on to every syllable. He told her, amongst other things, that he was a chief spy for England. His work took him into desert places. He told her that he was a member of an ancient and weird Secret Society called the Rosicrucians, to which society was vouchsafed certain mysteries concerning alchemy, the transmutation of metals and the inner secrets of Astrology. This order was limited to certain families of which his was one.

He told her under pledge of secrecy that he was at that time engaged in arranging for the allegiance to England of many desert chiefs, who, tired of French mis-rule, wished to assert their independence at some short date and ask English assistance in striking a blow for independence. The Sultan of Morocco was privy to the conspiracy and he showed letters from the Sultan.

He told her that away in the Riff Mountains above the Spanish zone of occupation, there was a simultaneous movement at that time being organised, that there was a wonderful new leader sprung up who had never yet been heard of outside certain well-defined areas, but whose name would echo through Islam and that his name was Abd-el-Krim. He showed letters from Abd-el Krim, and authorities from the Moroccan mountain chief to purchase guns and ammunition and all other materials of war.

Finally, he told her that there was a great danger of all his plans for the further greatness of England and the emancipation of the Arabs breaking down because of the regrettable and dangerous Pro-Greek policy pursued by Mr. Lloyd George who was then Premier. He, having promised to deliver certain arms, was being let down and it was possible that the whole great plan might be wrecked.

He told her that when eventually his great scheme went

through he would be Foreign Secretary for the Sultan of Morocco and live much of his life at the Moroccan Court, and she believed every word of it. Then he struck a personal and more sentimental note and told her how lonely he was, how lacking in inspiration his life had been since the girl to whom he was engaged many years before had run away with a cavalry officer.

Miss Armstrong had suitably and sincerely sympathised with him and pointed out that he might yet one day meet a true woman.

Ah! no, "Sir Robert Rivett Carnac," as she knew him, said there was only one woman for him. His long life in the desert had taught him to read the hearts of women and he at last had found his ideal. Of course, the sequel needs no relating. I listened, I remember, sick at heart as I was told by the lady how she "fell for him."

Anyhow for the speedy relation of my story it is necessary for my readers to understand that the strange couple became engaged. She lent him all the money she could lay her hands on immediately—a matter of about five hundred pounds and cabled for more.

The nephew who transacted her business was horrified when he got a request for two thousand pounds but he had to send it. He nearly had a fit when he was asked for another five!

On this request for the five thousand the nephew consulted the family solicitor who told him that he could not refuse to send the money unless he could prove that his aunt was insane. If he cared to take the risk of presuming insanity—then! Of course, the nephew dare take no such risk, with which concurrently went the risk of losing his ultimate thousands. So he sent the five thousand and bought himself a ticket to Algiers to see what was going on.

With much scraping the whole family had clubbed up to send Mr. John Armstrong out and, when he got there—the cupboard was bare. The lady had gone, accompanied by her devoted fiancé, to Melilla. The funds were not sufficient to take John Armstrong on a tour of North Africa and he came home.

Then the family was startled to hear that Miss Armstrong was to get married upon her return!

This was several points worse than the worst, and the family consulted the solicitor, who sent for me.

I agreed to make discreet enquiries and try to get a look at the man. He was not at Winchester but Miss Armstrong was newly back from Paris.

One of the nephews had managed to steal a letter from the lover to his aunt and by that letter we got his address, which was at that time the Adlon Hotel, Berlin.

Two days afterwards I was in Berlin looking at a man whom I recognised at once, but had not seen for many years. It was no less a person than the amazing international adventurer, Robert Rivett Carnac, and I had last come into contact with him in the years before the war when I was in the Special Branch of Scotland Yard.

In those days, during the Moroccan War, there appeared in the rebel ranks a strange figure who became known throughout the French armies as the "White Caid." This man was often seen by spies, and frequently reported upon, but though the most ingenious traps imaginable were laid for him, he was never captured.

The French native levies were terrified of him for he seemed to be endowed with some queer power to be in places far removed from each other in such a short time as to be apparently supernatural. Wherever the fighting was thickest and most critical the "White Caid" would appear with his machine guns and small mounted following, and use his guns with deadly effect, riding off again immediately afterwards to some other danger spot.

Papers that were stolen from him by traitors in the rebel ranks revealed him to be an ex-English Lieutenant of Indian Cavalry. He had left the Indian Army under a cloud and had become a wanderer on the face of the earth, finally linking up with the rebel forces in Morocco.

I remember that after hostilities ceased he got into touch with the highest authorities in England through the medium of a famous War Correspondent and authority on Moroccan questions, and seriously raised the question of taking over certain valuable concessions in the Sultan's territory.

Rebuffed by the Foreign Office, the War Correspondent actually had an interview with King Edward the Seventh on the matter and there is no doubt that the policy advocated at that time by this adventurer would have been adopted had it not run counter, in effect, to the Entente Cordiale which was being built up by the King.

However, the King thanked him, and it is right to say that at that moment Carnac very nearly struck a blow for the Empire which might have placed him in the same category as Cecil Rhodes, on a possibly smaller scale, if it had come off. As it was the whole thing dropped through and France held all her concessions, and the Sultan's rich territory remains to a great extent undeveloped to this day. That was Carnac's high tide, and from that time onwards the waters receded to the very mud.

In 1911 he became one of General Villa's generals and responsible for the dreadful massacre of Chihuahua. By his great military skill and especially in guerilla warfare he cleared the northern mountains of Mexico of the joint forces of American and Conservative Mexican troops. This was something of an epic, for Carnac commanded seven thousand ragamuffins, ill-equipped and wretchedly clothed. He only had one battery of mountain guns and a squadron of motley cavalry, yet he defeated a brilliantly equipped American Brigade and twenty thousand Conservative Mexican troops by sheer brilliance of strategy.

This, then, under names ranging from the commonplace Brown to that of General Roberto Carrenzia of Mexico, was the man who stood before me in the Adlon Hotel.

He recognised me at once and I thought the best thing to do was to take the bull by the horns and speak to him. So I called him to one side and we sat down in the lounge, and, over a drink, I told him that I was briefed by Miss Armstrong's family, that I did not wish to cause him unnecessary pain and trouble, that nothing more would be said if he just quietly "greased off" and disappeared. If he did not do that I would be under the painful necessity of relating his past to Miss Armstrong and also communicating with the Public Prosecutor in relation to certain charges still lying on the file against him in England.

I should explain here that it is a practice in the Criminal Courts, when a great number of charges are heard against a criminal, to proceed upon a certain number and pass sentence on them. To save time some of the charges are often left unproceeded upon, so far as sentence is concerned. A Judge will say :

"You are found guilty of four charges of false pretences and there are two charges of forgery. The Public Prosecutor

agrees to proceed upon the false pretences only, therefore I direct that the charges of forgery will 'Lie on the File.' " Technically, they can be proceeded upon at any subsequent time, but they rarely are. I knew that there were certain charges of that sort in Carnac's case and I knew that this was just one of those cases where the Public Prosecutor might intervene, to save the silly old woman, by prosecuting a rascal on a dormant charge.

He heard all I had to say, then he turned on me and in his singularly high-pitched, though cultured, voice, he said :

"Get out ! Get out of my sight ! Go to Hell ! I make no terms with paid intermediaries."

I returned to my hotel and prepared to get the train to Cologne to return via the British zone by which route my passport was visa-ed. I got the night train and was fortunate in getting a compartment to myself. I suppose an hour must have passed when I dropped off to sleep and then I remember no more until I felt something over my face, some arms grip my head and others grip my feet. I struggled and fought and tried to shout, but it was useless. There was something over my face. Then I remember a great rush of air and a flight through mid-air, and then a sickly soft splash like being plunged into a mud bath. I spluttered and tried to stand and open my eyes but my face was covered with some soft substance, my hands were embedded and I could hardly breathe. Then suddenly I got one hand out with a squelching noise and rubbed it over my face. In the distance I could see the lights of the train. I looked about me ; all around was mud. I tried to walk and gradually found a harder place for my foot. I was in the centre of a dried-up pond.

By slow degrees I worked my way out. It was perfectly clear to me that I had escaped from a definite attempt to murder me. I made my way to the station in the distance which I saw lit up and determined to say that I had fallen out of the train rather than face the delays which would arise through making a charge of attempted murder against anyone.

The train was telegraphed after and my luggage, which was registered through, was held for me at Cologne and I came on home.

I reported my experience and adventures and with John Armstrong went to see his aunt.

She had already seen Carnac, who had returned, had

accepted some story he had told her about his many persecutions in the past, and would hear nothing, nothing at all against him.

"I don't care what you have to say, I do not want to hear it—he's my man!" That was her refrain.

