

THE MELBOURNE MYSTERY

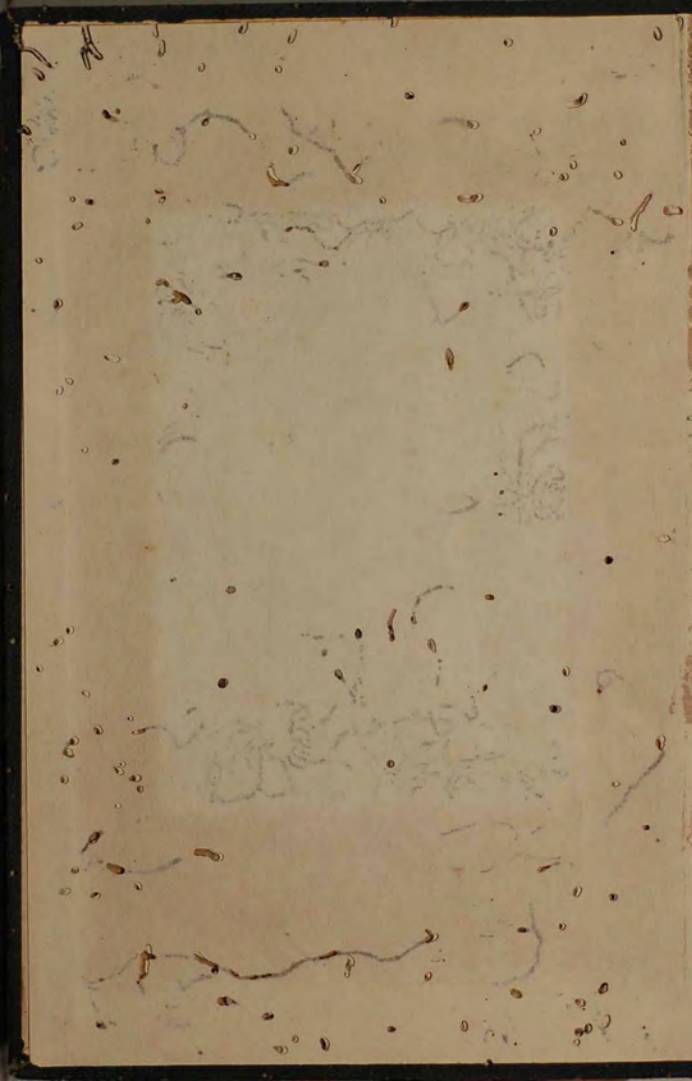




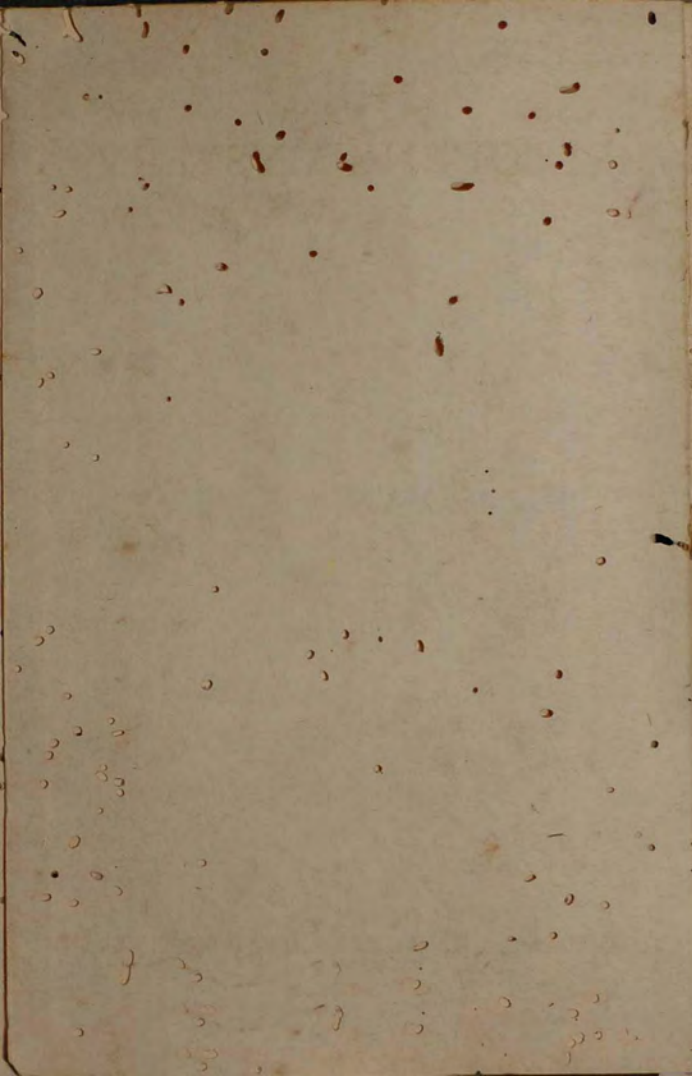
មេកាព ថាបពេកិ
វិសេស ភិវន្តិមេ

Fig 10m 328 W/E 350





THE MELBOURNE MYSTERY



THE
MELBOURNE MYSTERY

BY S. J. STUTLEY AND A. E. COPP

LONDON

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED

First published in 1929
COLONIAL EDITION.

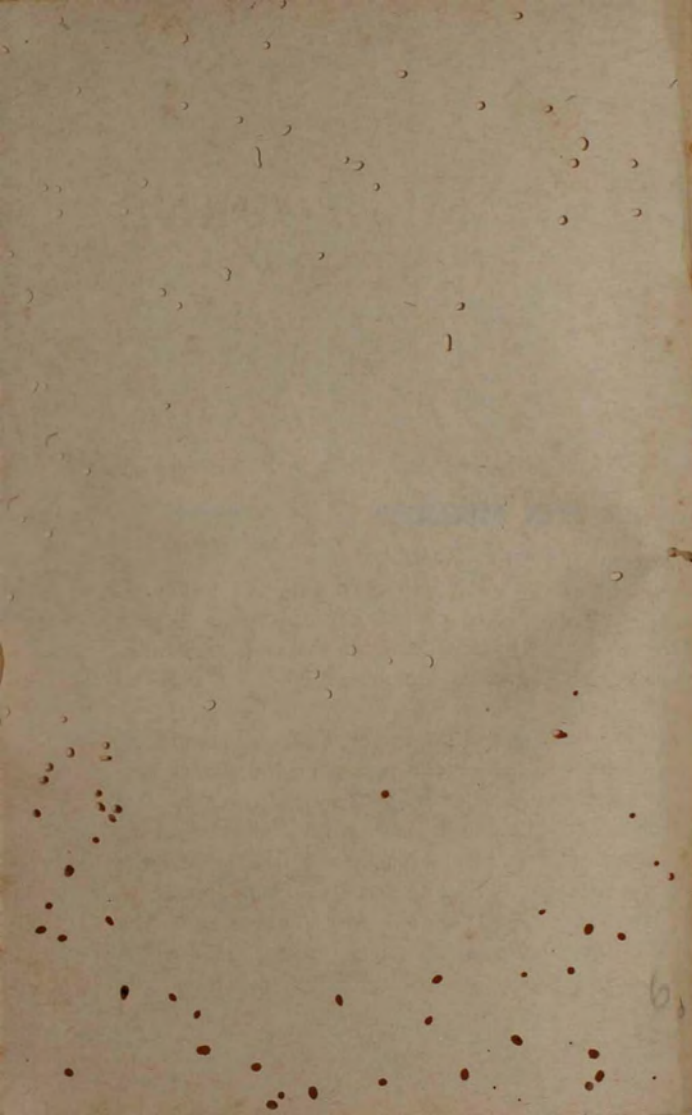
Printed in Great Britain at the Athenæum Printing Works, Redhill.

CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. SIR JOHN PALLISER | I |
| II. THE SECRET DOCUMENTS | 15 |
| III. WATCHERS IN THE NIGHT | 25 |
| IV. THE DANCE AT ARLINGTON | 41 |
| V. AN UNDERWORLD STRONGHOLD | 50 |
| VI. THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL | 75 |
| VII. THE DEATH OF SIR JOHN PALLISER.. | 87 |
| VIII. THE APPOINTMENT OF DETECTIVE TREVELYAN | III |
| IX. GATHERING UP THE CLUES | 134 |
| X. MURDER WILL OUT | 147 |
| XI. THE INVESTIGATION AT ARLINGTON .. | 157 |
| XII. UNEXPECTED ALLIES | 175 |
| XIII. THE READING OF THE WILL | 197 |
| XIV. THE OPENING DOORS | 205 |
| XV. AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR | 220 |
| XVI. DEATH STILL LURKS AT PALLISER HOUSE | 230 |
| XVII. WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT | 244 |
| XVIII. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF RUTH MADISON | 254 |
| XIX. KRAKOWSKI'S VICTORY AND DEFEAT .. | 272 |
| XX. THE RETURN OF SIR JOHN PALLISER .. | 291 |
| XXI. THE SECRET OF THE OPENING DOORS .. | 307 |



THE MELBOURNE MYSTERY



THE MELBOURNE MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

SIR JOHN PALLISER

SIR JOHN PALLISER, merchant prince and shipping magnate, had been unusually brusque all the morning. At the Melbourne Club, where he invariably lunched, his somewhat pompous bonhomie was proverbial, but to-day his manner was preoccupied almost to rudeness. Several times he had made an effort to shake off the depression that possessed him by examining the causes of it.

He knew it was not merely the scare-mongering headlines in the general press, and the dismal state of affairs as revealed in the financial columns, that disturbed him. With every turn of thought he was confronted by the disquieting fact that, for the first time in his life, he had been caught napping. He had allowed himself to be drawn into the perilous maelstrom of a trade boom, from which it might prove impossible for him to escape. It

was the uncertainty of what was yet to come that troubled him most.

Ugly rumours were about. It was being whispered that McCartney, the General Manager of the Anglo-Australian Bank, had committed suicide, and that several big houses were tottering. It might be his turn next. Then he straightened himself in his chair as he realized that he must not show the slightest concern—except for others—and he smiled at the irony of the thought. Merchants and financiers were like any other mob when it came to a panic, he reflected.

He drank his coffee, lit a cigar and rose to go, nodding cordially to several acquaintances as he passed out of the Club. His irritability betrayed itself, however, in his abstracted manner and the curtness with which he waved aside his chauffeur and signified his intention of walking back to his office.

“But wot time shall I call, sir?”

“Usual time, of course,” replied the magnate testily. “No, I forgot,” he added with deepening irritation, “I’ll be at the office late, I expect. Tell Jenkins to pack my bag for the week-end. You can bring it in with you. Come at a quarter to ten, but if I’m not out by ten you needn’t wait. In that case, leave my bag at the Club. Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir. Very good, sir,” said the chauffeur, saluting.

"And also, James, I shall be returning by Monday night's train—due in at 8.40. Wait for me near the centre clock; 8.40—do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir," was the mechanical reply accompanied by another equally unenthusiastic salute.

"The Old Man seems very crotchety to-day," he said to himself as he started the car. "In fact 'e's been a bit queer for several days," he added. "The old bloke's worried, I suppose."

John Palliser, still regarding himself as being in the prime of life, walked briskly as though to keep pace with his thoughts. Unlike his *confrères*, whose offices lay in the great blocks of buildings in "The Lane",* he preferred the quiet backwater of Collins Street East. There, on the fringe of the City's whirl, almost within stone's throw of its busy centre, he had chosen to control his vast interests. By some good fortune modernity had spared this corner. Shady elms still bordered the footpaths, and the one-time residences, Georgian in style for the most part, had retained their green shutters, their brass door knobs, their little strip of lawn. The only mundane sign about them was the array of door-plates of the medical specialists, gathered together, as though for self-protection, in this last quiet refuge of the City.

He frowned as he stepped off the pavement to

*Flinders Lane, the mercantile centre of Melbourne.

avoid the latest encroachment upon what he had come to regard as his domain. Next to his own offices too, he had thought in disgust when the new building was begun. Now it was practically completed. The painters were already at work on the great, gilded sign above the portico: THE DAILY WAIL.

"Damn the 'Daily Wail'!" he said to himself as he recalled the estimable paper's pessimistic leader of that very morning.

Set back from the alignment of the new building, his own with its narrow strip of lawn, seemed more than ever typical of a passing age. Two-storied, dignified, with the porch, mullioned windows and green shutters of the early colonial period, its mellowed stone seemed redolent of prosperity.

The great financier mounted the steps and passed through the fine old cedar double doors. He noticed, as he had done dozens of times before, how worn the doorstep had become, and as quickly and habitually dismissed the thought, as though reluctant to concede that the new must inevitably replace the old.

Pausing for a moment to tell the clerk at the inquiry desk that he was "not in" to anybody and must on no account be disturbed, he walked straight on through what had been the hall and had now become a corridor, past the front room on either side, used as the general offices of his staff, and turned into a room at the back and on

the right, which he reserved as his own private office.