The wedding was fixed for three days afterwards by special licence and I knew there was only one way to stop it. I must find Carnac's wife! Feverishly I worked for two days, using every old acquaintance at Scotland Yard and every crook in the underworld, to secure information. Carnac had stated definitely that she was dead when I had challenged him about her at Berlin.

On the second night, late, I went to a little house in Tooting, as a result of "Information Received," and there met Mrs. Carnac, as the poor woman knew herself to be to her sorrow. I rushed her to Winchester on the first train the next morning and took a taxi out to Miss Armstrong's place.

"What do you want now?" Miss Armstrong asked as she saw me standing in the doorway. I told her that I simply must see her for a moment. Reluctantly she consented. She looked askance at my companion and when I mentioned Carnac's name she began again:

"I've told you before I won't hear a word—he's my man!"

"Yes, madam," I replied, "but the trouble is that this lady says he's her man, too. Allow me to introduce Mrs. Carnac."

Well, the scene for the next half-hour was indescribable. She cried and she cursed herself and Carnac alternately. It was most distressing. Then she told me the whole story as I have told it to you only at much greater length. When Carnac arrived she would not see him. I have since learnt, however, that she subsequently sent him sums of money. Such is sometimes the effect of love which comes late in a maiden lady's life!

Carnac is, as I write, a guest in one of His Majesty's gaols for making a false statement on a marriage certificate.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE A DOCTOR

HE called himself all sorts of names. Once it was A., alleged to be a nephew of Sir John A.; again it was B., scion of a great Northern family; once more it was C., but his real name was Cummins. As he changed his name so also he changed the scene of his operations but never, by any chance, was he untrue to the general method.

To all these names he prefixed "Doctor." It was perfectly true that he was not a doctor, that he had never seen anything beyond the outside of a college, and that, so far from being the offspring of noble parents, he was the son of a pitman; but it was also true that from the time he was five years old he played at "Doctors." Driven down the pit at an early age he never had the remotest chance in the world of legitimately gratifying his ambition, but when other pit lads were spending their pennies on pitch-and-toss and visits to coursing meetings, Cummins was putting every penny aside for the purpose of purchasing medical works by eminent physicians and surgeons.

Later he engaged himself to the old local doctor, became his bottle-washer and, gradually, his unofficial dispenser.

The amazing sequel of all this was that he actually became, in the course of years, to possess the knowledge of an ordinary practitioner. His knowledge of the British Pharmacopœia was uncanny, even for a doctor. In surgery, even, he eventually possessed an ability amounting to nothing less than an instinct. But having told you so much I will explain how I came into contact with him.

In the year 1920 I was asked by a firm of solicitors to see a certain eminent practitioner in the South of London. This doctor had a large practice of both rich and poor people. He was popular and was something of a specialist in certain children's diseases. He acted on several days a week at one of the hospitals and had two assistants.

Some time prior to my visit to him he had had to replace one of his assistants and had advertised, through the usual medical journals, for a new assistant.

Amongst the applicants was a "Dr. A.," a curious, clean-shaven little man who was inclined to be bald, looked in age

anything from thirty-seven to fifty-five and was exceedingly pleasant in manner. His papers seemed all right and the doctor was struck by his apparent erudition. Whatever department of medicine was discussed at their interview, the little man was equal to making serious comments on it. The doctor determined to give him a trial. Three months went by and the local practitioner was more than satisfied with his choice. Little Doctor A. was patient, splendid with children, indefatigable in his labours, not minding in the least being called out in the middle of the night, and always ready the next day to undertake the heavy surgery duty for several hours.

As the doctor said to me, "He was a 'gem' amongst doctors." The patients had got into the way of asking specially for "little Dr. A.," and his efficiency was undeniable. It amounted to brilliancy.

Then a disturbing thing happened. The local doctor was visited by a friend from the North whose years at Edinburgh coincided, or should have coincided, with those of Dr. A. Indeed, the doctor upon one occasion had asked Dr. A. if he knew his friend, Dr. E., and A. had replied casually that they had met years ago, but not since.

Dr. E. met Dr. A. at the house of their mutual medical friend, who said :

"This will be a surprise for you two fellows—quite a reunion !"

As he explained to me, the genial practitioner had never for a moment doubted but that the two knew each other. His action was not intended to be in the least degree a trap. He profoundly trusted and liked his little assistant.

However, the two stared at each other, neither recognising the other. They put questions to each other about their years at Edinburgh and there was no doubt but that they should have met. Then Dr. E. said :

"Well, it's funny ; I only knew one A. in my time, and that was old "Piker" A. He could eat more than any six students. Went to Greece after the war to direct a hospital. I had a letter from him three weeks ago."

And this was the man whose papers, apparently, were in the possession of Dr. A. !

The occasion had passed over with a little awkwardness

but it troubled the local doctor tremendously, and he determined to investigate the past of his remarkable assistant.

Several days after this incident little Dr. A., evidently with a view of strengthening his position, came into his chief's surgery with a telegram.

"I've got it," he said. "I've got it at last—the baronetcy, now."

He showed the doctor a telegram purporting to come from a Scottish firm of law agents intimating the death of his uncle and his succession to the baronetcy. Dr. A. then left for several days to arrange his affairs, whilst his chief, now thoroughly suspicious, sent for me.

"Whatever you find," he said, "I want to tell you this. I have had trouble before with bogus doctors, but in my profession it is as a rule that 'by their works ye shall know them.' There has usually been trouble with the dispensary or something of the kind, but here I have nothing but unrestricted praise for the little chap, whoever he turns out to be."

So I set about tracing the antecedents of Dr. A.

He had made mention of a certain war record, so I made enquiries at the various hospitals and surgeries, questioning doctors who should have been his chiefs during the war.

I found at the outset of this enquiry an immediate confusion of identity. There were two doctors named John A., both apparently with similar credentials. One had served in the East and the other in France. I soon ascertained from his description that the one who had served in France was my Dr. A. and I traced his war record from the beginning to the end. *It was a remarkable and worthy record*; let there be no doubt about that. Every Commanding Officer spoke well of him, and there were epic tales of endurance in his ministrations to the wounded during the ghastly periods of congestion at the clearing hospitals.

The tales I heard about his war record made me long to hear something reassuring about him at the end of the enquiry, for it would be heart-breaking if this man, who was nothing less than a hero, should turn out to be a fraud!

Before 1914 I could not trace him. Then I got on the track

of the other Dr. A. who was perfectly easy to trace. My Dr. A. appeared as if from nowhere at all in 1914 and was commissioned to the R.A.M.C.

A few days after my enquiry the doctor with whom Dr. A. had been associated got a further telegram from him to the effect that he regretted he would have to leave him as it was necessary for him to remain in Edinburgh.

Then a most amazing thing happened. The doctor got a letter from another doctor in the West of England asking a formal reference in respect of Sir John A., who said that he had been for some time associated with the doctor who had instructed me, and who now sent for me again and consulted with me as to what was to be done. We decided that it would be impossible either to ignore the letter or to reply without disclosing the grave doubts about the little man's bona-fides. Finally, it was arranged that I should go and see the doctor who had written the letter, and give him the facts, as we possessed them, in confidence.

I did so, travelling to Gloucester to interview the doctor. I found him to be an old-fashioned country practitioner whose work was getting beyond his capacity. He had had Sir John A. with him for a fortnight and the whole countryside were attracted to the "doctor baronet" who was a pleasant fellow and an excellent doctor.

I simply loathed my task. As a rule it is a satisfaction to unmask an adventurer, but here was a man who only took a moderate salary for his services and who earned, and more than earned, every penny that came his way. Besides, the war story was still fresh in my mind. Nevertheless, duty is duty, and I had to tell the horrified country doctor of all the facts about Sir John A. as we had them.

The white-haired old man was aghast.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed. "This is dreadful. Why, the fellow has signed death certificates. It is criminal and I don't know how far I am likely to be held responsible. Will you meet him with me?"

I said I would, though I hated the job. How could I run away?

Sir John A. returned from his rounds at about six o'clock and he was invited at once into his chief's study.

"Sir John," began the old doctor, "there is something rather inexplicable about your identity. I will be perfectly

straightforward with you. This gentleman is a private detective"—the little man paled—"and he says that there are two of you—two A.'s. Let us have a look at your papers, will you?"

"I don't know—I cannot understand——" began Sir John, stammeringly. Then he changed his tactics. "Certainly. I will get them now." He left the room walking with his peculiar little limp, his face pale and troubled. He returned in less than five minutes with some papers.

"Here we are!" he announced. "My Licentiate-ship of the Royal College of Physicians! and my membership of the Royal College of Surgeons!" He placed the papers in the hands of his chief. A relieved look came over the old man's face. He turned to me.

"I cannot resist the conviction that these papers are regular," he said. "I have seen too many to be deceived. Do you possess any knowledge of these things?"

I shook my head.

"Sir John," said the old man next, "This detective says that there are two of you. That one A. is practising in Greece and that there were distinctly two A.'s who served through the war whose pre-war identity was given as the same so far as origin and qualifications were concerned. How do you account for that?"

"How should I be able to account for it?" the little man brazenly asked. "The other chap seems to have gone far enough afield to use my name, doesn't he?"

"What about that?" asked his chief in triumph, turning to me.

"Sir John," I addressed the little man, "when you were with Dr. X. in South London, you had a visit from a Dr. E., who, Dr. X. tells me, knew the real Dr. A. at Edinburgh. You were not able to account for the curious discrepancy in your history then. You will remember that Dr. E.'s years at Edinburgh and yours were identical and yet Dr. E. stated definitely that not only did he not recognise Dr. A. in you, but he had only recently had a letter from Greece from the real Dr. A. who is a friend of his. You will remember that immediately after this contretemps you alleged that you received a wire from a firm of Scottish law agents acquainting you with the fact that your uncle had died and that you had become a baronet. You left to attend to your affairs and you

never returned. Now I have very carefully traced the 'Baronetcy' and cannot find a Sir John A. who died a week or two ago."

The little man had been listening to me with changing expressions on his face. Fear was there, but also a desperate stubbornness. When I finished he said :

"My uncle died abroad and the failure of the agents to notify me was due to the fact that they never had my address. I fail to see why I should be interrogated in this manner. Look here, sir, I am a baronet and a medical man. Who the devil are you that you come here with your wild stories?" He turned to his chief.

"Am I to be subjected to any more of this?" he asked.

"No," replied the old man. "If you will kindly leave us I will dismiss the detective." The "Baronet" then withdrew.

"I am coming to London with you to see Dr. X.," announced the doctor with decision. He did so and of course the doctor who had briefed me told him again all that I told him and of how the coming of Dr. E. had exposed the little man. The Gloucester doctor returned and the next morning we had a telegram from him :

"A. disappeared. Police informed."

They arrested him three weeks later and he was charged with issuing a false death certificate—a most serious offence. Also he was charged with the comparatively minor offence of obtaining money by false pretences. In the trial all the facts of his life came out. This was not the first time that he had been similarly convicted. He had undergone a term of three years' penal servitude for pretending to be a doctor fifteen years before. Then he had served five years for exactly the same thing soon afterwards, and had come out of prison just before the war.

But when the various doctors and others with whom he had been associated gave their evidence, the most impressive thing about their stories was that they all agreed that the little man was more than efficient. Never had there been a suspicion of anything in the nature of a lapse of medical probity on his part. He was accorded by all the character of a most efficient, conscientious practitioner.

The Judge who tried him said frankly that he had never in

his life heard of such a case. How he had managed to collect the knowledge—he, a pitman's son—simply baffled the Judge. His Lordship paid a tribute to his service in the war, but the signing of death certificates was a thing too terrible to countenance in a pretender, no matter how able he might be. He then sentenced John Cummins to penal servitude for a term of five years. The little man hung his head as he limped out of the dock without a word.

Now in 1924 I went abroad and I travelled from San Sebastian (where I had called) on a Spanish steamer which I will not name. The Captain was a very charming man and I had a letter of introduction to him from a bank.

"I will try to make you comfortable," said he, smiling. "She is a good boat and, by the way, the Commodore Doctor of the line travels on her. He is English, clever, and charming. His wife is Spanish. I will introduce you now."

I accompanied the Captain along the deck :

"Mr. Edwin Woodhall!" he announced, when we came upon a trim little figure in uniform: "Meet my friend the Commodore Doctor Señor Hugh Cavendish!"

I looked straight into the eyes of "Sir John A.," alias John Cummins, the pitman's son. I shook hands with him and preserved a perfectly straight face. The next minute I was introduced to a charming Spanish girl at least four inches taller than the little doctor. His wife!

We chatted for a few minutes and then I went to my cabin. I was visited there later by the doctor. He came in and closed the door.

"Well," he said, with a drawn face. "What are you going to do about it. Be quick for God's sake. Don't do any cat-and-mouse business!" Rightly or wrongly I made my decision then and there.

"I don't know what you mean," I answered. "I never met you before, Dr. Cavendish. I hope we shall like each other."

For a moment he looked at me in stupefaction, then realising what I meant, his face softened. He put out a hand and, as he was leaving, he said in a husky voice :

"I'll not let you down Woodhall," and I know he won't. He meant to be a doctor and he WILL be a doctor. Prisons

254 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

and Judges and Medical Associations cannot bar the persistence of this pitman's son to realise his life's ambition.

I happen to know that at this moment his position is greater than it was before and that he has regularised his position as a medical man in a certain South American Republic. Good luck to him.

CHAPTER XII

THE DRUG ADDICT

ONE of the many misapprehensions under which the public labour, and one which is certainly no less profound than it is widespread, is that the calling of a private detective savours of the drab in the extreme—a bleak monotony of watching for divorce evidence and petty “spying” for people who are not honest or courageous enough to go straight to the police with their business.

No greater mistake could be made. Strange indeed are the episodes which crop up in the life of a high-class private detective and dramatic are many of the tales unfolded to him during his career.

The stories related are often the last thing in human tragedy. Sometimes the tales are of love dramas that lead to disinheritance or the Divorce Courts; of lives ruined by blackmail and roguery; of the fascinating adventurers and adventuresses who thrive in the gay world of fashionable society.

Also it often happens, incidentally, that the good-class private detective may have to adopt more rôles in the course of a single year than many a popular character in fiction is obliged to fill in a whole lifetime.

In my many years' career as a criminal detective, secret service agent, and private detective, I have assumed some extraordinary rôles and characters; but only once, I think, did I even enact the part of custodian or “faithful watchdog.”

To this isolated instance there is attached a romantic and remarkable true life story, the successful issue of which, from my point of view, I owe in no small measure to the loyal and intelligent co-operation of a London taxi-cab driver.

There is a young man, alive and well, in a certain part of the British Empire to-day who has much to thank me for. At the time my story opens he was a drug-addict; now, I am happy to say, after many months of careful nursing he has steadily regained his health and is proving an honour and credit to the name he bears.

For the purpose of this story I shall term him Major Lorraine, although that is not the name by which he is known in English society. No matter. Suffice it to say he is connected by marriage to a well-known Scottish family.

Young Major Lorraine was a fine up-standing fellow when

he went to India with his cavalry regiment just after the Great War. He was keen as mustard on soldiering, and was determined to make a big name for himself as a soldier.

But destiny decreed otherwise. Fond of all manner of sports, the Major was taking part in the cavalry pastime of tent-pegging preparatory to a forthcoming regimental "gymkana," when his mount, a new one, jibbed suddenly and sent him crashing to the earth.

That fall had far-reaching consequences. In the hospital this robust young man failed to progress towards recovery. He was suffering from concussion and severe nervous shock, and it was eventually decided that his condition was such that he should be sent home to England without delay.

He was accordingly invalided out of the service and returned to London, where he was met by his sister, a celebrated Society girl. She was full of solicitude for the "crooked" youngster, and at once took him off to her house in the country. But the thought of having to forgo the military career which he had always cherished so greatly was ever present in the young man's mind, and despite all the best endeavours of his sister, he developed into a taciturn fellow with whom no one could get along.

Months wore on, and then the girl began to suspect that her brother was drinking too heavily. She did not know that he was taking drugs as well. But always when she made some excuse to come and stay with him for a week at his flat—for by this time Major Lorraine had returned to London—Miss Lorraine would go off quite satisfied that the rumours which reached her continually were baseless.

Now Major Lorraine was neither a drinker nor "drug-taker" by inclination, only he seemed unable to resist the temptation of engaging in a perfect orgy of dissipation once a certain mood overcame him.

Thus it was that about every six weeks or so he would disappear from his flat and not return until after a week or an even longer period had elapsed, when he would creep back to his rooms haggard and ill-looking. It was owing to an entirely fortuitous circumstance that this young man's sister was at last able to realise the true state of affairs. Both had been left considerable wealth, but by an express instruction in one of the clauses of their father's will, they had a joint title to the same money; that is to say, there was one account

between the two, and they were willed to share a large income jointly and equally.

The family solicitors, a well-known firm of society lawyers not many hundred yards from the Law Courts, were in the habit of sending a friendly letter on occasions when either appeared to be drawing money excessively.

Major Lorraine had not proved what could be termed extravagant while he was in the Indian Army. But when he returned to London a change took place in his affairs, so much so, that the solicitors invited his sister to their office for a frank discussion.

There Miss Lorraine was shown a number of cheques for sums ranging from £100 to £250 running in all to a sum total of about two thousand pounds. They were all of recent date and there was no doubt that Lorraine had signed them, although it was noticeable that his signature appeared to be slightly less resolute than usual.