A massive cedar door, steel backed, and screened by a heavy *portière* was the only entrance. Giving out on to a courtyard, a solitary mullioned window, on either side of which heavy curtains were drawn back, was also rendered burglar proof by a steel grille of Chinese design let into the masonry.

Whether viewed from Sir John's room or from a lounge chair out on the lawn on a summer afternoon, the courtyard was a pleasant enough place, with its shady plane tree, its shrubs and rockeries. It had privacy too, in the tall, blank wall of the new building on the left and the older, creeper-covered block that flanked it on the right. A high wall, also covered with creeper and with a postern gate opening on to a lane, gave an added air of seclusion.

On this afternoon workmen were busy painting the woodwork at the back of the building. They were quiet enough, however, as they had been cautioned to be if they wished to keep their jobs.

Sir John sat down at his desk and took some papers from a drawer and attempted to concentrate his thoughts on them. It was obvious that he was unsettled, for at times his glance would wander round the room and he would fall into a reverie.

His room was as unlike an office as it could be. It was rather, the sanctum of a wealthy collector of Chinese art. Several paintings on silk, centuries

old, adorned the walls. Even the curtains were of Chinese design hand-printed; the rugs, the furniture, with here and there a piece of rare porcelain or bronze or jade—all was Chinese. In one corner of the room a great bronze figure of Buddha was set on a solid concrete block faced with polished granite, on the front of which were carved three Chinese characters: "May all within thy House endure".

Ever since he had had the figure he had never questioned those words. He had come to take them for granted. Now it seemed as though there were some Oriental hint of mockery in them. Was the whole fabric of his universe sound? Would it stand the strain of the next few weeks, he asked himself. He stared musingly at the immutable figure of the Buddha, with its impassive, inscrutable expression, endowed with that air of eternal mystery by some long-forgotten genius of the world's most long-lived race. He could find no answer there for him. Only the mocking words seemed to re-echo: "May all *within* thy House endure". Was there some subtle meaning in them that he had missed?

John Palliser had spent twenty-five years in the East—chiefly in China—first in the Customs when Sir Robert Burchell had been Inspector-General. Perhaps he had not been as scrupulous as most—or so it had been whispered by jealous colleagues. Possibly a good deal of the opium that had been

confiscated and supposed to have been destroyed had found its way out of the country through his instrumentality, and to his consequent profit. Nor, so it had been said, had he failed to avail himself of that peculiar form of extortion, known in China as "squeeze",* irrespective of whether it is made by a rickshaw coolie out of a drunken sailor for a few cents, or by high officials out of taxation or misappropriation of army pay to the extent of a million dollars. In addition, many of his finest examples of Chinese art had come to him as "cumshaws".†

So cleverly had he managed his affairs, however, that nothing was ever sheeted home to him. Nevertheless, he had thought fit to retire shortly after the fall of the Manchu Dynasty, and following upon his unsuccessful attempt to smuggle the Imperial Seals—looted from the Winter Palace—out of the country. Through some weakness in the scheme the plot was discovered, but only at the eleventh hour. A scapegoat had been found. John Palliser's name had not of course been remotely connected with the affair, but he decided to tempt fate no further. He therefore retired from the Customs with a pension only insignificant compared with his accumulated, though ill-gotten, assets of several million dollars.

*A commission or rake-off, usually secretly appropriated as distinct from an acquisition in the form of a bribe.

†In its extreme sense it is a form of bribery in which a gift other than money is tendered. In its mildest sense it is a tip, baksheesh, alms.

He was loath to leave China. With his knowledge of its language and customs, his wide circle of political and commercial acquaintances, together with his wealth, it was an easy and congenial matter for him to acquire large interests in the shipping, banking and general commercial undertakings in Shanghai and elsewhere. Within a few years, Peking, Tientsin, Canton and Hongkong and all the principal outports began to feel the influence exerted by John Palliser under cover of this Company or that. Now and again he would have a set-back and lose a million dollars on exchange or as a result of one of the petty civil wars that were almost continually being waged, but on the whole wealth flowed steadily into his coffers.

Then came the death of his wife, and immediately after that the War. He realized that the great break in his life had come. He decided to go back to Australia, the place of his childhood and birth. He felt that he had had enough of money-making for a while. He told himself that he would relax, take things easy—perhaps go into Parliament, take more interest in social life, entertain. There could be no sustained relaxation for him in China. His environment had engendered in him a state of mind in which avarice, unscrupulousness and egotism were dominant. He found himself at the end of twenty-five years with only the social relationships which, for ulterior motives, it had suited him to preserve. Such a conception of

friendship, based, not on mutual attraction but only on his own selfish ambition, must inevitably have failed to satisfy him when put to the supreme test. In any case, the only people he really wanted to know seemed to keep him at a distance. With them his wealth availed him little. In Melbourne or Sydney things would be different. He would be a great man there.

Thus did John Palliser return to Australia. If he had not been generous before he certainly became so from the moment of his arrival. He donated a field ambulance, subscribed munificently to the Red Cross funds, and later placed his country home at the disposal of the returned convalescent soldiers, so that his knighthood came deservedly, according to general opinion.

And was it all for nothing, this making of fortunes, this gathering of honours and the esteem of men, John Palliser now asked himself. Would his fortune, like many another, be swallowed up in the maelstrom that was gathering with inconceivable force outside in the financial world? He knew well what typhoons were, how suddenly they sprang up, with what ruthless malignity they swept the safest harbour of unprepared craft and the high seas of all but the most skilful mariners. The words echoed again in his mind and this time they seemed to demand an answer: "*Shall all within thy House endure?*"

He thought of his dead wife, of his two boys.

It seemed, not twenty years ago, but only yesterday, that he and his wife, despairing of having a child of their own, had decided to adopt the baby which had been left on the steps of their house in Melbourne when they were on their first furlough from China. His wife had been so keen about the adoption that she had the more easily persuaded him, already half-reconciled as he was to such a compromise. The founding of a fortune seemed to him inevitably bound up with the founding of a family, but the thought that his own flesh and blood could never share in his triumphs had been a bitter disappointment to him. Still, he had felt that even an adopted son was better than none at all. They had advertised, offered a reward, in an endeavour to trace the child's parentage, but without success. All the information they had was the one word "Hugh" and the date—presumably of his birth—which appeared on the piece of paper that was found pinned to the child's clothes. Even the date was wrong, or the birth had not been registered, as inquiries in the proper quarter had shown. John Palliser had therefore insisted that the child should be brought up in entire ignorance of his adoption. There they had let the matter rest, shortly afterwards returning to China.

So the baby became Hugh Palliser, lovable as a child but difficult as he grew up, and latterly a source of worry. Why, it was only yesterday he had had a violent quarrel with the boy over gamb-

ling debts, he reflected. Was that partly the cause of his depression? He had almost forgotten it in hearing the bad news about McCartney. Of course he had been irritable and worried for days. Perhaps he should not have threatened to alter his will and cut the boy off with a shilling. Still, Hugh's losses were considerable. He had overlooked them before, but with the financial world toppling as it had been lately he might be excused for being nervy and losing his temper.

Then he thought of his son, Geoffrey, born two years after Hugh had been adopted. Strange how neither he nor his wife ever mentioned parting with Hugh when their own child came. He had refrained because of a superstitious fear, an unaccountable dread, that if they parted with Hugh they might lose Geoffrey. Now, if the worst came to the worst, the two boys would have to make their own way in the world the same as he had had to do. Only this was a new, more strenuous age. Even he felt un-at-home in it. The War seemed to have made such a difference everywhere. Not only had the frontiers of nations been altered out of all recognition but the old landmarks in finance, in commerce, in social life, seemed suddenly to have been swept away. No wonder he was losing his grip of things. He was beginning to feel old. The new generation, with its restless urge, had seemed literally to spring up, taking its place with a noisy assurance, so utterly different

from the imperceptible and leisurely manner that had characterized his generation. Moreover, neither Geoffrey nor Hugh seemed to regard him with that degree of affection and respect that he considered due to him. They, too, seemed to share the general flippancy and casualness of the age.

If only he had stayed in China, the world that he knew so well, instead of dabbling with things in a country that he did not understand! He would have been incredibly wealthy instead of being faced with ruin. He thought of the opportunities there even during the past few months with silver at treble its pre-war value. He knew that astute financiers on the spot were converting dollars into sterling as fast as the banks could negotiate the drafts, and were making fortunes out of it. Three and a half dollars to the pound instead of ten or twelve before the War! He almost groaned aloud at the thought of the chance he was missing. As for the drop—when it came, as it inevitably must, they would simply convert their sterling back into dollars at eight, ten or twelve to the pound, at whichever the market became stabilized. And here he was out of it all!

He suddenly started from his reverie. "Good God! What a fool I am!" he cried aloud in his excitement. "I'd almost forgotten it."

With an impatient movement he rose from his desk and switched on the light. Pausing momentarily, he turned to the door and bolted it, and

after drawing the window curtains close, went across to the Buddha. Placing a thumb against the right eye, he pressed firmly. Then he exerted all his strength and twisted the figure round and round. It rose gradually, revealing a cone with a screw thread. From this ingenious safe he drew a small, folded leather despatch-case. He sat down at his small writing-table near the window and took from the case a flimsy sheet of paper and opened it. It was covered with finely written Chinese characters, not the formal writing of general use, but the cursive hand that requires more than ordinary skill to read. Chinese scholar though he was, he knew that even he would need an hour or two to translate it properly. However, he had read enough of its contents, when he acquired it, to know that it might mean the realization of a great deal of ready money. If only it would make good his losses in the present financial crisis!

He instinctively put his hand to his pocket for his watch, only to recollect that he had sent it to be repaired that morning. He glanced at the clock on his desk. It was later than he had realized. All the staff must have gone an hour ago. He decided to leave the translation until after dinner.

Slipping the paper back into the wallet he went over to the Buddha and replaced it in the safe, screwing the figure round to its normal position.

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET DOCUMENTS

JOHN PALLISER, in no mood to meet acquaintances, decided not to dine at his Club but to go to the Hotel Cecil, where he could get a private room. As he walked on newsboys thrust papers at him, crying, "Terageddy! Terrible Terageddy! Bank Manager Shot! Piper!"

So then, it had come out, he reflected gloomily. Poor old McCartney! He was glad he held no Anglo-Australian Bank Shares. He mechanically put his hand to his pocket to buy a paper, and then checked himself. With an impatient gesture he waved an expectant boy aside. He had had enough bad news that day without wanting confirmation in print of the possibility of learning of further catastrophes. He would need all his concentrative powers, he reminded himself, if he were to finish the translation of the document that evening.

He swung into the quickly moving stream of humanity flowing towards Flinders Street Station, and battled his way through the cross-currents that were hurrying from Swanston Street. Little

did this scurrying mob realize, he reflected, how precarious its means of existence were at this time. Like so many ants rushing to and fro, they seemed to him; doing it all, no doubt, with monotonous regularity morning and night, month in and month out. They reminded him of the times when he had callously stepped upon an ant-hole, crunching it out of all recognition, killing dozens of ants and setting the survivors in a tumult of bewilderment. It seemed now as though Fate or Economic Law were ready to stamp upon the very structure that these human ants depended on for their livelihood. Still, only some would be crushed out of existence. Like the ants, there were always others who would laboriously reconstruct their devastated dwelling or build anew. He wondered, such was his gloomy mood, if he would be one of the crushed or one of the survivors and if he, at his age, would have the energy and courage to start afresh.

As he drew near the hotel his step quickened in anticipation of the quiet of a private room, the log fire, his favourite port, and the cigar—his best brand of Dutch—that would give the last soothing touch to his nerves. To his chagrin, however, his request was met by the most profuse apologies from the head waiter, who informed him that all the private rooms were engaged. He cursed himself for not having telephoned. Dissembling his irritation as best he could, he accepted the offer of

a corner table and the ministrations of his customary waiter, Saunders.

"I've no appetite to-night, Saunders, so you're on your mettle," he growled, pushing aside the menu which was handed to him.

"If you will leave it to me, Sir John," replied the waiter unctuously.

He presently reappeared with a glass filled with an amber liquid. "I think you'll find this more than a cocktail, sir. I've been experimenting for some time, and I venture to say that it's just about perfect now."

John Palliser sipped it with evident appreciation and began to take an interest in his *hors-d'œuvre*. The music of the orchestra, unnoticed before, seemed suddenly to flood his senses with exhilarating melody. The shaded lights, the flowers, the gay, crowded room became a new world. His depression, his vague forebodings, his irritability seemed momentarily to rise before him like evil genii, and then to vanish. It was as though a tremendous burden had suddenly been lifted from him. He felt a new man, capable of dealing with any problem. Life was wonderful.

Two guests, who had arrived soon after him and who sat at a table near, glanced in his direction and then whispered together for a moment or two.

Saunders glowed with pride as his patron complimented him on the concoction. He glowed also in anticipation of the extra tip which he had

no doubt would follow in due course. Then he made one of the slips of his life. It may have been to test the elixir, or it may have been that even a humble waiter, having been foolish enough to dabble in shares, was anxious to know the best or worst concerning them.