All were open cheques payable to M. A. Starmer, and it had attracted the attention of the solicitors that the handwriting in each case appeared to be similar: more than that, it appeared to be a woman's caligraphy in each case.

All this was somewhat mysterious and inexplicable. The solicitors had asked Lorraine, but he had merely replied that the sums represented some gambling debts. He refused to say another word about the matter. The solicitors had a few enquiries made on their own account, then came to the conclusion that Miss Lorraine had better be apprised of the position.

She was alarmed when she heard from the two partners in this legal firm how her brother was steadily going to the dogs, and when they put forward a certain suggestion she at once acceded to it. The suggestion was that I should be called in to act as watch-dog over her brother and to see that he came to no harm.

I had already carried out a good many intricate commissions of a very private and confidential nature—in fact I had been all over Europe for this well-known firm, from time to time, on most important matters and thus I was well known to them. I received a carefully couched letter one morning and by three o'clock in the afternoon I was in full possession of the facts, had my duties outlined to me and had been introduced to Major Lorraine.

When first I learned what it was I was expected to do, I foresaw trouble with the man. I was especially gratified therefore to discover that he was in one of his normal moods and heartily entered into the scheme. In fact he looked upon it more or less as a joke. He was perfectly blunt to me about his failings and said: "You'll find I'm all right for weeks at a stretch. But don't allow yourself to think I'm going to stay all right. The more normal I appear the more you'd better keep your eyes open. When I go off, I go suddenly. And then I'm not responsible for myself. There's nothing really of the Jekyll and Hyde about me. I suppose it is just my nerves. They went wrong after my crash in India."

The manner in which he took my surveillance made things so much easier for me, since I felt it would be distasteful carrying out my duties without his consent.

I actually commenced my duties that same day. I found Lorraine to be a very handsome and charming man, well read and sociable, and for at least two weeks we wandered about together. One day we would go to some races, and another meeting for a car run in the country. Always when he met friends I was introduced as "Woodhall, an old pal." There was nothing savouring of patronage about him. Lorraine promised his sister that he would do his uttermost not to give way when his abnormal fits came over him. With my companionship I got him over his first spell and I had been acting the part of guardian for more than a month without any outbreak on his part, when the solicitors informed me by letter that they thought I should relax my vigilance since Lorraine appeared to be pulling himself together again.

Accordingly I arranged to call every two days at his place and have a chat with him and generally try to form an idea as to how he was getting on. Throughout this time, too, I should mention, he was under treatment by a well-known Harley Street specialist who has probably handled more cases of drug-taking than any man in London. He was doing this work at a disadvantage since Lorraine resolutely refused to enter a nursing home, preferring to be free.

I was on the point of making one of my periodical calls at his flat in St. James's when the telephone bell in my office shrilled. When I placed the receiver to my ear I heard the agitated voice of one of the solicitor partners.

“What have you been doing?” he exclaimed. “Young Lorraine has disappeared again!”

At once I was on the alert. I had not expected this, since the day I had last seen him he appeared to be perfectly normal.

“Well, you can’t blame me very well,” I replied. “It was on your own suggestion that I adopted the practice of calling at his flat every two days only.”

“Never mind that; get ahead and find him, Woodhall. Bring him back at once. Whether he likes it or not he’s going to be sent to a nursing home this time. That young man is going to kill himself. I’ve been talking to Professor F—— and he declares that there will be no hope for him unless he is put under restraint at once.”

With that the solicitor rang off.

I proceeded at once by taxi to Lorraine’s flat, which was one of a number in a fashionable block. The house porter supplied me with the information that two days previously, not long after I had left in fact, a lady had called up my man on the telephone. Soon after that Lorraine had departed. He had not returned nor had been seen since.

What was I to do? I had no clues and the matter was urgent, even critical if the Professor were to be believed. I knew most of the clubs, restaurants, and theatres which he frequented, so I decided to make a round of them first.

By ten o’clock that night I had gathered one scrap of information, namely, that Lorraine had been to the Criterion Restaurant with a very pretty and fashionably-dressed woman. The attendant at the entrance recalled the visit of Lorraine, whom he knew very well by sight, and added that he recognised the lady as one whom he had seen before. Where that was he could not remember.

I persisted in questioning this attendant about the lady and succeeded in obtaining a very meagre description of her. She was inclined to be foreign-looking in appearance, wore large drop ear-rings and had a head of very frizzy black hair, cut fairly short. She was about five feet six inches in height, slim, and had rather long narrow feet. The man recollected this latter fact since his eyes had been drawn to a particularly beautiful pair of gold-brocaded evening shoes the woman had worn that night.

It was not much of a description, I knew, but it was better

than nothing. The attendant could not tell me to what class this woman friend belonged. "From her clothes and the way she carried herself," was all I could glean, "she was quite accustomed to good society."

As a last resort I exclaimed: "Did they leave on foot?"

"Oh no, sir, they left by taxi. It took me a time to get it for them."

For the moment I realised that at last there was a small clue in my possession. Tiny, I admit, in fact, infinitesimal in its certainty—but a clue, nevertheless.

"I suppose you know the number?" I asked.

"Oh! I'm sorry sir, that's beyond me; why, I'd have my time cut out on this job if I took all the numbers of taxi-cabs that arrive and depart from this place."

"Yes, you're right, quite right," I replied. "But I only asked in quite a natural way."

"That's all right, sir, I perfectly appreciate your point of view and I'm only sorry that I can't assist you."

With this remark the attendant turned away as a rush of arriving patrons engaged his attention.

Time, however, was on my side and I decided to question him when the opportunity was more appropriate to the occasion on hand.

Presently the rush died down and I had another chance to speak to my be-medalled friend in gold and red. This time, however, I was determined to arouse his interest, so I handed him my card.

Looking down at it the man grasped the significance of my questions, at the same time placing it in his pocket.

"I take it, sir, you are anxious to find the lady."

"Ah!—that may or may not be," I answered. "If by finding the lady I can trace the gentleman—well, you're right. But it's the gentleman I'm mainly concerned about; the lady—well, she's of secondary consideration."

At this moment there was another rush of in and out-going patrons and the attendant's attention was once again occupied with his duties, but when he was free I again, as it were, returned to the fray. Placing a Treasury note in his willing hand I asked the following questions, both, to my surprise, being answered in the affirmative.

"I presume you know the gentleman I am alluding to, and whom I am anxious to trace."

" Yes, sir, I do ; he's Major Lorraine ? "

" And I reckon you are also acquainted with the taxi-cab driver.

" Well, sir, I'm not acquainted with him, but I know the man by sight. He's a ' regular ' round here."

" 'Er, do you think he'll be here to-night ? " I nonchalantly asked.

" Oh ! it's quite possible. He's a smart fellow, sir ! Should imagine by his style and general appearance, also the way he speaks, that he's a man who has seen better days. He drives a ' Beardmore ' and the outfit is as smart as can be seen on the streets of London. In fact the gentleman whom you are seeking was very partial to him because I've often noticed he had come here with his cab by arrangement to meet Major Lorraine.

I leaned back against the door to digest this piece of information. With a little luck I should be able to trace this particular taxi-driver. I remembered Lorraine telling me of a certain taxi-cab driver whom he rather liked, and upon one occasion I saw him draw up at his flat and pay off a taxi-man, saying to me as I met him at the entrance : " Here's a good man, Woodhall, if ever you want a reliable driver."

Recalling the incident I asked the attendant to describe the taxi-cab driver, and as he did so, I realised that undoubtedly by the description given he was one and the same man.

But how was I to find him, that was my dilemma ?

To search London for a smart licensed man driving a ' Beardmore ' was a proposition that I realised might take months' and months' of patient work, and even then not be successful, so I decided to adopt the course of keeping observation in the vestibule of the Criterion Restaurant.

Fate, however, then took a move in my game and without doubt settled the issue.

An exclamation on the part of the attendant brought me from the realms of soliloquy to earth.

" Here he is, sir, that's the taxi-driver ! He's just being paid off by those people coming in now."

Immediately I was on the alert and one glance was sufficient to show the attendant was right, and further that the man in question was identical with that particular driver whom I had seen only for a few moments some weeks previous.

As his departing fares left the cab I entered, and told him to drive to Lorraine's block of flats.

As we were driving to the flat I decided upon a line of action and upon alighting I put my project into action.

"Oh, driver!" I said, "I've been searching London for you!"

The man stared incredulously. "Indeed, sir, and for what reason?"

"Well, before I answer that question I would like you to answer mine which will then give you the reason why I have been searching for you."

"Fire away, sir!"

"Right! Do you know Major Lorraine?"

Promptly came the answer: "Yes, sir. I know him well, a perfect gentleman in every respect."

"Good!" I answered. "I'm an intimate friend of his, and am anxious to trace his present whereabouts," and with that I handed him my card.

Reading it by the light of his meter lamp, he turned to me and said: "If there's anything I can do to help Major Lorraine, I'll do it—but if it's not in the Major's interests, I tell you candidly, I am suffering from loss of memory!"

Looking at him I reflected that I liked this good-looking, bright-eyed London taxi-driver, and decided then and there to take him into my complete confidence. I am glad I did so, for had it not been for him I am doubtful if I should ever have been successful in tracing the missing man. I have found by long experience that if one talks "straight" with the average London taxi-driver, he's as easy to handle as the next. But let him have the slightest inkling you are using him for your own interests, or more familiarly "telling him the tale," and he's the toughest proposition you can come up against.

In a few moments I had explained the whole position, and with a sympathetic but intelligent gesture he said: "Well, sir, as willing as I am, I don't think I can be of much help."

"Never mind, let me be the best judge of that," I answered.

"Well, the last time I drove him I took him and a lady to Maida Vale, but the exact address I cannot for the moment recall."

"Do you think you could remember it if we drive there now?"

"It's possible, sir; in any case I could give you a good idea, and that perhaps might be of some help."

Thanking him I re-entered the cab and off we bowled in our dash to find my delinquent patient.

Presently my driver friend pulled up, and coming to the window, said: "Do you know, it's somewhere here, but exactly which entrance I couldn't tell you."

Pulling out my watch I observed it wanted about twenty minutes to one in the morning and that the neighbourhood in and around Sutherland Avenue was not an ideal one at that hour for making an exhaustive enquiry, so I decided to postpone operations until the following day.

The next morning at nine-thirty by arrangement I met my taxi-driver friend and he drove me to the offices of Lorraine's solicitors, where I was destined to receive another shock. A cheque for £150 payable to "M. A. Starmer" had gone through the London County & Westminster and Parr's Bank at their Piccadilly Branch the previous day.

It had been signed by Lorraine and endorsed in the same feminine hand as previously.

The dark lady with the shingled hair and drop ear-rings was obviously busy again!

I listened to the expostulations of the two family solicitors—and without stating to them my plans swore to myself I would have Lorraine safely in my custody before another day had passed.

I was relying upon my taxi-driver's information of the previous night. Once outside, I directed my new-found colleague to drive to the vicinity of Maida Vale, and having arrived at our destination I commenced at once my investigations.

From a *Kelly's London Directory* we procured the names of all the estate agents likely to deal with flats in that area upon which we were concentrating. One by one, I called on them. There was just a chance—and a sporting chance, that if Lorraine had rented a flat he would have taken it in his own name. That being so, he would pay the rent in advance, by cheque. I staked all on this possibility . . . and won.

A private detective, particularly one who has graduated through the ranks of the greatest police force in the world, knows much about the "under-world," and from my enquiries, briefly made, I recognised in Lorraine's female companion a one-time associate of West End "confidence men."

The puzzling part was how was it that Lorraine should be so friendly with a person of this type.

Reflecting on the woman whom I suspected, I admitted to myself that her style, prepossessing appearance and charm of manner had evidently been too much for the young man, morally weakened as he was by the influence of drugs.

In this conjecture I was right, as will be seen before my story concludes.

After about a score of enquiries I learned that a Major and Mrs. Lorraine had taken a furnished flat in Sutherland Avenue.

In fact it was at the exact place where my taxi-driver had taken me in the early hours of the morning.

"I knew I was right, Mr. Woodhall, but the exact number I was not sure about."

"Never mind, old chap, we've got him, so this is the programme. I'm going up—I'm taking a risk, mind you. Are you 'game' to come up with me? There may be trouble, and I don't want you drawn into this affair if you would rather keep in the background."

"That's all right," he replied. "I'm with you, and if there's any trouble, I'm your man."

I shook his hand, and we entered the block of flats together. The flat was on the second floor. I rang the bell. No answer. I rang and knocked this time.

The door opened a few inches and a woman's face looked at me.

I lifted my hat.

"Good morning," I said, at the same time thrusting the toe of my right shoe forward so that there would be no possibility of the door being slammed in my face.

"May I and my friend come in?"

"Who are you?" came the reply indignantly. "How dare you. Please remove your foot."

For answer I pressed my shoulder against the door. In another moment I was inside.

As the woman spoke I had recognised in her beautiful features the woman whom I had mentally noted since first her description had been given to me.

I had recognised her for what she was, one of the most accomplished "decoy women" of a notorious West End gang of blackmailers and society pests, now happily broken up.

"So you're Mrs. Lorraine," I countered. "Well, let me tell you I'm here to see Major Lorraine, and what's more the Major is leaving with me. He'll tell you who I am, when he sees me."

I could see she was rather taken aback at that, but in a moment her composure was regained.

"Since you're in now, I suppose you'll stay in," she snapped at me. "But remember that I'm the affianced wife of Major Lorraine."

I laughed. Purposely. Little did she know that I was perfectly aware of her antecedents and her exact position in regard to matrimony.

That enraged her

"Very well. I see you don't believe me. You'd better come and see Major Lorraine himself.

This was exactly what I wanted. So requesting my friend to wait in the hall I rejoined: "Yes, you might please lead me to Major Lorraine."

And without another word she led the way. I followed her into a very artistically furnished bedroom.

There in bed lay Major Lorraine. But what an altered man he was! Pale and haggard, with bright hectic daubs on his cheeks and fiery eyes, he looked as though he were in a serious stage of fever. By his side I saw a half-empty whisky bottle.

He was very weak and ill but nevertheless recognised me.

"Hello, Woodhall," he said in a faint tone. That was all.

I told him not to speak. I feared he might break down in strength altogether. All too well did I realise the diabolical plot of which he had been the victim. I turned to the woman sternly and then—who should come into the room but the very man I was most anxious to have near us!

"What's your idea," he commenced, somewhat truculently. "What are you butting in here for? Don't you know that the Major is engaged to be married to this lady?"

I waited a moment, quite sure of my ground. I had seen this man before and I knew his criminal record.

"Really?" I queried mildly. "Then when were you divorced? When did you disencumber yourself of 'Maisie,' whom you married in 1916, when you were living on the proceeds of the robbery at ——'s jewellery shop in South

266 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

Kingsington and for which you were sent to prison for three years?"

His bluster was of no avail. I always knew Fred Starmer, blackmailer, adventurer, and common thief, for what he was. He subsided like a pricked bubble. Maisie tried to make a scene. I rudely interrupted that.

Fortunately there was a telephone in the flat. I 'phoned the solicitors at once. They agreed to have a doctor sent to the address post haste in order to take Lorraine off in my taxi-cab to a nursing home. I urged upon them the need for hurry since I could see he was in a more or less precarious condition.

Although I did not believe there would be any police action taken, I nevertheless warned Maisie and her husband that if Lorraine died they would be held responsible. I succeeded in making them more frightened than one would have believed. The result was that Maisie actually produced and handed over to me a cheque for £100 which Lorraine had not long signed.

I could see there was something else troubling them, but they would not divulge what it was. After we had seen Lorraine to a nursing home I discovered from the solicitors that negotiations had been commenced for an insurance of £5000 on the life of Major Lorraine. Maisie had engineered this in conjunction with her husband. Had it not been for my timely intervention—thanks to the assistance of the taxi-cab driver, there is little doubt that the young man who to-day looks upon both of us as friends would have passed over the Great Divide to the enrichment of two of London's worst crooks.

It was obvious from the discoveries we made later that Lorraine had been inveigled by this dark woman with the frizzy hair for one purpose only. She and her husband through one or other of the channels which crooks use, had learned that he was giving way to dope and drink. They had decided to make the fullest use of their discovery. Once Lorraine had become enamoured of Maisie she had kept him in a state of semi-consciousness until he yielded to her pressure and wrote out cheques payable to anyone who cared to endorse them.

They had had more than a thousand pounds from him when I cut short their little game. To this day I wonder whether,

if the insurance policy had gone through, they would, have encompassed young Lorraine's end. I still wonder, but Lorraine himself is certain.

"I owe you both my life," he said.

It is possible—perhaps he did !

CHAPTER XIII

THE DUEL

IN a street off the Strand, there is a firm of solicitors for whom I have undertaken several important commissions. Numbered among the numerous clients of this fine firm are some of the richest and most distinguished people in the country.

When the necessity arises among members of the legal profession to call in outside expert assistance, the selection of their private men for confidential work is chosen with great discernment—nobody is ever employed by them unless they satisfy every requirement as to training, experience and integrity.

It has, upon occasions, been my unique privilege to work for this firm upon various foreign enquiries, and their transactions with me have left an indelible impression of unfailing courtesy and generous treatment.