"Terrible news about Mr. McArthur of the Bank, Sir John," he observed by way of introducing the subject.

"Not McArthur, you mean McCartney, Saunders."

"No, sir, the papers say McArthur of the United Provincial."

"Good God!" John Palliser managed to ejaculate, staring incredulously at the waiter. Then, recovering himself, he added peremptorily, "Get me an evening paper: there must be some mistake!"

As the man left him, he suddenly recollected he had heard it was McCartney only from that deaf old ass Tidcombe at the Club. More than likely the old fool had got the name wrong.

Saunders appeared with the paper. He scanned the headlines. It was true enough. The heavy-faced type stared back at him:

TRAGIC DEATH OF HENRY McARTHUR.
GENERAL MANAGER UNITED PROVINCIAL
BANK COMMITS SUICIDE.
BANK SHARES DROP HEAVILY.

"Of course!" muttered Palliser to himself:

Saunders, observing his patron's consternation, and in his own anxiety, could not restrain himself.

"Hope it's not going to affect the Bank, sir," he cried. "I was told a few months ago that I'd be quite safe in buying those shares. I—I—put every penny of my savings into them, sir." His voice trembled.

"More fool you, Saunders," replied the magnate callously. "You shouldn't go dabbling in matters you don't understand. Anyhow," he added in a more conciliatory tone, "it's too soon to say what will happen; but, if the Bank does close its door, you can say a brief prayer for me. I stand to lose a quarter of a million! And now bring me a bottle of Veuve Clicquot. I don't want anything more to eat."

Saunders gaped in astonishment at the mention of the huge sum, mechanically repeating the order in an awe-struck whisper as he left.

He returned presently, bringing with him the bottle of champagne. "I have a message for you, sir," he said, handing Sir John a folded slip of paper. "It's from the two gentlemen over at the table near the window," and he nodded discreetly in their direction.

John Palliser unfolded the note, somewhat curious, despite his ill-humour, as to its purport. Evidently they knew his name, for it began:

TO SIR JOHN PALLISER.

The writer and his friend would be glad if you

would join them or permit them to join you to discuss a certain important matter which may prove to be of considerable advantage to you. The writer's *bona fides* will be tendered upon your compliance with this request.

He frowned as he finished reading the somewhat cryptic demand. He was half-inclined not to accede to it, although, on reflection, he decided that they were hardly likely to be crooks intent on defrauding him.

"Any answer, sir?" inquired Saunders, observing the magnate's indecision.

"Yes, ask the gentlemen to come over here."

The two strangers joined him and bowed stiffly. He motioned them to be seated.

"Sir John," began the taller of them, "this is Monsieur Paul de Fresnes of the Paris Prefecture, more recently of Shanghai. My name is Randall, Colonel Randall, and as far as the present matters are concerned I am here in the interests of Chang Tso Lin, the Governor of Manchuria."

John Palliser acknowledged the introductions with cold politeness and waited for further information from his guests.

"I will be as brief as possible, Sir John," said Colonel Randall, "and at all events, I do not think you will find the subject boring. Will you be good enough to cast your mind back to the night of June 16, six years ago? You were living

in Shanghai at the time. Your house, with its extensive grounds, was situated next to the French Consulate. You will recall that, owing to the lay-out of the grounds, the drive of both properties converged, and the main gates adjoined each other.

"The night was warm and you were seated alone on the piazza, smoking a cigar. (Forgive my detailed description, Sir John, but it is necessary in order to convince you of my *bona fides*.) Suddenly a Chinese messenger appeared, breathless with running, and gasped out, 'From Li Sung Huang. Guard well, Excellency.' The man disappeared as quickly as he had come. Soon after he was beaten almost to death, stripped, and left for dead not far from your gates. You may or may not remember so trivial a thing as the report of the finding of the body of a stray Chinese who had been beaten and robbed even of his clothes. He did not die, however, but he had been so ill-treated that he lost his memory. He disappeared—swallowed up amongst the million odd natives of Shanghai—until recently, when he recovered his memory.

"On that night of June 16 too, you will remember, and there can be no possibility that you will not, the French Consul and his guest, the French chargé d'affaires from Peking, were shot and the Consulate burned to the ground."

Sir John gravely nodded his head, but showed no other sign of emotion.

"Even now," continued Randall, "you are not unlike Monsieur René de Joinville, the chargé d'affaires. Six years ago there was probably still more resemblance. In the dark the messenger mistook not only the entrance to your grounds for that of the French Consulate, but you for the French Minister to whom he had been instructed to deliver the despatch-case. Owing to his having been followed, and fearing to wait, he trusted to his native wit to escape by climbing into the adjoining grounds, thinking them to belong to a private house. Instead of getting away from the danger zone, he emerged at practically the same spot as he had entered, and, moreover, from the Consulate gates where his pursuers expected him." Colonel Randall's face was grim and his tone had lost its conversational quality. "Where is that despatch-case and its contents, Sir John?"

Sir John had been listening attentively with head slightly bowed as though recalling the events that had been so vividly recounted. He looked up.

"A very interesting story, gentlemen, though somewhat depressing, like the times in which we are living," he commented sneeringly, and avoiding a direct reply to Randall's question. "I seem to remember, however, that your very kind message struck a brighter note, that you had something to discuss which might prove to be 'of considerable advantage' to me. Forgive me if I am dense. Certainly I am not at all myself this evening and

I am sure you will pardon me if I leave you. Allow me to give you my card. I am available by appointment if there should be anything of real importance that you might wish to place before me."

"Pardon, monsieur—Sir John, I should say," interrupted the Frenchman as Palliser rose from his seat. "Permit me"—and there was only the slightest trace of accent in this enunciation—"we sought you this afternoon and were informed that you were on no account to be disturbed, even though we stated that our business was of the utmost urgency."

John Palliser seated himself, recalling his very firm instructions, and knowing that there was no one who would risk disobeying him in the circumstances.

"Be brief then, Monsieur de Fresnes."

"Very good, Sir John," replied the latter. "The contents of that despatch-case were of great political importance six years ago; so much so, that their destruction was assumed to have been the reason for the burning of the French Consulate. To-day they are of still greater importance, owing to the new faction in China which is negotiating the sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway to the Soviet—which would mean, sooner or later, another world war. Only the production of those documents can prevent the transfer and bring about the downfall of the present party in power at Peking. We believe that those papers are still in

existence, and we mean to have them. But we are not the only ones who want them. Your life is not worth the flick of a finger if it becomes known to the Soviet's agents that you were the recipient of the despatch-case."

He paused a moment as though to emphasize the seriousness of his announcement, looking searchingly at the magnate for some sign that might betray him.

"We are going to have those papers, Sir John," he continued sternly, "but we are willing to pay for them. Our price is £100,000. If you attempt prevarication, or in any other way try to delay these negotiations, you may lose your life at the hands of our enemies—which, of course, will not help us. On the other hand, we may be able to help you in your decision by reminding you of your dealings with Kuo Ping Tang when he was Civil Governor of Honan, and you were Commissioner of Customs at Tsinan Fu. We have a most interesting, and incriminatingly complete, dossier of you, Sir John, which we should be glad to exchange, plus £100,000, for those despatches. Your life would also be out of danger, and no one need know how they came into our hands. Come, Sir John, you will not be foolish and obstinate about the matter."

"Gentlemen," replied John Palliser, frowning, "since you put it that way, I admit I received the despatch-case, but I know nothing of the docu-

ments you mention. They were not in the case when it reached me."

He spoke with apparent sincerity, and both his listeners were impressed; but, judging from their expression, by no means content to let the matter rest there.

"Perhaps you will be able to help us, then," suggested Colonel Randall, "by telling us what has become of the despatch-case. If you still have it, empty though it be, we are prepared to make you a substantial offer for it."

John Palliser remained silent for a moment or two. Then he replied with a tone of finality:

"I will consider your offer and will give you a reply at midnight at my Club. You will find the address on my card. That is my answer for the present. I hope it is agreeable to you. Au revoir, gentlemen."

Colonel Randall and his companion nodded curtly and Sir John left them.

CHAPTER III

WATCHERS IN THE NIGHT

“COME, de Fresnes,” said Randall directly John Palliser had left the dining-hall, “we must follow him. It’s a thousand to one that he’ll go straight to the place where he keeps the despatch-case. If he told us the truth it will be to make sure that he hasn’t overlooked the documents. If he lied to us it will be to re-examine them and to consider our offer.”

“Quite so, mon cher Randall,” rejoined de Fresnes as he followed the colonel to the lift. “It is, of course, remotely possible that they may have been stolen before he received the case, but I think it is more likely that they are secreted in the lining. You know the average Chinese diplomat’s craze for carrying out his delicate negotiations on that absurdly thin Chinese paper, which occupies next to nothing of space and gives not the slightest clue to its presence.”

They reached the hall and watched Sir John enter a taxi. In a moment their own car was following. As soon as they saw that he was making for his office, they turned off into Spring

Street and stopped near the alley that led through to the back of his courtyard.

"By Jove, de Frésnes, it's late enough—nife o'clock!" said Randall. "We were talking longer than I realized. Have you the key to the back gate?"

De Fresnes produced a bulky key from his great-coat. "Yes, I only got it finished this morning." He looked up at the sky. "This Melbourne weather in August is nearly as wet and cold as Paris in March," he added, shivering. "Still, it will be a good night for our work. I only hope the rain will hold off for another hour."

Half-way down the alley, Monsieur de Fresnes gripped his companion by the arm. They stood silent for a moment or two. "What's that peculiar humming sound, Randall?" he asked.

The colonel listened intently. A pulsating hum, punctuated by the faint staccato beat of machinery, sounded upon the air. "Must be in there," he said, pointing to the offices of the "Daily Wail." "I noticed workmen and scaffolding round at the front yesterday. I remember now—it's a newspaper office; that's the sound of the printing presses."

They reached the postern gate, which they quietly unlocked, relocking it from the inside. Pausing for a moment beneath the plane tree, they saw a chink of light between the window curtains of Palliser's office. They crept cautiously forward,

and after ascertaining that the back doors were locked, went to the window.

"I'll keep watch while you look, de Fresnes," said the colonel.

The Frenchman peered through the narrow margin that afforded the only means of spying upon John Palliser. He stayed there, gazing intently within. What he saw, however, appeared to be of sufficient importance to sustain his interest for what seemed hours to the colonel, alert for the sound of any other possible intruder.

At last de Fresnes straightened himself. "Yes, Randall," he whispered excitedly, "he has the case. He's seated at a small table quite near this window. The only light burning is a reading-lamp, so I couldn't see the rest of the room. There's a revolver on his desk. I saw him take a thin document, written in Chinese, from the case, but it's not the one we're after. Next he searched each of the pockets. Apparently they were empty, for he took a knife and ripped open the lining, and there, sure enough, were our papers. I could even see a line or two of the code."

With a thrill of satisfaction at the news, the colonel bent down and gazed within. He saw John Palliser sitting, with furrowed brow, staring at the documents which had so unexpectedly proved to be in his possession, as though deliberating upon the offer that had been made to him.

Could he be meditating an attempt to use their

offer as a basis for negotiations with the Soviet, to auction them to the highest bidder, the colonel wondered. This was hardly likely, he immediately reflected, seeing that their threat of exposure left him with no alternative. The papers would be in their hands at midnight, he felt sure.

As they turned to leave, they noticed the glow of lights at the windows of the first and second floors of the building across the alley, immediately at the rear of the courtyard.

"I wonder who occupies that place?" whispered de Fresnes. "It would have suited us as an observation post, although I should imagine this tree would block most of the view."

They skirted the wall of the newspaper office in order to avoid detection by any possible watcher, and stole through the postern gate and thence along the alley to their waiting car.

As they drove off Monsieur de Fresnes smiled expressively. "Ça va, mon cher Randall, n'est-ce pas?"

"Most decidedly," agreed the colonel, "or, as we would say, 'So far so good'."

Had they delayed leaving the courtyard a little longer they would have been surprised at the interest that was being manifested in John Palliser by the occupant of the building which had momentarily attracted their attention. They had hardly been gone five minutes when the first floor light dis-

appeared. Then the door was opened and a stout plank was thrust slowly and cautiously out from the landing until its further end rested securely on top of the courtyard wall. A moment later the figure of a man crept along the improvised gangway, hung a rope ladder from the projecting end of the plank, and lowered himself into the courtyard. With the same intense caution he made his way to the window and peered through the narrow aperture between the curtains. He could see a little bit of the iron grille that protected the window from within. With face held close to the glass he watched patiently.

John Palliser was still seated at the little writing-table. He had laid aside the enigmatic documents concerning which his self-invited guests at the hotel had been so eager, and was giving his attention to the other papers whose translation might mean so much to him. He took up the brief letter which had accompanied the document and which, unlike the latter, was easy enough for him to read, being written in the formal Chinese characters, without any abbreviation whatsoever. It was addressed "To His Excellency, the Great French Devil, de Joinville", asking him to hold the enclosed document in safe keeping and to see that it reached the writer's only son, then completing his education in Europe.