I have generally made it a practice—unless receiving strict instruction to the contrary—to apprise the other people of my connection that I am proceeding abroad, my object for this being based purely on economical grounds.

An enquiry in Paris, Rome, or Vienna may be wanted, but possibly the party or parties concerned would not deem it worth while to incur the expense of a special trip.

Upon this particular occasion I rang up a man who some time previously had told me about a business trouble he had in Belgrade. So having told him I was passing through Serbia, he at once asked me to come and see him.

Now here comes the most unique and romantic thing I have ever known, and I recount it, as near as possible, to his own words.

“Woodhall,” he said, “I am going to tell you a very peculiar thing and it’s up to you to refuse or help me.

“As you know, my wife is Serbian and comes of a very old family.

“For some time past she had been receiving letters from a man in Belgrade, who was a former sweetheart. She has told me all and I believe her implicitly when she tells me that never at any time was there anything between her and him but ordinary courtship and that being of neighbouring families they were constantly thrown together for several years.

"Her brother is an officer of considerable rank in the Serbian Army and her erstwhile lover threatens that unless she sends him a sum of money he will inform me of her past. Also that if that does not evoke any response from her he will belittle her name among the people in Serbian circles in which her brother moves.

"Unhappily, he has letters which, if constructed in the wrong way by any evilly-disposed person, might possibly reflect on her brother's reputation. Such is the way of the world, Woodhall—as you know." I agreed with him.

"In this country it is blackmail," I said.

"Admitted!" he answered. "But he is not in this country, otherwise I would deal with him and in a manner that any man would in the defence of his woman's good name," he replied grimly.

"Well!" I replied, after an awkward silence of about three or four minutes, "how can I help you, Mr. —"

"Why, in this way. Will you go to her brother, Major M., and deliver a note to him.

"That's all I want you to do. You will find him a charming man, and he speaks good English and very fluent French, so if he asks you any questions there will be no difficulty in explaining anything that he might wish to ask you."

I told him I would do so on my way back home—but that the primary concern was that of my employers, and that if the exigencies of their case demanded it, I might not be able to deliver it. It all depended upon the way their case developed.

"Very well," he said, "we'll leave it like that. If you can you will," he smiled. So we parted.

The next morning he saw me off at Victoria, giving into my care a heavily-weighted sealed letter.

I placed it in my attaché-case, shook hands and promised to wire him from Belgrade should the commission be fulfilled.

There, for the time, I must leave this affair and deal with the happenings of the first case that I had been sent upon.

Travelling overland, via Venice, Fiume, and Zagreb, I eventually arrived at the bleak, isolated terminus of Brod.

It was a cold night in November, and as I alighted with my kit-bag from the warm, comfortable travelling car, I could not help feeling a sense of loneliness as I saw the red rear lights of the Overland Express fade away into the dark.

I picked up my bag and walked towards a sort of verandah-

built shed, the windows of which I observed were dimly lighted.

My first acquaintance with Yugo-Slavian customs was in the form of a challenge from a person whom I took to be a soldier.

He spoke to me in a language I could not understand, and I replied in English, then French. Seeing this was of no avail I asked in my very best German if I might speak to the station-master.

He immediately turned round and beckoned me to follow him; knocking at a door he entered, closing it behind him. I guessed he wanted me to wait.

In a few seconds he opened the door again and beckoned me in. At a table sat several soldiers, while in the corner at another smaller one I observed one who by his dress was an officer. I asked him if he could speak English, but he made no reply. Then I spoke in French, to which he at once replied.

"You are English, Monsieur. You wish to go to Sarajevo. Possibly you are not aware that hostilities are still in progress in this part of the world."

Immediately it flashed upon me that here was a position that had not been foreseen.

Balkan wars are intermittent occurrences and unless they are of very serious dimension, secure little or no attention.

True, authentic papers like *The Times* report such things—but they are only of real concern to certain interested sections of society.

However, my officer friend turned out to be a very agreeable person.

He told one of his soldiers to take my bag and escorted me himself to a small hotel. Here he gave instructions, and within a few minutes the station-master came and was at once introduced. I talked in French to the officer, who, in turn, spoke in Serbian to the railway official.

"He is putting you into a special first-class compartment," the officer said smiling, "and your train leaves for Sarajevo at 1 a.m., so pray make yourself, in the meantime, as comfortable as you can because you have another good four hours of waiting."

During the time we were together I mentioned the name of the particular Serbian officer whom I was to see upon my return to Belgrade.

He at once expressed his pleasure at knowing him, and asked me if I knew him well. I said no, but that I hoped to have the pleasure of his acquaintance upon my return.

"Oh! you will find him a thoroughly good fellow, and a coming man in Serbian military circles."

This chance remark enhanced my popularity with the Transport Officer and by the time the little train was due to start, we were fast friends.

Upon my journey to Sarajevo I will not dwell. I only say that I should not care to do the journey again.

The distance is about two hundred miles and at four o'clock in the afternoon I arrived at my destination.

Sarajevo is a name known throughout the world. But I am doubtful if this primitive Balkan city knows many European visitors.

In 1921, my visit was looked upon as something unusual and they promptly took my passport from me.

I had been there about three days—and had achieved the commission upon which I was sent, and having made up my mind to return, went to see the police authorities about my passport.

During my sojourn I had made the acquaintance of a Serbian journalist who was visiting the place from Belgrade, in view of the hostilities then in progress against Albania.

He showed me around the city, introduced me to many Yugo-Slavian and Turkish people of importance, showed me the exact spot where the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated; the house of one of the assassins; also the graves of eleven innocent prominent Sarajevo citizens, who, according to local history, were shot by the Austrians as reprisals for the crime.

This and much more I saw which, for the purpose of this story, need not be dwelt on at too much length.

As I said, I went to claim my passport and obtain the visa necessary to pass back through the zone of the armies of the Yugo-Slavian Field Forces.

Not that I cared a hang, and after all it was no fault of mine if the railway ran through the scene of military operations.

However, the Commissioner of Police thought differently. He wanted to know tersely—What brought me to Sarajevo? Who I was exactly, and the precise nature of my business?

272 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

Unless I could explain he was afraid that he would have to detain me, etc. etc. All this was said through the medium of my journalist friend who was present.

I told my friend to inform him that I was an Englishman and had come on a visit. This was the worst thing I could have said, because it immediately suggested to the pseudo-Military Police Officer's mind that I was a spy.

My friend argued and stormed—but all to no avail—and I saw the official give a nod to two very well-equipped gendarmes.

Suddenly I thought of the Transport Control Officer at Brod.

I asked my friend to ring up Captain X., at Brod, who would answer any questions in respect of myself. It was a flash of bluff, but, as the confidence trickster said, "it came off."

At once the official demeanour changed. He motioned me to sit down and while he was getting on the 'phone, chatted away to the Serbian journalist.

Presently I heard him speaking and by his expression judged that it was satisfactory.

My friend turned to me and said: "Captain X. has told the Commissionaire that you are a very distinguished person, and that he is to give you every facility at his command on his, Captain X.'s, responsibility."

With a beaming smile the official signed my passport, turned to my interpreter and said something.

My friend then repeated it to me:

The Commissionaire offers a million pardons to the English gentleman and hopes he will forgive his apparent rudeness.

I smiled, and said: "Oh, don't mention it. I guessed there was a mistake—it's quite all right."