He put it down and proceeded to give all his attention to the translation of the main document, which he reckoned on turning to greater advantage

than those in code for which Colonel Randall and Monsieur de Fresnes could offer only £100,000. Bit by bit he got at the meaning of the difficult writing. Several times he took it up as though to get a better look at an obscure character. Only then did the watcher outside seem to betray any impatience at the inadequacy of his view. Presently he seemed to see something on the document that satisfied him. It was when Palliser, in holding it up, shifted his thumb lower down the paper and revealed a seal printed in red. Nearly three-quarters of an inch square, its strange assembly of lines seemed familiar to the watcher and to afford him some satisfaction.

John Palliser appeared to be succeeding with his translation more quickly than he had anticipated. The second page was merely the enumeration of a wealthy Chinaman's treasure. He knew that would not take long to decipher. It was the first page, however, that he was anxious to complete—precisely as to where that treasure had been hidden. The document had apparently been written in haste, yet it lacked nothing of the circumlocutory style that characterizes the Chinese nature. The most concise part seemed to lie in the heading: "Unto my son, Li Wan Chên".

Apart from the reason given for the sudden and secret disposal of all the family's portable wealth, there appeared to be no further reference to it, and certainly no clue as to its hiding-place—nothing but

exhortations to this "honourable and beloved son" to honour his ancestors and take a worthy place in due time in the affairs of his country.

Further along he read:

You are called to make the Sun of Wisdom shine; but as for me, worn out by age, I fear that I shall not see the day. For me there has only been the long journey and I have now only the wish to sleep.

John Palliser reached the last column, trembling with an excitement in which there was a shade of apprehension. Eagerly he translated:

In the early dawn the shadows are gathered about the tombs of thy ancestors: so have I set a place for thee above them.

There was nothing more! What had Li Sung Huang done with the stuff? John Palliser remembered well the *coup d'état* of Wu Pei Fu that had brought about Li's downfall and assassination. He had always got on well and had had many financial deals with that astute individual, though he had lost sight of him in later years when Li assumed Cabinet rank as Minister of Foreign Affairs. He had heard that Li's estates had been confiscated, and recalled the resultant outcry when it was discovered that his more negotiable wealth had been mysteriously dis-

posed of. Was there any significance in the closing words of this document that would be obvious to Li's son but of no import to an outsider? As far as he was concerned he could see none.

He pushed the papers from him in disgust, and stared with unseeing eyes before him. He felt desperate. All his earlier depression suddenly returned to him like a dank fog, chilling flesh and blood, clouding his brain, and insidiously sapping his will, his energy, and filling him with an indefinable dread. His hopes, so centred on that document and the acquisition of Li's enormous wealth, were now dashed to the ground. He wondered what had compelled McArthur to take his own life, whether it was the result of a sudden mood or the long drawn out agony of sleeplessness and depression. He wished for a moment that he had the courage. He stared at the revolver on his table for a few moments and then picked it up. How did men shoot themselves? He held it up to his temple, to his forehead, then at the back of his head.

The watcher at the window waited, every nerve tense, for the shot that seemed about to be fired. He moved from his cramped position and, in doing so, accidentally knocked against the window. John Palliser gave a start, and putting down the revolver got up from his chair. The figure at the window made a dash for the plane tree and thence to the ladder.

The intruder need not, however, have gone away

in such haste. The slight noise he had made was not the cause of Sir John's sudden movement. It was the unexpected sound of the buzzer of his "private" telephone — unexpected, because the number did not appear in the telephone book and was known only to the members of his family, his principal brokers, and one or two who might have occasion to ring him direct on business of an urgent nature.

In his state of apprehension he hesitated whether or not to answer it. He could not imagine who it could be ringing him at such an unusual hour. Before he could make up his mind, the buzzer ceased. He gave a sigh of relief and went back to his desk near the window. Glancing at the little travelling clock, he saw that it was nearly a quarter to ten. With a gradually increasing feeling of normality, he gathered up the documents upon which he had been working, together with the papers in code, and replaced them in the Buddha. At least the interruption had served to break the continuity of his depressing train of thought. He made an effort to divert his mind towards the consideration of a plan which would counteract the extremely difficult circumstances now confronting him.

He had yet to make up his mind, he reminded himself, as to his course of action regarding the political documents. He would need to go carefully. If Randall and his friend really knew any-

thing of his somewhat questionable dealings with Kuo Ping T'ang and others, they could utterly ruin him. Yet the price they offered was of little use to him. He had made that much in a few hours before to-day.

The general strain of the past few weeks was telling on him. He knew himself for a man of quick decision, of shrewd and balanced judgment; and yet here he was vacillating with ideas, unable to make up his mind.

Then the telephone buzzer recommenced its insistent staccato. "Damn the thing!" he muttered as he jumped up from his seat. Going over to the instrument he angrily jerked the receiver off its hook and asked who was speaking.

"It's Hugh, dad," he heard. "I'm sorry to disturb you now, but I haven't seen you all day. Lavington said you would be working late. I thought of driving in for you."

"You needn't trouble, thank you. I shall not be leaving until midnight and can easily get a taxi," was his curt response.

"Just as you like, gov'nor, only I wanted to tell you that I was sorry about the row we had yesterday, and to ask your forgiveness—but I must have that money to-morrow, dad. If I don't——"

John Palliser did not wait to hear the rest. His voice, as he replied, sounded as if all the chagrin and disappointment of the day was to be vented on his adopted son.

"I've already told you that I will pay no more of your gambling debts, Hugh. I've paid them too often in the past and, as it appears now, to no purpose. I've warned you what would happen. What is the amount you want?"

"Eight thousand pounds, father. Yes, I know I told you six thousand yesterday, but I made a mistake."

"I quite understand that kind of error," his father replied. "It means you've been betting again since then—and you have the damned impertinence to talk to me about apologies! You have no consideration for your own or my good name. I seem to have done nothing but get you out of scrapes for the last two years." The usually cold, hard voice of the magnate was hoarse with anger. He almost shouted into the telephone. "You—you can clear out to-morrow and not darken the doors of my house again until you can show me that you're capable of earning your own living. I'll alter my will to-morrow."

"I say, gov'nor, you can't be as hard as that. Don't you realize what it means to me? Let me call for you at midnight and drive you home. We can talk it over then."

"No, I've said all I have to say, Hugh."

He replaced the receiver with an air of weariness and stood with his hand resting on it, pondering over this added worry of which even his financial ability to pay to the uttermost could provide no

adequate solution. Strange that even his family affairs would not run smoothly! He thought again of McArthur and the "way out" he had taken. "No," he muttered, "I must see this thing through." He had always been a fighter, even if a somewhat unscrupulous one. And yet, what had he to fight for? he asked himself. His wife was dead. Somehow he felt the need of her now, he to whom affection and home life had meant so little during the busy years in China when he had been accumulating wealth. If the worst happened now there would surely be something left over for Geoffrey. Hugh deserved nothing. And as for himself, he asked for nothing but rest, and even that was denied him.

He realized, in his introspective mood, and for the first time in his life, the shallowness of all his ambitions. He had had enough of commercial strife and the fretting and scheming for social and political advancement. He began to see himself as others must have seen him during all those years. How utterly weary he felt!

He went back to his seat at the little writing table. Seated there, his head bowed between his hands, the millionaire, the great Sir John Palliser, was a pathetic figure. And as he sat there with closed eyes, in the bitter knowledge of his failure to achieve happiness, there came once more—with an almost irresistible appeal—the thought of McArthur and the "way out" he had taken.

At the window of the building overlooking the courtyard, Li Wan Chên, the son of Li Sung Huang, had been waiting, with all the patience of the Oriental, for the sound that he felt would come. It would, perhaps, save a lot of trouble, he told himself. With Sir John Palliser dead, it might be easier to get the document relating to the treasure left by his father.

He was almost tempted to make another incursion to the courtyard. The light, showing through the chink in the curtains, proved that Palliser was still there. Perhaps it might be as well to see what he was doing. He might even be able to ascertain where Sir John kept the document. He drew back from the window and put up his hands to close it.

As he did so he heard the sound of running feet and the shouts of hooligans below him in the alley. He leaned out of the window, endeavouring to see what was going on, but could discern nothing clearly in the darkness. He realized in less than a minute, however, that there was no need to see to determine what the nature of the trouble was.

The noise of the rival gangs in fierce combat, the crashing of bottles, the thud as a body hit the cobble-stones, and the yelling and screaming that went on, were more than sufficient to convince him that he was better off where he was. Then he saw a spurt of flame and heard the report of a revolver. In an instant the alley reverberated with the crash of fire-arms and the cries of wounded men,

Suddenly there was a cry of "Police!" followed by a yell of execration as the men made a wild dash towards the street. For a few minutes there was silence again, except for the groans of the wounded men left behind. Then he heard the voices of the police at the end of the alley, trying to keep back the crowd which had gathered now that the danger was over.

Presently the police patrol arrived, having arrested some of the combatants, and inspected the scene of battle. When the wounded had been taken away and the police had gone, Li Wan Chên breathed a sigh of relief. He could now proceed with his task. He looked in the direction of Palliser's room.

The chink of light had disappeared!

He cursed the hooligans. The din they had made must have disturbed Sir John in his intention. It now meant that he would have to wait until the morning and interview Sir John. But why should he wait? Why not make the attempt to get the documents to-night now that he knew they were in that room? But not immediately—not until he was sure that everything had quieted down after the shooting affair in the alley. He would wait a couple of hours. So he reasoned. In the meantime he would go back to his hotel and get his revolver. He might need it.

In Collins Street East the cars of the theatre-goers were parked on either side in a long rank.

Lavington could not find room for Sir John's car directly outside Palliser House. The nearest available space was some yards further along. He had heard a quarter to ten strike, but Sir John had not come out. When ten o'clock chimed he reminded himself of his master's words about not staying after that hour. He decided, however, to wait a few minutes longer.

Getting out of the car, he glanced back at Palliser House and then up the street in the opposite direction, and noticed the policeman on the beat trying the doors of each place as he passed. He unfastened the bonnet of the car and, making a slight adjustment to the carburettor, flooded it liberally.

The policeman stopped to speak to him. "Anything wrong?" he asked, more by way of sociability than from curiosity. "You're waiting for Sir John, I suppose," he continued without pausing for the chauffeur's reply. "I know this car of his well."

"Yes, I am," replied Lavington in response to his second question, closing up the bonnet as he did so, "but 'e told me not to wait after ten. It's a perishin' night and I shan't be sorry to get 'ome. But I say," he added, "wot was all the row about round the corner? I 'eard a lot of yellin' and firin' goin' on about ten minutes ago."

"Don't know anything about it," replied the constable. "I've only just come on duty. I started my beat at the top end of Collins Street. Sounds

to me as if it must have been a couple of 'pushes' * having a row. They're good things to be out of."

"Gorblimey! I should say so. Any'ow, I couldn't very well leave me car because I was expectin' the boss any minute."

"Well, it's quiet enough now," said the constable, "so I think I'll take a look round there."

"Righto, constable. Good night," returned Lavington as he started up the engine. "I wouldn't like your job this weather."

"No, you're lucky. Good night."

*Rival gangs of hooligans, each from a different district.

CHAPTER IV

THE DANCE AT ARLINGTON

ARLINGTON, Sir John's beautiful home at Toorak, was one of his notable acquisitions. It was to him, as no doubt it had been to the wealthy squatter who built it with convict labour in the "early days", a source of continual satisfaction; not only as a reminder of personal achievement, but as an unmistakable proof to all of its owner's position and well-being. For more than half a century it had stood, a mellowed, stately pile—for all the world like an old Tudor manor-house—in a perfect setting of pleasant lawn, well timbered park and spacious meadow-land.

The rapid growth of Melbourne, however, following upon the immense wealth that came to the colony in the days of the "diggings", saw each successive owner of Arlington take advantage of the rise in land values, until only three or four acres remained to the house. Even so, it continued to be the cynosure of every property agent anxious for land in one of Melbourne's most fashionable suburbs.

Then came John Palliser, who bought it at a price that admitted no competition. He entertained

lavishly and, as with everything he did, not without due discrimination regarding any possible advantage to himself. Of late, however, he had seemed to tire of playing the part of host, and, instead, relegated most of the entertaining to his sole, unmarried sister, Anne, and his two boys, Hugh and Geoffrey.

On this night, while he was busy at his office working at Li Sung Huang's documents, his house was thronged with people, most of them in the early twenties, seeking with all the ardour of their age and race the full measure of happiness that youth, nowhere, manages to find more easily than in the new world of the south.

Arlington had always been famous for its ball-room, and many a time an early colonial governor and his lady had graced its floor in the days of pantaloons and crinolines, when the minuet and the quadrille were not the least charming expressions of a leisured age.

Those days were long since past. The one-steps and fox-trots of a newer, more hectic day had succeeded even the revolutionary tango, and were danced with an abandon, more intense perhaps than that which the old dances could ever have evoked. And the new mode of short skirts, with their charming corollary, whose silken-clad shapeliness had so long remained hidden, was no more a mere fashionable whim than were crinolines in their day. The new fashion, like the new dances, was the inevitable

expression of the times—of which frankness is not the least of its virtues.

Hugh and Geoffrey Palliser were typical young men of their set. They had been born too late to have been greatly impressed, either by the sacrifices that the War entailed or by the breakaway from convention and tradition that it brought about. They simply took things frankly, casually, as they found them. Often with more money than may have been good for them, they had eagerly joined in the irresponsible rush for pleasure that followed upon the Armistice.

The newly returned soldier made the pace at first because he could not settle down, or because, he contended, he had earned a good time. The younger generation, lacking such an excuse, but possessed of boundless good-natured flippancy, simply flung itself into the gay crowd because it was a crowd and because it was gay. The male element—or most of it—made some pretence at work in the parental office or was something or other in the nature of an understudy in the professional world. Some merely played the young man about town. Only a few on leaving school or university set to work immediately with any degree of seriousness. Parents, or at least those of the *nouveau riche*, whose own careers had been so kaleidoscopic, being without precedent to guide children whom they scarcely understood, simply acquiesced in the general *laissez-*

faire attitude of the well-to-do. Their boys could play well, were healthy—let them have a good time!

As for the girls of the Pallisers' set—not even in America could they have had more freedom to be and to do as they chose.

So then, this assemblage of the gilded youth of Melbourne, if it lacked some of the subtler elements of social *savoir-faire*, was in the main healthy enough in mind and body, and endowed with an independence of spirit which sooner or later, no doubt, would find adequate expression.

Hugh Palliser had left his partner to get her something to drink and incidentally to have his -nth whisky and soda.

“Come on now, Jenkins. Be a good sport and put a bit of pep into the claret-cup.”

The butler, presiding over the buffet, smiled indulgently.

“No, Mr. Hugh. The young ladies will find this quite strong enough, I'm sure.”

“No doubt, Jenkins, old boy, if they could hold as much as a camel, not otherwise. You don't know the gay young damsels as I do.”

The sedate Jenkins made no reply, but his smile might have meant that he would not mind if he could, or it may have been that he was thinking of the good old days when he did. Several of the housemaids certainly averred that he still had a roving eye.

Hugh returned to his partner. “Here you are,

Ruth, old thing. I'm not having any—not enough pep in it for me.”

Ruth Madison, only daughter of a wealthy Melbourne barrister, smiled. “Thanks, Hugh.” Then she added with a spice of malice, “I'm not so sure that a little pep, or whatever you call it, wouldn't do you good. You're not really the life of the party, are you? You need to sit up and take a little more nourishment, my lad, or try a change of petrol—you're only sparking on about two cylinders. What's the trouble? Don't be sloppy, though,” she concluded as he attempted to squeeze her hand.

Hugh shrugged impatiently. “You know very well what the matter is, Ruth. You're fairly all right to me sometimes; at others I simply can't get near you. Take to-night for example. You were like a prim little Puritan when you danced with me just now, yet you seemed like a blessed naiad—or whatever they call 'em—when you were on the floor with Geoff. What the dickens you can see in him, I don't know!”

“Thanks, Hugh,” responded Ruth with disconcerting imperturbability, “but aren't you making rather an ass of yourself? Run along with your sob-stuff, little boy, and pour it out to some soulful, understanding person.”

The orchestra struck up and Hugh's retort was cut short by the arrival of his brother, Geoffrey.

“Mine, I think, Ruth, isn't it?” said the latter

gaily. "Can't afford to waste a single moment of it, old thing." Excuse me, Hugh."

Hugh bowed with the best grace he could muster, but gave vent to his jealousy as he watched them moving gracefully in and out amongst the throng. "Damned, goody-goody young puppy!" he muttered from the high pedestal of his twenty-three years, and supremely oblivious of the fact that only two years separated their ages. Then his scowl deepened as his thoughts reverted to a matter that was causing him even more concern than his jealousy of Geoffrey. He looked at his watch and saw that it was just after half-past nine. He remembered that Lavington had brought a message home during the afternoon to the effect that his father would be working late. He decided to telephone to him without delay. He must have that £8000 by to-morrow, he told himself again.

His bookmaker, uneasy for the past month or two, had not only refused to take any more bets from him, but had actually threatened him with legal proceedings if the long overdue amount were not forthcoming soon. In order to keep the man quiet he had foolishly given him a post-dated cheque maturing on the morrow.

Hugh decided, as he made his way to the telephone, to be more circumspect and tactful with his father this time, and not lose his temper as he had done yesterday. He had not apologized, he reminded himself with a grimace. However, this

would be a good opportunity; moreover, he would offer to call for his father and drive him home. That would help calm the Old Man down! He would be the dutiful son—more like that confounded Geoffrey.

He returned to the ballroom in a black mood, compared with which his previous ill-temper had been a very subtle nuance. It was obvious that he had not had a pleasant experience at the telephone. Jenkins watched him with some anxiety as he helped himself very liberally to the whisky.

Hugh looked at his programme. The names of his partners seemed a little blurred. Still, he would not admit to himself that he was in the slightest degree fuddled.

“Eileen Westcombe—she’s next,” he said in a drawling voice, his programme held up at an absurd angle before his eyes. “Good ol’ Eileen! She’ll do me, and be hanged to Ruth!”

He looked round the room and at length discovered Eileen sitting with Ruth Madison in an alcove on the other side of the ballroom. He managed to negotiate the floor without attracting undue attention.

“Hullo, Eileen. I think the next is our little f-f-flutter, isn’t it?” he said with only the slightest hint in his manner as to how much of a flutter a dance with him just then would be.

Both girls looked up, a little suspicious of his condition, but not at all embarrassed.

"S-s-sorry, dear boy," said Eileen, mocking him, "but you must have been reading between the lines. The last dance was yours, but you didn't turn up. The next is Geoff's. He's just gone to the hall to meet Harry Worrall. Harry's beer at the office late on account of the christening ceremony of the new printing presses. He was rather afraid he wouldn't be able to get here."

"Is z-z-zat so? How beastly thrilling!" burred Hugh, sitting down opposite the two girls. "I mean, of course, about the mouldy ol' 'Daily Wail' and its new—" he hesitated as though a little dubious over negotiating the word he wanted to say—"yes, its new mach-ch-chinery."

He paused as though trying to collect his thoughts.

"What were we talking about? Yes, I know—the next dance. What about it, ol' dear? Never mind Geoff. He's not here an' I am." He got up from his seat and made an unsteady step forward. "Come on, Eileen. I'll get the or-orchestra to strike up now."

Both girls were by now anxious to be rid of him. One could never be sure of Hugh when he had had a few drinks.

"No, thanks, Hugh," replied Eileen. "I can see Geoff and Harry just coming in. Now run along like a good little boy and find your right partner."

"Come and see us again another time, Hugh dear," added Ruth mockingly.

Hugh only scowled and made no move to go. Neither he nor the two girls realized just how rapidly his father's excellent whisky was affecting him, or they would have been a little more tactful in handling the situation.

"And, Hugh dear," said Eileen for what she intended as a last sally, "don't forget the old adage you're so fond of quoting: 'Two's company; three's a football match'!"

Still Hugh made no move, but stood just within the alcove, swaying a little unsteadily and attempting with fuddled gravity to solve the riddle that his entire programme had now become to him.

The girls breathed a sigh of relief as Geoffrey and his friend, Harry Worrall, joined them. The latter greeted them and then turned to Hugh. Hugh seemed not to notice his guest as he stared with stupid gaze at his now badly crumpled programme. Worrall turned inquiringly to Geoffrey.

"Looks as if he's a bit squiffy, Geoff," he whispered. "Can we get him out of it?"

Just then the orchestra struck up and Hugh shoved his card into a pocket. "'S'alright, Eileen. I've found it," he said as he made a rather unsteady step towards her. "It is my dansh—your mistake, ol' thing."

The two girls shrank back and looked appealingly at Geoffrey and Harry.

"Sorry, Hugh," said Geoffrey firmly, "but you're making the mistake." He took him by the arm. "Now come along quietly, there's a good chap. We can't have a scene in here."

Then Hugh lost control of himself entirely, and attempted to let loose all his insensate jealousy and dislike of his brother, all the chagrin he felt over his failure to get the money he needed. Had he been Geoffrey's junior instead of senior he might have aroused a little sympathy in his audience. As it was, however, he did not get beyond the first dozen words. Geoffrey slid an arm round his neck, half throttling him, and dragged him into the alcove.

"Tie a handkerchief over his mouth, Harry, while I hang on to him," said Geoffrey. "We can then get him out through the window on to the lawn."

The two girls, although a bit scared, played up well and stood at the entrance of the alcove to prevent the passing dancers from seeing that there was anything amiss.

In a twinkling the two men had the now cowed tippler outside. They half led, half carried him upstairs to the bathroom. As he realized their intention he struggled desperately to free himself. In the end they managed to tie his arms behind his back with a towel and lay him in the bath. Then they turned on the cold shower and left him.

"If those lips could only speak—now," said Worrall. "Anyhow, there's no cure like cold

water. It'll bring him to his senses without doing him any harm. He'll be able to get his arms free and the gag out quite easily. When he does, though, I bet the air will be blue."

They re-entered the ballroom. "Looks as if we're only just in time for the encore," remarked Geoffrey.

"Awfully sorry, dear ladies," said Harry as they reached the alcove, "but it had to be done." He turned to Eileen. "Do you feel like finishing the dance?" He seemed not to notice her momentary hesitation before taking his arm, nor her swift glance at Ruth as he led her out.

They danced in silence for a minute or two, giving themselves up to the rhythm of the music and to *that* attunement of personal magnetism which is perhaps the chief attraction, whether realized or not, of the modern dance.

"My dear man," began Eileen, after an appropriate silence, "has it dawned on you yet that you have the wrong partner? I was to have danced with Geoffrey. I hesitated when you asked me, but as neither he nor Ruth made a move to claim their respective rights, I had to come with you."

Worrall chuckled at the thought of what might have been an embarrassing situation for him. "Of course!" he exclaimed. "I remember now. And to think that I rang her up specially to book this dance too! Hugh is not the only one who has been

getting things mixed up. However, it's rather an interesting phenomenon," he added. "In moments of great excitement, memory and reason often cease to function, and impulse and emotion have full sway. In the excitement of Hugh's little affair I forgot that I was to dance with Ruth and simply followed the dictates of my heart!"

"Geoff's heart must have played him the same trick as yours," retorted Eileen. "Just look at them dancing. They seem content enough."

"Not more than I am at this moment, Eileen," she heard him murmur, and felt the subtle pressure of his arm as he drew her ever so slightly closer to him. She, too, was content enough.

If Eileen's surmise concerning Geoffrey's heart was correct, she could also, with equal justice, have attributed a similar cardiac condition to Ruth. That irresponsible damsel, unconscious of the fact that she was dancing with the wrong partner, was, however, blissfully conscious that she was dancing with the right man.

Hugh presented a very bedraggled appearance when at last, having got his hands free, he climbed out of the bath. With teeth chattering, and shivering from head to foot, he stripped as fast as his shaking hands would let him. After a good rub down he felt, if not sorry, at least sober.

He went to his room and dressed himself again. Then, still surging with hatred towards his brother whom he knew he would never forgive for this

humiliation, he returned to the ballroom. Fortunately, he was sane enough to realize that he had been guilty of insulting several of his guests and must apologize to them. Unfortunately, he was not sane enough to realize that he owed it to Geoffrey for hushing up what might have been a greater scandal, for which his apologies would have been of no avail. His one hope was that the affair would not reach his father's ears. He was in his bad books sufficiently as it was.

He apologized as graciously as he could to the two girls and to Worrall. To Geoffrey he said nothing in words, but his black look spoke volumes.

Being in no mood to dance any more he gave a message to the butler for his aunt that he was not feeling well and was going to bed. Returning to his room he stood staring moodily for several minutes at his reflection in the mirror of his dressing-table. He would have to do something to avert ruin. He had to have £8000 by the morrow, and he must prevent his father from altering the will. But how? He suddenly became conscious that he was trembling.

He poured himself out a stiff whisky and soda and gulped it down greedily. He helped himself to another and yet another. Earn his own living! Never darken his father's doors until he had done so! He didn't relish the thought of that. He went over to a drawer and counted his ready money—barely twenty pounds.

As he poured himself out another drink an idea began to shape itself in his mind; nebulous at first, it gradually evolved with clearer and sharper insistence. He gave an occasional grunt, as though of disapproval, and sat moodily drinking. But the idea refused to be dismissed. It began to shout within his brain. Cursing, as if still reluctant to entertain it, he got up and irritably flung on a great-coat. With unsteady hands he went to a drawer and took out a revolver and an electric torch. He paused at the door, still hesitating to take the irrevocable step; then, as though impelled by some sinister power, greater than all his inhibitions, he left the room.