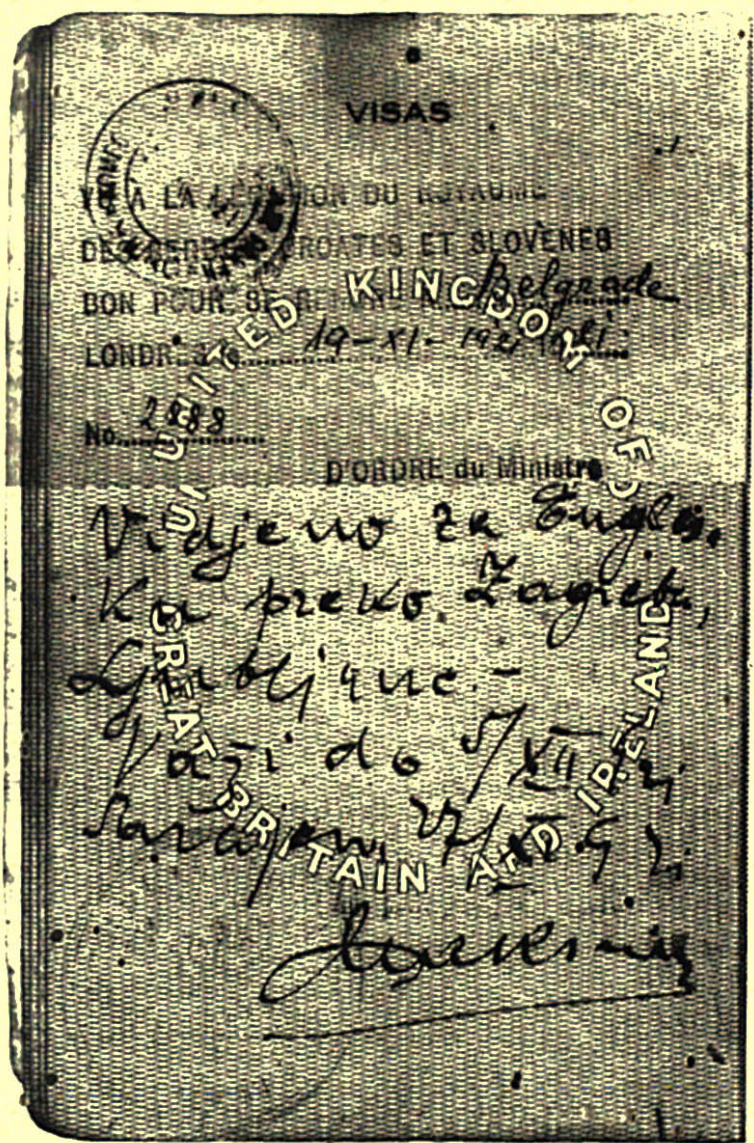
So smiling and inclining his head, the official rose from his chair, and bowed us out.

That ended my visit to Sarajevo.

My journalist friend told me they were on the look-out for some renegade American, who was at that time causing them a lot of trouble—and curiously enough I bore a striking resemblance to him.

Hence the suspicion—and possibly the correct thing on the part of the Sarajevian officer.

Had they detained me, it is difficult to conjecture what



THE AUTHOR'S PASSPORT TO SARAJEVO

THE DUEL

413

might have been my length of stay. Because in such remote parts of Europe they take very drastic steps sometimes.

However, all's well that ends well, and I once again congratulated myself on the luck which has stood by me through so many ticklish positions during my wandering and crowded life.

I will not dwell upon my journey back to Brod. Arriving there I alighted only to find my friend gone, but he had left word with his successor to give me every possible facility.

In due course I reached Belgrade and, after fixing up at a hotel, proceeded to look up the address upon the envelope in my attaché-case.

I did not have much difficulty in finding this gentleman who, immediately I made myself known, at once put me completely at ease by his charming manner and unfeigned hospitality.

I spoke of his brother-in-law, also of my courteous friend, the Serbian Transport Officer, and gave him their respective messages, the communication of which occasioned him undoubted pleasure.

After we had conversed for some time, I handed him the letter and as he settled down to read it I contented myself by watching his features.

The expression only changed to a slight lowering of his brows and a tight-set compression of the lips. Beyond that he gave no further sign.

After about ten minutes silence he looked up, and with a smile said :

"I guess by the purport of this letter that you, Monsieur, are more or less acquainted with this unhappy story."

I replied in the affirmative.

"Very well," he said. "In the meantime, while you are in this capital, pray consider me at your disposal, and if there is anything that I can do for you, I hope you will honour me by asking."

"Also, Monsieur, I shall no doubt want you to be present at a little morning interview that I shall have with this gentleman."

"In these parts of Europe, Monsieur—we have a way of settling these unpleasant and sordid affairs," and he smiled significantly.

"So, until I send for you at the interview, let us forget

the incident and make the short time that you have here in our capital as agreeable as possible."

The next two days I spent enjoying the sights and scenery of the turbulent Balkan city, and upon my return to the hotel on the evening of the second day found a message from the Major to the effect that he intended to telephone me in the evening about the proposed appointment.

About seven o'clock the message came through and I recognised the deep, cultured voice of the Serbian Major's voice as he said :

"Soon after day-break to-morrow morning two gentlemen will call for you in a car, and the gentleman referred to in my brother-in-law's letter will be interviewed." He added one or two conventional phrases and wished me good night.

An interview at day-break, I thought, surely that's about the limit! Still, I am hardened to surprises—but I was to have a greater surprise before my journey in Yugo-Slavia was terminated.

I slept soundly that night, and was awakened by a knocking at my door. Slipping on my dressing-gown I at once unlocked it, and to my surprise saw two military men whom by their long cloaks and military képis, I knew at once to be officers.

One craved my pardon in French, and asked if I was Monsieur Woodhall, the English friend of Major M. I replied, "Yes."

"Very well, we are sent to bring you along in our car to a place of assignation to settle an affair of honour."

I went cold for a minute. However, being in it I was not going to be considered a "quitter." One thing I was hoping as the car rushed through the cold, grey morning air was that they wouldn't want me to fight.

After about an hour's ride, the car arrived in front of a large house into the grounds of which we entered, and as it pulled up I perceived on a wide lawn, hidden by large bushes from the road a group of four or five men standing, some in uniform. It did not take me long to comprehend the seriousness of the situation.

As I came towards the group of waiting men, the Major beckoned me in his direction. Complying with his request I went towards him and shook hands, while over my shoulder he bowed to another man near him and said in French :



THE LATE ARCHDUKE FRANCIS FERDINAND AND HIS FAMILY

Taken two days prior to his assassination in Sarajevo, July, 1914

"This is the English gentleman who is acting as my messenger."

His opponent, the villain of the piece, bowed to me and said, "Bon jour, Monsieur."

I replied, with the same salutation, "Bon jour, Monsieur."

The Major then continued: "You have agreed on your word of honour as an officer, to hand me a sealed packet. Will you do so? The result of this affair will in no way affect our arrangement."

This I found out afterwards is what had happened. The Major, with another trusted friend, one of the seconds who had fetched me along in the car, had sought out the "black-mailer" and in the privacy of his room the Major had confronted him with his infamy.

After a stormy scene it had been arranged that the letters should be given to me and that only the sword could settle the thing finally.

The Major's second then handed me the sealed packet.

We all bowed to each other and the opponents' seconds then conferred as to the final arrangement.

Away from the group I could perceive another officer in uniform taking from a black attaché-case various things, which as they caught the glint of the morning sun, I knew to be surgical instruments.

I was asked to go and stand near him, a little away from the scene of the intended combat.

He was the doctor and I knew that before I left the place I was to witness something serious. I took another good look at the two opponents.

Both were fine-looking men and as they stood there bare-headed and coatless with the sleeves of their white shirts rolled up I could not help feeling a thrill of admiration for a code of honour which could only be satisfied by the sword.

The swords of both officers were tested, compared in length and bent by the respective seconds, while the two combatants in their knee-breeches and riding jack-boots cut, parried and thrust at imaginary enemies to get their sword arm in form.

At last the moment arrived and the two men took up their positions..

They faced each other in the early morning sun; a word of command and with a flash their blades met.

276 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

The details of the fight I will not describe, but within two or three minutes my friend, the Major, had achieved the desired result.

His antagonist, with blood welling from his right arm, dropped his sword and fell in a dead faint into the arms of his second. The Major, by a superb piece of swordsmanship, had severed at the wrist the sinews and artery of his opponent's sword-arm.

I remained on in Belgrade for another few days as the Major's guest and had the consolation of learning prior to my departure that his sister's "one-time lover" was making rapid recovery.

Just before the Simplon Orient Express left Belgrade the Major turned to me and handed me a small packet with the words :

"Here you are, my friend, give them to my worthy sister. Good luck !"

That was the last I saw of Major M.

Upon my return to London I reported to the client all that had transpired.

He expressed his pleasure, also his gratitude, and as I handed him the packet of letters I could not help feeling how very nearly that inanimate bundle had brought about a tragedy.

CHAPTER XIV

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE KIDNAPPED BABY

ONCE I became a kidnapper. I confess it without any blush of shame. A mother's love, if nothing else, urged me on to commit the crime, and I have since congratulated myself upon the manner in which I carried it out. But, as for that, I shall let my narrative speak for itself.

The late Chief Detective-Inspector Yeo, of Bow Street, who had, if I may say so, a somewhat high opinion of my abilities as a detective officer, was once good enough to recommend me to a certain legal firm who wished to employ an investigator on a rather curious case. I may say in passing that it was one of the great griefs of my life when this fine officer of the police, as the result of a heart attack, fell dead one day in the police station where he had endeared himself to so many of his colleagues.

A summary of the facts as given to me is as follows: Mrs. A. R. X— had been granted a separation order from her husband, Mr. W. A. X—, a very well-known City stock-broker and a man of wealth and social position; she had obtained by legal award the custody of their one child, a charming little girl named Marjorie. Mrs. X— prized her beautiful little daughter beyond anything in the world.

After the separation order Mrs. X— had taken a flat in Kensington and each morning her little daughter was taken to the Gardens by a nurse. One morning, as the nurse and her charge were walking along one of the drives, they were overtaken by a large motor-car from which a man suddenly alighted and, seizing the little girl in his arms, bore her into the car, which made off again at a great speed ere the bewildered nurse had grasped what was happening.

It so happened that at the moment of the abduction there was no one in the immediate vicinity, and the girl's screams therefore passed unnoticed; so, in haste and dismay, the nurse rushed back to her mistress's house where she tearfully told all that had occurred. She could not clearly describe the child's kidnapper, but, from the scant details she furnished, Mrs. X— was able to recognise in Marjorie's abductor her own husband!

The mother's first impulse in her alarm and indignation was to invoke police aid, but after some minutes' reflection

she decided against this course and resolved to consult her solicitors. Thus it was I received the summons I have mentioned.

At my interview with her solicitors I was told that at all costs the little girl must be brought back to Mrs. X—— safe and sound. I was, moreover, given a free hand in my enquiries and it was to be understood that while I should be substantially recompensed if I succeeded in my task, I was to accept full responsibility if I made any unfortunate move in my attempt to recover the child. In other words, if I blundered and got into the hands of the police, I must get out of the mess myself!

On the face of it, I could see that it would not be quite the simple matter it appeared at first to regain the stolen child, and early investigation proved this, for the very first snag I struck was when I called at the house in Richmond where Mr. X—— had been staying. I discovered he had been gone from there for some months, and was informed that “‘Mrs. X——’ had gone with him to some place in the country.”

There was no reason to doubt the information which had been given to me by the solicitors; then it was obvious that this lady who had been passing herself off as Mrs. X—— was some one else whose identity it would be my task to establish. I did not doubt that if I traced this mysterious “Mrs. X——,” I would automatically find the key to the problem of little Marjorie’s whereabouts.

X—— obviously had guessed the course his wife would pursue, and he kept out of the way with a skill I could not but admire. He had no desire, it was apparent, to be followed to the new home he had taken, and had covered his tracks with the greatest care.

However, undismayed, I set one of my men to watch the office in the city. For days we were without a clue as to his whereabouts. Some trusted member of his staff was obviously journeying to and from the office with instructions, but who that member was we were quite unable to discover.

All the while this was going on I had, of course, set afoot enquiries as to the identity of the lady.

I called upon Mrs. X—— and although she was reluctant, she at length agreed that her husband probably had a woman accomplice. She had challenged him about the existence of

this rival many months before, and, indeed, it was this intrigue which had led to their separation.

Mrs. X—— could not inform me of this woman's name; she thought her first name was Julie or Ruby, or something like that, and fancied she was an actress playing in a West-End theatre.

That was something, I reflected. Ten to one where I found the pseudo "Mrs. X——" there also would I find X——, and it now looked a simple enough matter to trace her.

Discreet enquiries made at the theatre in question showed that more than one of the ladies in the show were on intimate terms with members of the other sex, and it was therefore a case of weeding them out until we came to the right one. Fortunately, I was lucky almost at once, the second one to come under my notice proving to be the one I wished to trace. The man answered in every respect to X—— and the girl had been heard addressing him as "Arnie." X——'s middle name was Arnold.

I then put one of my best "shadows" on to watch the woman Ruby. She had a flat in town and spent half of each week there and the remainder in the country.

It was the country destination I wished to find, and I found it easily enough.

While sitting in my office one day, a 'phone call came through to me from a certain big store in the West End. It was from the man whom I had detailed to watch Ruby.

"I've trailed her to the toy department here," he said. "She's making purchases. What shall I do?"

"Follow her and if she takes the toys, find out where she is taking them. If they are being posted or delivered, find out the address. And don't leave her until she settles down somewhere."

The toys were plainly for little Marjorie.

Less than two hours later my man telephoned again giving me an address near Tunbridge Wells to which the toys were to be sent. He himself had followed the woman about shopping, and had at last trailed her to her flat, which he presumed she would not leave until her departure for the theatre. I may say here that the girl Ruby was understudying one of the principal parts in the show.

The following morning, therefore, one of my men and I

journeyed to Tunbridge Wells by an early train and found the address to which the toys had been despatched. It was a large house, approached by a winding carriage drive, and situated less than a mile out of Tunbridge Wells.

We hung around the place till close upon eleven o'clock, when I suddenly drew back into the shelter of a laurel bush, pulling my companion with me. We happened to be standing just inside the drive gates at the time.

The next moment a splendid Rolls-Royce car, driven by a coloured chauffeur, swept down the drive towards us. In it were a nurse and a footman, together with a pretty little girl—Marjorie, I saw at a glance—but there was no sign of X—himself. Reaching the gates, the car swung into the road and sped off in the opposite direction from the town.

For the next three days I had the house watched, and the same thing happened every day. In the morning, about eleven, and in the afternoon, about half-past three, the car went out with exactly the same people in it.

I puzzled my head to devise some way of getting hold of the kidnapped child. Force was, of course, out of the question, and in any case both the footman and the chauffeur were hefty fellows, probably dangerous in a scrap. So I felt it was a case which called for strategy.

And then the idea came to me. It was a flimsy enough plan, true, but I decided to risk its weaknesses and bank on it proving successful. I would, I decided, give X— Roland for his Oliver and turn child-stealer myself—and motor-thief into the bargain!

So it came about that at ten o'clock the following morning I saw with satisfaction a telegraph messenger cycling up the drive to X—'s house. Only ten minutes earlier I myself had carefully cut his telephone wire, and the telegram was one I had caused to be sent off in the name of Ruby. I read: "In great trouble; come and see me at once." My reason, of course, for severing the telephone wire was to prevent X—' phoning up and discovering from Ruby that some one was hoaxing him.

Close upon the return of the telegraph messenger came the purring of a motor, and from my place of concealment I next saw the luxurious Rolls-Royce, coming down the drive. As it passed me, my heart jumped with relief when I observed that X— was inside it, as well as the nurse and the little

girl, *but no footman!* I had conjectured aright. X¹— would not require the footman to accompany them to the station, as I had figured, and now with that massive specimen out of the way I was pretty confident the remainder of my plan would not miscarry.

No sooner had the car driven out of sight than another, a smaller one—a two-seater—drove along and stopped a few yards past the drive gates. From this second machine a well-dressed young man in flannels jumped out and, with a word to his lady companion, started to explore the engine anxiously.

No one for a moment would have associated the immaculately dressed young fellow as an assistant to a private detective. Yet such indeed he was, and while the part he had to play could have been enacted by the veriest amateur, it was nevertheless a most important part for the success of the scheme.

A few minutes passed. Then the big Rolls-Royce came into view, returning to the house after depositing its passengers at Tunbridge Wells Station. It could not, however, turn into the drive, for the disabled car lay across the road and practically blocked the entrance. From my place of concealment in the bushes I waited breathlessly.

The coloured driver did the expected thing and stopped his luxurious car when he saw another in apparent difficulties.

"Can I assist you, suh?" he queried, coming out of his seat and approaching my confederate.

"Perhaps you can. I don't know what's gone wrong with the bally engine," came the reply in well-simulated tones of annoyance. "Will you have a shot at it?"

The moment the unsuspecting Rolls-Royce chauffeur had leaned over the roadster's engine I was out of my hiding-place and into the seat he had vacated. The engine, of course, was still running, and, throwing in the clutch like lightning, I sped past the two-seater and was yards away before I heard the chauffeur's shout of dismay and anger. I opened her out at that, and, looking over my shoulder, had a glimpse of the fellow panting after me until he was engulfed in a cloud of dust.

Up till this moment the nursemaid inside the purloined car had been too scared to realise exactly what was happening. Now, however, she opened her mouth and emitted the most

piercing shriek I have ever heard. The fright her sudden scream gave me almost caused me to put the car off the narrow road.

Little Marjorie behaved like a brick, but of course, she couldn't realise what was afoot, and, child-like, probably thought it was all a game.

A mile away from the scene of the affair I perceived what I was looking for—another oncoming car, driven by one of my men with a woman seated in it.

I pulled up the Rolls-Royce, and the woman in the other car—Mrs. X——, stood up with a glad cry as she saw her little girl. In a moment the little child was in her mother's arms.

The nurse stood by, utterly bewildered. Turning to her, I told her to get into the other car, and made for the driving-seat myself. At first she flatly refused, and seemed about to go into hysterics; but a few words from Mrs. X—— calmed her down, and she did as she was instructed.

We drove almost up to the drive of the X——'s house, then stopped to allow the frightened nurse to alight, telling her to let the chauffeur know where he would find his car. And as we flashed past the gates I saw that my friend with the two-seater had evidently succeeded in remedying his engine "trouble." At any rate, he was nowhere to be seen!