He stole out of the house by the servants' staircase and went to the garage. As if to justify his acceptance of the idea that now possessed him, he kept reminding himself of his utter inability to face the morrow without a further effort, however desperate and criminal, to remedy his position. The thought of losing the money that he counted on getting when the Old Man died surged and resurged continuously in his mind and held him to his purpose. He must not, would not, let that will be altered. In his terrible mood, verging almost on hysteria, he wished his father dead, there and then.

He looked at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve. "Not too much time," he muttered. He got his car out quietly cursing the chill wind that

was blowing and the rain that had begun to set in.

He swung out of the drive at a furious pace, and defying the slippery roads, half skidded round corners—nearly running over several belated pedestrians—before he reached the St. Kilda Road, along which he could speed with comparative safety. A policeman tried to stop him as he took Princes Bridge with the speedometer at 50, but he swept on, unheeding. In order to avoid further trouble of a similar nature, however, he decided not to keep straight on, and instead, swung round into Flinders Street.

Judged in the light of subsequent events, it would have been far, far better for him had he adhered to the direct route. The more immediate result of his decision occurred as he tried to turn into Collins Street, at the intersection nearest to his father's offices, where he was compelled to swerve sharply to avoid colliding with another car. The sequel was a loud report, and he felt the bumping of a rear wheel on a flat tyre. Comparatively trivial incidents, apparently, but ill-fated, like all else for him that night.

He drew in at the kerb, and without waiting to ascertain the extent of the damage, hurried round the corner to Palliser House. Now that the crucial time was at hand, he was seized with a sudden revulsion; for one fateful moment a gleam of sanity lightened his dark mood. He hesitated, key in

hand before the front doors, appalled at the crime he contemplated.

Then, like a swiftly gathering storm, the sense of his desperate plight returned to him and urged him on and silenced all qualms in its own clamour. Would he find his father in? he wondered. With feverish haste he unlocked the door, and entering, closed it cautiously behind him.

A few minutes later he emerged in such haste that he almost collided with the policeman who was about to try the doors. He went white and trembled, muttering, "Sorry, constable," and attempted to hurry on.

The policeman, however, called on him to stop.

"All right, constable," he replied, striving to speak calmly. "I—was looking for my—for Sir John Palliser. I'm his son—Geoffrey," he lied. Then he added quickly, "He said he would be here until midnight. I suppose you don't happen to have seen him leave."

The constable eyed him critically and was apparently satisfied. "No, sir, his chauffeur was here at ten waiting for him. He didn't come out then and the chauffeur left."

"Thanks, constable. I'll try the Club."

He walked hurriedly off, realizing that he was a fool to have told the man that. He knew that his father wasn't in the habit of being at the Club at such an hour—and he shuddered at the thought

that the Old Man would never again enter its portals at any hour. Still, he had better go round in case any questions should crop up next day as to his movements. Then it dawned on him that in giving the constable Geoffrey's name instead of his own he had only laid a snare for himself. He could not go on palming himself off on every Tom, Dick or Harry as Geoffrey. However, he would have to chance it. Ten to one the night porter would not know him. He instinctively pulled his hat down in front and turned up his coat collar.

It began to rain heavily. He cursed the weather, his father, his bookmaker, and everybody and everything that had brought about this situation.

He waited for a moment or two in the hall at the Club, but the porter was not about. He went to the lounge, but saw only two men who looked up expectantly as he opened the door.

"Have you by any chance seen Sir John Palliser?" he asked, realizing the futility of his question, but, in his nervous state, feeling that there was some necessity to explain his entry.

"Sorry, we have not," replied one of them. He seemed as though about to add something, but checked himself and turned his attention again to his companion.

Hugh went back to the hall and saw the porter at the foot of the stairs. He nodded and hurried out without giving the man a chance to question him.

There was only one thing to be done now, he

reflected, and that was to go straight and see Krakowski. The Jew had helped him out of many a scrape before, although he had been very hard to deal with lately. However, it was largely Krakowski's miserliness that had brought him to this desperate plight, therefore he should get him out of it. There could be no question of blackmail, because if Krakowski consented to his plan, they would both be in it. If it turned out successful his present financial worry would be over. He would take his chance about the future. Not that there was any chance about it now that the Old Man was out of it—a damned good riddance to the old miser, anyway! He could not alter the will now.

Hugh made his way quickly in the direction of the city where he would find Krakowski. Ready money—he must still have that at all costs—but he must be careful. One false step—he shuddered at the thought of what the consequences might be.

CHAPTER V

AN UNDERWORLD STRONGHOLD

TO Colonel Randall and Monsieur de Fresnes, Melbourne seemed at first glance a city incapable of concealing a festering slum. The parks, the fine boulevards, the wide regular thoroughfares with their substantial and dignified buildings, thronged with well-dressed people, appeared to them a triumph of colonization.

They had not seen, however, anything of the "Little" streets,* especially Little Bourke Street where the Chinese quarter links up with the underworld, and a maze of alleys, ill-lighted, unsavoury and unsafe, exists. Melbourne, to Randall and de Fresnes, had thus far been only the rectangle of compact orderliness and dignity that lies between the railway and Bourke Street.

While they, the only late comers, were seated in the lounge of the Melbourne Club awaiting their appointment with John Palliser at midnight, life in Little Bourke Street and the underworld contiguous to it was only just beginning. The last trams and buses had left the city, and the main streets, except

*Melbourne streets running east and west are alternately wide and narrow; the former giving the title to its subsidiary, as: Flinders Street—Flinders Lane; Collins Street—Little Collins Street.

for the policemen on their beats and an occasional pedestrian or passing motor, were deserted. At intervals the police patrol car leisurely, made its way, block by block, through the city. The big illuminated signs and the glaring lights of the shopping centres and the theatres were switched off, leaving only the glow of the street lamps.

In the gloom of the "Little" streets and the alleys that led off them the policemen, single-handed, dared not venture, but left the skulking figures to themselves, deeming discretion the better part of valour.

In Little Bourke Street, the heart of this *demi-monde*, a heterogeneous, irregular block of ramshackle buildings reared its ungainly bulk. No. 13 appeared over one door and an almost indecipherable 17 over another. The intervening numbers, if they ever existed, had long since disappeared. Its composite nature usually rendered abortive any attempt by the police in their occasional raids to arrest criminals suspected to be harbouring there. From out of the welter of petty jealousies and internecine strife in the underworld, whispers had come to Russell Street* of stolen goods hidden in strange places within its walls, and sordid stories of white girls in its opium dens, of robberies that had been planned there. Sometimes there was a battered body in the gutter—another Chinaman the less in Little Bourke Street! And since Chinese appear

*Melbourne's Scotland Yard.

so much alike, whether he lived in No. 13 or No. 33, never seemed possible of being ascertained (or even worth ascertaining) amid the baffling silence or the equally uninformative "no sav'ee" of its denizens.

In addition to the Chinese inscriptions, the names of Ah Sam, Chinese Laundry, and Yat Loon, Furniture Maker, were painted up in English on signboards or on cracked windows; a dilapidated archway with an iron gate leading into a small courtyard, apparently Yat Loon's factory entrance, completed the façade. It was evident that each place had been built at a different period, for, although they all comprised three floors, there had been no attempt at conformity of height or design. They were alike only in their crazy, jerry-built irregularity, and their separate identity was merely a blind. Within they formed a single entity, with inter-communicating secret doors that had more than once enabled a wanted man to make a hair-breadth escape. By day, the façade, though exceedingly dingy, looked innocuous enough. At night, however, the shadows and the shabby slouching figures that hung about it gave it a sinister air.

At a little after 1.30 a.m. a quietly moving car, whose headlights had been dimmed immediately on leaving the main street, turned into Little Bourke Street and drew up outside the big iron gate of Yat Loon's furniture shop. Budge Thompson, cracksman and *persona grata* in Melbourne's under-

world, got out of the car, followed closely by Colonel Randall, Monsieur de Fresnes and Li Wan Chên.

"My friend," murmured the Frenchman in Budge's ear, "one sign of treachery from you and you are a dead man. Do not forget that you have much to gain and nothing to lose by playing straight with us."

Budge Thompson growled a reply that was meant to be reassuring, and knocked at the gate. A peephole slid back.

"'Sorlight, Fêng Wa. Open slick an' let the car in."

Randall got back into the car and drove in. A doorless, dilapidated shed, filled from top to bottom with neatly piled timber, end on, faced him. There was only just room for the car between it and the gateway which Fêng Wa closed behind them.

Li Wan Chên addressed the seemingly decrepit Fêng Wa in fluent Mandarin, but the gatekeeper's only reply was, "No savvee, Master. My belong Kuang Tung, Lilly Blurke Stleet only savvee Kuang Tung. Pei-king talk no savvee." Budge Thompson gave an impatient grunt. "Come on, gents, yer only wastin' time 'ere." The trio followed him along a dimly lighted passage and up rickety stairs, passing through doors at each of which signs were given and answered.

The whole place seemed to be permeated with all the curious odours of the East. Here and there burned a stick of sandalwood, stuck in an old sand-

filled flower pot or a common bowl; and at times there came to them the pungent aroma of highly spiced foods cooking, and the subtle odour of opium. Occasionally, through half-opened doors, they caught sight of a charcoal brazier, and heard the muttering of strange tongues; while the peering, distrustful glances of the silent Chinese they encountered on the landings and in the corridors made each of them grip the automatic in his pocket a little more tensely.

Presently they reached a landing from which a door opened on either side. In front of them appeared only an expanse of wall, evidently dividing one portion of the ramshackle block from its neighbour. After tapping gently on the skirting, Budge Thompson led them to the room on the right. There they saw a big steel safe let into the wall, with its doors open. There was no back to it and they could see into the room beyond. The guide led on, the Frenchman holding on to him as they passed through the safe.

Involuntarily they glanced back, but the opening was closed by what appeared to be shelves crammed with books and papers.

Budge Thompson seated himself and lit a cigarette. " 'E'll be 'ere in a few minutes, gents."

Randall and de Fresnes exchanged significant glances. Li Wan Chên smiled his comprehension of the situation. Addressing his two companions in French, he commented in a low voice on the

theatrical entry that had been made. "I hope you gentlemen are suitably impressed. I have no doubt there is a much simpler means of egress."

Randall and de Fresnes chuckled. "All the same, Chên," replied the former to the astute Li, who had not yet deemed it advisable to disclose his full name, "we're not out of the wood yet. We shall need all our wits to convince the estimable 'he,' whoever he may be. It's practically certain we are being spied upon and sized up at this very minute."

"Yes, chentlemen, that is so," said a voice behind them. They looked round in astonishment. They had been expecting their anonymous host to enter either through the safe or the doorway on the far side of the room, both of which were within their line of vision and which appeared to be the only means of entrance.

He was an unpleasant looking individual of middle age, obviously a Jew, and almost as obviously a Slav.

"Yes, chentlemen," and except for a slight difficulty with some of his consonants, he spoke excellent English, "I am delighted to see you—that is—seeing you are introduced by my very good friend—er——"

Budge grinned. "It don't matter, Krak. I told 'em me name."

Randall pulled out his watch impatiently. "I'm sorry, Mr. Krak, or whatever your name may be, but we are not concerned about the correct cognomen of either of you just now. Likewise ours is

of little importance. Our time is precious. We have money to spend and, provided that you can earn it, it is yours—and no questions asked."

At the mention of money the Jew's eyes glistened, and there was an involuntary movement of his hands as though he were going to rub them gloatingly together.

"Yes, chentlemen, but I t'ink one or two t'ings might want explaining. My name is Krakowski. I am an honest man." He smiled in what he deemed to be his most ingratiating and convincing manner. Budge chuckled audibly. "Perhaps," he resumed, with a scowl in the direction of his unflattering henchman, "you will allow my friend, Budge, to explain. He might even have somet'ing confidential to tell me. I will not keep you waiting long." He motioned to Budge.

"No go, boss," replied the latter, ignoring the gesture. "I didn't get wot I was after. These gents, as far as I can make out, 'ain't dems.* They know just about as much as I do. They copped me just as I was 'oppin' it through the back gate."

"Yes, my dear Budge, and why were you in such a hurry to leave the place?" There was a hint of anger underlying the oily politeness of his tone.

"Because the joker's dead, that's why. When I put me torch to the winder to 'ave a look round I couldn't see nuthin' at first. Then I found a little gap in the curtains an' I seen 'im lyin' there,

*Detectives.

'is 'ead all over blood. These gents 'ad a look afterwards, an' they know. I ain't goin' to be mixed up in no swingin' job—not if I knows it. An', any'ow, the back doors wasn't open like you said they'd be. I tried 'em before I looked through the winder. I was 'oppin' it when these blokes nabbed me." Budge relapsed into a disgruntled silence.

Krakowski's expression of astonishment at Budge's crude announcement of Palliser's death changed to one of anger at his remark concerning the doors. He muttered something in an undertone. Then he turned inquiringly to the three men.

"It is very sad, is it not, chentlemen? May I ask why you assaulted this poor man and how you came to be in that alley at such an hour?" Again the note of annoyance was apparent.

Randall nodded in the direction of Budge. "Speak in French, Paul," he said, using that medium himself.

The Frenchman returned a glance of understanding.

"Monsieur Krakowski," he began, "first of all allow me to reassure you on one point. Neither my friends nor I have interested ourselves in your estimable companion from motives of philanthropy or affection. Still less are we desirous of bringing him or you—or ourselves, for that matter—under the notice of the police. If you will therefore display a little candour towards us we shall be happy to do likewise."

Krakowski shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. "I am at your command, Monsieur—Paul, I think your friend said."

"Good. Then tell us what this man of yours was after at Sir John Palliser's. I want the truth, for upon what you tell me depends the business we are desirous of negotiating."

Krakowski hesitated and looked across at Budge. He cursed them for speaking in French. If it had only been English Budge could have given him some hint of what explanation he had made. Should he tell them the truth? Three of them, he thought, which would mean, in case of trouble, that he would be confronted with witnesses.

Paul de Fresnes, observing his hesitation, eyed him intently. "Perhaps you would prefer to whisper it, my dear Monsieur Krakowski, although my friends have no intention of acting as witnesses."

Krakowski was taking no chances, however. He leaned forward and placed his lips close to the Frenchman's ear. "He went there after money. Sir John Palliser is known to keep large sums there at times. That is absolutely the only reason."

Monsieur de Fresnes nodded in answer to the glance of inquiry from Randall and Li.

"Yes, Monsieur Krakowski, that is the explanation given by your charming protégé, Budge. Having heard them independently, we are prepared to accept them as true. I am now willing to answer your questions."

"My friend and I had an appointment with Sir John Palliser at midnight. He was to deliver to us certain papers which have no value to anyone but my friend and me. In consideration of so doing he was to receive a certain sum of money. He did not keep that appointment for the reason that has now been made clear. We waited at the rendezvous until one o'clock and then decided to reconnoitre. We were about to effect our entrance by the back gate when your man attempted to dash out of it. It should be obvious to you that if, by any chance, this man was on the same quest as ourselves we were going to take drastic steps to prove it."

"Pardon, my dear Monsieur Paul," intervened Krakowski with a politeness that only half-veiled his sneer, "but I understood you to say that those documents were only of value to you and your friends. How then should I or my poor friend, Budge, or anyone else be interested in them?"

Both the Frenchman and Randall frowned at this sally. As for Li Wan Chên, he did not appear to be interested overmuch in the conversation. Whatever had brought him to this unsavoury spot, it certainly did not seem to be this affair.

"Not so fast, my friend, not so fast," returned de Fresnes, only momentarily checked. "I think you stretch my words a little further than I intended them to go. I did not say that no one but ourselves was cognizant of the existence of those papers or

of their importance to us, but only that they have no value—*per se*—to anyone else. For all we know, a number of people may have traced them to Sir John Palliser; they may, perhaps, have been ready to bargain with him; may even have been prepared to rob him—but only with the intention of selling to us. Is that clear?”

“Perfectly, Monsieur Paul, as far as it goes,” replied Krakowski in a more conciliatory manner. “Permit me to ask, however, why these documents should only be of value to you. Perhaps I have already guessed, perhaps not.”

“That I am not prepared to disclose. What I desire to do at this stage is to put a proposition to you, for the recovery of those papers, to which Sir John Palliser had no legal or moral right and to which, if necessary, we can prove our claim. We do not want publicity, otherwise we would have adopted the ordinary means to gain our end. We understand from your estimable friend, Budge, that you have the means at your disposal of, let us say, acquiring those papers. If you have, then, upon receipt of them within three days, we are prepared to pay you the sum of £100,000. But for Sir John’s death, we would not be troubling you. We can’t afford now to try and get those documents ourselves.”

If Krakowski’s eyes had glistened avariciously at the previous mention of money, they now positively shone with an unholy light. He could scarcely

conceal his excitement. Even his inherent instinct to bargain was paralysed before this gigantic offer. Only one doubt obtruded itself: the ability of these men to pay. Of his ability to carry out their wishes he had not the slightest doubt. At that price he would even have been willing to include a dozen murders in the contract had they so desired.

De Fresnes' eyes narrowed as he watched the Jew. He seemed to read the man's thoughts, for from an inner pocket he withdrew a slim wallet.

"Perhaps, monsieur, a glimpse of this may help you in your decision," he remarked dryly, as he handed the wallet to the Jew.

Krakovski eagerly opened it and, removing a mica cover, extracted a folded paper from between two mica flaps. He saw that it was a genuine letter of credit for £100,000, drawn to the order of John Adams. He handled it reverently and caressingly, and then reluctantly replaced it, heaving a sigh as he passed the wallet back to the Frenchman.

"Very good, Monsieur Paul or Mr. Adams, whichever you choose to call yourself. The documents shall be yours within three days. Can you describe them? Where are we most likely to find them?"

Monsieur de Fresnes gave him a guarded description, adding, "They are somewhere in the room where the dead body of Sir John Palliser is lying, but there was no sign of them when we left there an hour ago."

"By the way," said Randall in English, "now that we seem to have reached a satisfactory understanding, I don't think we need keep Budge any longer. We had, unfortunately, to give him a rather nasty bump on the head, and I have no doubt he will be glad to have a well-earned rest."

Budge, who had been sitting solemnly smoking his pipe during the negotiations, of which he had not understood a single word, took the hint and rose. He realized from Randall's intimation, as the latter intended he should, that everything now being satisfactory, his reward for having secured this interview would be forthcoming. Altogether, he was not at all displeased, with the night's adventure, even though he had not succeeded in burgling Sir John Palliser's office, and in spite, too, of the rough handling he had received.

"One t'ing more," remarked Krakowski when Budge had gone, "I do not understand the presence of this chentleman," and he nodded towards Li.

Both Randall and de Fresnes looked rather apologetically at the latter. Truth to tell, in their intentness to get their own affairs settled, they had completely forgotten his.

"Monsieur Krakowski," said Li quietly, "as I have only been incidental to this rather unusual gathering, I desired that these two gentlemen should transact their business with you first. I, also, am interested in the late Sir John Palliser. It was while watching his house from the alley at the rear that

I heard the scuffle when your man was collared. Realizing that it was not a common brawl, I felt that it might have some bearing on my affairs, so I opened the door and offered my help to resuscitate the unconscious Budge. It is unnecessary for me to tell you how I came to accompany these gentlemen, except to say that it was a mutual arrangement when it became evident that our interests were not in conflict. In short, I also am after a document in the possession of John Palliser, to which he has never had any legal or moral right; it also is of no value to anyone but myself, and is itself sufficient proof of my right to claim it. It is written in Chinese and is almost certain to be with the documents which have already been described to you. I am not a wealthy man, but on delivery of that paper I will undertake to pay £10,000."

Krakowski listened to Li's recital as in a dream. The calm, wily, avaricious Jew, hardened by years of haggling, found himself at a loss to make the most of his opportunity. It was too big for him. Years of niggardly deals, with only an occasional *coup* running to four figures, left him helpless before the biggest chance of bargaining in his life. He pulled at his beard to make quite sure that he really was not dreaming. He could not find his voice for a moment or two.

"Very good. I shall find this paper for you," he at length answered.

Li handed him a card on which was inscribed

the name of a well known firm of Melbourne solicitors.

"A note addressed to W. C. Lee will reach me within an hour," he informed him.

"And you, chentlemen," said Krakowski, "I have not yet your address."

"Monsieur Paul, care General Manager, Union Bank, Collins Street, will find me quickly enough," replied de Fresnes. "And now I think we will get along. I have no doubt you can show us a simpler way out than the one we arrived by."

Krakowski smiled knowingly. He rang a bell and a Chinese "boy" appeared. He gave him an order, and then taking them through the door in the far corner, led them down a couple of flights of a handsome staircase, heavily carpeted, and thence, to their surprise, through a very luxuriously appointed restaurant.

"Your car, chentlemen, is waiting for you at the front entrance. I wish you a good night or a good morning, whichever you prefer to call it." He closed the door sharply without giving them a chance to question him.

They looked about them for a moment, endeavouring to get their bearings. They found themselves in a narrow lane, apparently the side entrance to the restaurant. They made their way round to the front which faced on to a main thoroughfare.

"Another bit of theatricals," said de Fresnes, as he realized where they were. "This is Bourke Street."

"Yes, and this is the Piccadilly Café," added Randall, looking at the gilded sign above the entrance. "Krakowski must also control this place. Uses it as a blind, I suppose, an attractive and perfectly respectable entrance for his wealthy *clientèle*. Anyhow, this is more convenient. Jump in, Chên, and we'll drive you to your hotel."

"Thanks," replied Li, as he stepped into the car.

"Sometime, Mr. Chên," said Monsieur de Fresnes a little more formally when they pulled up at Li's hotel, "we should be glad to hear"—he hesitated for a moment—"that is, if you have no objection to telling us, how you came to ascertain that Sir John Palliser was in possession of the documents you are interested in."

Li smiled enigmatically. "I shall be most happy to do so. I can give you also a little information about those you are seeking that will perhaps be news to you." He paused, enjoying the look of hardly concealed astonishment that greeted his words. "There is one condition, however," he resumed, "and that is that you permit me to join with you in the search. I will help you to get yours if you will do the same regarding mine. In other words, we are none of us to act independently of the other. Are you agreeable?"

Paul de Fresnes, before replying, glanced at Randall, who nodded his acquiescence.

"Yes, we are perfectly willing, Mr. Chên," he said.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

KRAKOWSKI returned to his room, uncertain, now that the first thrills of avaricious joy had passed, whether the matters he had undertaken were as simple as they had appeared. Certainly, to judge from the vicious compression of his lips and his deep-furrowed frown, there was something in the business that was only now beginning to present itself. He savagely jabbed a bell-push at his side.

"My wantchee Missisie," he snapped out to the "boy" who answered the summons.

Krakowski's expression changed as a rather flamboyant Jewess entered the room. Fair skinned, with the rich sparkling auburn hair that one occasionally sees in the women of her race, she already showed, however, the first signs of that obesity from which none of them seem eventually to escape. She might once have been almost beautiful. Now, her floridness, her voluptuous air, her use of cosmetics would have announced her as a little *passée* to anyone less gross than Krakowski.

He smiled indulgently as he drew her to him.

"Ah, Rachel, my dear! I am glad to see you. I have some good news for you—and perhaps a little bad that you will be able to change to good. You are so clever, my dear, and I t'ink you may have those diamonds you set your heart upon."

Rachel's carmine lips parted in a smile that was at once voluptuous and eager, "Koffski dear," and she bent over and kissed him, "I am all yours whether you give me diamonds or not. You know that. Tell me what the trouble is."

Rachel knew her man, could lie to him, cajole, flatter, arouse, soothe, but, best and oftenest of all, lie to him—but never love him or any man. She had long since learned, like all those who have entered the garish portals of the *demi-monde*, that the mystic something which quickens—for a moment at least—in every woman's heart, could never be hers again. And she, like so many others, had learned to forget it as though it had never been. Only sometimes, when she looked upon Krakowski and shuddered, she would utter the prayer of the little French grisette: "Ah! si j'étais riche! Je vendrais mon grand lit et j'en achèterais un tout petit . . . pour une seule personne!" Just now she knew that he had something on his mind, something that she might be able to turn to her own advantage, as she had so skilfully managed to do on previous occasions.

The Jew was silent for a little while, considering where to start the strange story he had to tell. Then

he decided to keep back the part concerning the offer of £100,000 for a little while and to begin, at the beginning.

"We must keep an eye on that young fool, Palliser, my dear," he said. "He is a little more cunning than I thought. You know he has been trying to borrow a large sum of money from me lately and yesterday I have again refused him. Soon after midnight he comes to me, looking very white and tells me that his father generally keeps plenty of money at his office. He asked me to send a man to burgle the place and we could divide the booty. He tells me that he has just come from there and has left the back door ajar so as to save time and trouble breaking in. T'inking him really in need, I believe him and sent Budge along. He returns with the news not only that the back door was not open, but that when he looks through the window of the old man's office he sees him lying dead."

Krakowski paused in his narrative. He knew that Rachel was following him closely and wondered whether she would jump to the inference that very forcibly presented itself to him.

Rachel frowned. "You say he was urgently in need of this money. When did he have to have it by?"

"To-day, my dear."

"Then, my Koffski, even if he is a fool, a desperate fool may sometimes do a clever, or try to do a clever thing. He must stand to get a lot of money

under his father's will; he has told me that several times."

Rachel was careful not to state under what circumstances this information had been imparted to her, or that she had sullied the youth in Hugh Palliser by her callous wiles, and thereby added to her gradually accumulating store of jewels.

"It looks, Koffski dear"—and her lips curled cruelly—"as if he was trying to put one over you. No doubt if Budge had broken in, or while he was breaking in, a 'trap'* would have come along at the right moment and pinched him. Our dear young friend was meanwhile tucked away in bed. Quite a perfect alibi! Only the fact that Budge didn't wait to leave his visiting card or scatter flowers over the fallen seems to have saved him. It has been a lucky escape."

"It has been more than that, Rachel, my love. It has been a blessing, somet'ing of the wonderful." And Krakowski's eyes lighted up as he recounted to her the extraordinary sequel to Budge's attempted burglary.

Rachel's eyes gloyed at the mention of the "big money". And this niggardly old pig had talked of giving her two or three paltry little diamonds! She would have more than that, she told herself. Nevertheless she followed him attentively to the end.

"Is it not wonderful, my dear?" he concluded.

"Yes, almost too wonderful to be true if you

* The police.

hadn't seen that letter of credit, Koffski mine. But how are you going to work it? Three days doesn't give much time—at least not when there's a murdered man in the business, and you can't go near the place until that's cleared up. It may take the police days before they get out of it."

"Yes, my dear, that's what is now worrying me. It's quite certain that while the police are hanging about we can do not'ing. I'll put Lame Jimmy on to watch the place. We'll soon know then whether the police are wise to it or not. Anyhow, that's where young Palliser comes in. If he's been cunning enough to t'ink out the other plan, he might have been clever enough to have made it look like suicide. If so, the matter will be simple and all we'll want from him will be a duplicate set of keys or wax impressions. It's not always easy to pick these newfangled double-turn locks, and breaking in takes time and means more risk. The job's got to be done quickly, and that means a set of keys. If this young fool did kill his father, I can hold it over him and he'll have to do what I tell him. But, if it was suicide, then you must get them out of him."

Rachel smiled at him enigmatically. "Yes, Koffski dear. And I've thought of something else. You'll want to buy me the big diamond, the one Slick Harry left with you for 'safe keeping', when you hear what I have to tell you. Why not put your theory"—she was careful to give her Koffski

the credit—"about young Palliser to the test? If he committed the murder, he'll not be worrying over the money Budge was supposed to have got for him—unless he's far, far deeper than we imagine him to be. If he's innocent, it should be some hours yet before he learns of his father's death. Anyone will advance him money as soon as that is made public. What time was he supposed to come and collect his share?"

"Half-past seven this morning, my dear. It's nearly seven o'clock now. I see what you mean, but there's another side to the picture. If he comes for the money, it doesn't mean necessarily that *he* doesn't know that his father is dead, but that he is aware that the police and the public—including us—do not. If he is clever enough to see that point, he'll also see how important it is to come here in order to throw us off the scent. Don't forget he knows we are cognizant of his presence at Palliser House last night."

"Yes, Koffski dear, but there is something still more important to us than that. Whether he did or didn't, whether he knows or not, doesn't matter. *We* know that old Palliser is dead. Therefore if young Palliser comes here for his share of the robbery, you've only to tell him that Budge was disturbed and had to leave without getting anything. Then, out of the kindness of your heart, dear Koffski mine, you'll offer to lend him the money—£8000, wasn't it? He'll sign up for

£10,000. You, always so kind and generous, won't even charge him a cent above the usual interest!"

"Rachel, my angel, you are wonderful!" broke in Krakowski, rapturously seizing her hands.

"And, Koffski dear, we'll soon know at what hour the discovery of the body is made. Suppose it's nine o'clock, when the office opens. It's hardly likely to be discovered before. If young Palliser comes here at 7.30 and turns down your offer of the loan, you'll want to know why, Why, WHY, won't you, Koffski dear?" She smiled cruelly. "And if he won't tell you, dear, dear Koffski, you'll tell him that HE KNOWS HE DOESN'T NEED IT BECAUSE HIS FATHER IS DEAD, AND THAT HE KILLED HIM! And tell him how he tried to trap Budge." Her voice rose to an hysterical pitch. "And then kill him slowly, Koffski dear. Torture him with blackmail and the threat of the scaffold until we've sucked him dry. He has tried to double-cross us!"

It was a very limp and pallid Hugh Palliser who arrived to keep his appointment. Krakowski, despite his own impatience, kept the lad upon the rack by making him wait a quarter of an hour, and from a secret point of vantage spied upon him, observing his increasing nervousness, the accentuation of his anxious expression.

So much the better, he told himself. He liked

dealing with his victims thus, leading them on until they were on the verge of collapse. It effectually cleared the way for the subsequent blackmail or usury.

When he considered that Hugh had had enough, he nodded to Rachel to retire and gave an order that he was to be admitted.

Hugh entered the room, trembling, his whole demeanour pitiable to anyone a whit less callous than the disreputable Jew. Krakowski eyed him coolly. Beyond a curt nod he made no acknowledgment of his visitor's presence. It was essential to his plan to leave the initiative to his victim.

Hugh fidgeted for a moment or two. "Well, Féodor, what—what about the money?" he at length managed to jerk out. "How much did you get?"

Krakowski eyed him intently. "Not'ing," he replied curtly.

The boy's face, already pale, turned ashen. "Nothing!" he repeated. "Why, what happened? Come on, Féodor, tell me. Have you only been stringing me on? My God! I was relying on you." His voice broke on a sob.

"The Jew was not in the least swayed by his victim's emotion. Acting, clever acting, he told himself. Even he could not have done it better.

Hugh waited, his whole attitude an agonized appeal. "For God's sake tell me, Féodor; I must have that money."

"Very well then, I will tell you. But, first of

all, let me inform you that the back door was not open as you said it would be."

"I left it open, Koffski, I swear I did," cried Hugh.

"And the man I sent swears it was closed. Anyhow that's not the point. He was disturbed and had to leave hurriedly without getting in."

"Then for God's sake, lend me the money, Féodor; I'll pay you any interest you like. I offered you £2000 for the loan; I'll make it £4000. You've always had your money back all right before."

Krakowski chuckled to himself. The thing was progressing even more favourably than he expected. What still puzzled him, however, was the youth's anxiety for money when he must know that, with his father dead, the terms of the will would be made public and his financial position assured. Was there something behind it all that he hadn't thought of? he wondered. He couldn't stop now to puzzle it out. He must take the risk before this too clever young scoundrel attempted to back out of his offer.

"Well, my young friend. I know all that you have said may be true, but money is very tight just now. However, I will stretch a point this time and lend the money on the terms you have offered—with the inclusion of one other condition."

Hugh's expression underwent a complete transformation at the Jew's words. He sank back limply in his chair and his eyes closed. "And I never

knew he was such an actor!" said Krakowski to himself. All the same he poured out some whisky which Hugh gulped down greedily.

"Quickly then, Feodor; give me the papers to sign and the money, and let me get out of here."

"And the other conditions, my young friend," resumed his tormentor, "is——"

"Yes, I'll agree to it, whatever it is; only for God's sake hurry up, Koffski. I've had more than enough these last few hours."

"Quietly, quietly. All in good time. The other condition is that you get me a wax impression of the key to the back door of your father's building and one of the key to his office—or duplicate keys if you can without arousing suspicion. Are you agreeable?"

"Yes, yes, anything. I'll get them. But what about the money? I mightn't be able to get them until to-morrow, and if I can't have the money now, I shan't want it at all." Again the desperate note crept into the boy's voice, and the strained expression to his eyes.

"Got him!" thought Krakowski. "I wondered when he was going to try and back out of it. Now he's showing his hand." Still, he reflected, he must not ruin his plan now. He would have to pay out the money before getting the keys. That was inevitable.

"Yes, you shall have the money now, but I must

have those keys by to-morrow for certain—to-day if possible. You will not fail me, I know." There was a veiled threat in the words. The Jew knew only too well the evidence he held against the lad.

"All right, Koffski, I'll get them somehow. Now do your part of the job."

Krakowski pulled open a drawer of his desk where lay a pile of notes made ready for the occasion. He counted them carefully, as though he had not already rehearsed that part of his scheme, while Hugh signed the documents connected with the loan.

"By the way, Koffski," said the latter as he pocketed the notes, calm and rational for the first time since he had entered the room, "why do you want those keys? Aren't I to be in on that deal?"

"No, my dear Mr. Palliser, you are not. The reason I want them is not for any purpose which would cause concern to you or the police. Indeed, in a few days you may have them back, and no one need be any the wiser as to my having had them. What may be taken from your father's office no one will miss. It is of no value to you or anyone connected with you. For once in my life, my dear young friend, I am to be the instrument of justice!" The Jew chuckled, vastly amused at such a fantastic absurdity. "I am going to return to its rightful owners something which was, let us say, 'lost', that is all."

Hugh looked puzzled. "All right, Koffski, as

long as it isn't a matter for the police, and nobody's going to miss what you take, I don't see that it's anything for me to worry about."

"Quite right, my dear Mr. Palliser. I should not, if I were you. It is not'ing at all." To himself, however, the old Jew added malevolently, "He will have enough to worry about before I have finished with him, without that!"

Hugh left, such is the resilience of youth, with an almost jaunty air, humming to himself as he went. There remained only one thing now to complete his plan, he reminded himself, and that was to repair as soon as possible to his father's office. He must not forget that it was still necessary to walk warily.

CHAPTER VII

THE DEATH OF SIR JOHN PALLISER

OF the virtues of the estimable Lethbridge, John Palliser's secretary, punctuality was not the least. As for his vices, those who thought they knew him best would have laughed at the idea of a fatuous, pompous old fool like George Lethbridge having any. His business acquaintances poked fun at his buttonholes, his gay ties, his spats; while the typists, and the girls generally, adored "dear, fat old Georgey" and the chocolates he brought them. If sometimes a pair of silk stockings—or even something more charmingly flimsy and intimate—accompanied or took the place of the chocolates, who minded? The fact that they were from "Georgey-Porgey" made all the difference, and, if not entirely depriving them of a suggestion of indelicacy, at least added a humorous piquancy that robbed them of offensiveness.

But Lethbridge was no fool where business was concerned: John Palliser had known that. Sometimes he had been inclined to be irritated by the man's pose, his fatuousness, his bland, self-satisfied air, his smug sense of well-being that seemed so guileless. That he was sharp, sharper even than

his employer, the latter had come to realize on more than one occasion.

Lethbridge entered his office punctually at nine o'clock and settled down to run through the several piles of correspondence neatly opened and stacked on his desk. Presently there was a curt knock, and in walked Hugh Palliser. Except that he looked as if he might have spent a hectic night, his usual devil-may-care air and sporty manner seemed not to have suffered in consequence. If anything, they were a little more offensively accentuated, it seemed to Lethbridge, as the young man flippantly greeted him with a "Morning, Georgey, my lad. You're looking in the pink to-day". Lethbridge returned the greeting with cold politeness.

Hugh, by no means rebuffed, took a cigar from Lethbridge's box, open on the desk, and proceeded to clip it. Just then the telephone bell rang. Lethbridge took up the receiver.

"The police want to speak to you, sir," he heard the girl at the switchboard say.

"The police!" he echoed.

"Yes, sir, it's something about the front doors having been found open last night."

"Very well, put them through."

He glanced at Hugh, and in his own state of wonderment at the strange news, failed to observe how suddenly tense the young man had become at the mention of the police. Then his attention was diverted to the voice on the telephone.

"What's that? . . . Sergeant Gibbs speaking, is it? . . . Yes, yes. . . . No, it's Sir John's secretary this end. Sir John hasn't come in yet. . . . Front doors found open in the early hours of the morning, you say. I can't understand it! What time was this? . . . H'm! 2 a.m. . . . You say the constable tried all the doors inside and noticed nothing of a suspicious nature. . . . No. As far as I can say everything's all right. I'll inquire, to make quite certain, and let you know if there's anything wrong. . . . Yes, we do keep fairly large sums of money in the safes at times, but nothing untoward has been reported to me. . . . Yes, certainly, I'll have a look at the doors and also speak to Sir John about the matter. Thanks, sergeant."

"I say, Lethbridge," said Hugh with a little less levity in his manner, "that's a bit queer about the doors, isn't it?" He pulled at his cigar, but in his concentration upon the telephone conversation he had let it go out. He flung it into the fire-place in disgust.

Lethbridge frowned. "I can't understand it. I knew Sir John was still in his office when I left yesterday, but he would not have been so careless as to leave the front doors open. I'll ask him, but I don't suppose he'll be able to throw any light on the matter. I wonder what time he's coming in this morning. He's usually in by ten. Was he still at home when you left?"

Hugh looked at Lethbridge as though a little

startled by the question. "No—er—that is, I left home rather early. Matter of fact, I haven't seen him at all this morning."

"Then what about last night? Sir John doesn't stay here as a rule later than 5.30 or six. Didn't you see him at dinner?"

Again Hugh seemed to find a little difficulty in framing his reply. "No. We had a dance at the house last night, but the Old Man didn't put in an appearance at that. In fact, he was working late last night. I—er—know that, because I—er—had occasion to telephone him."

Lethbridge regarded him a trifle dubiously. What was the boy being so mysterious about? he wondered.

"Now I come to think of it," continued Hugh, "the chauffeur brought a message saying that he wouldn't be home till late." Then, apparently as an afterthought, and recovering his flippant air, he added, "As a matter of fact, what I came for this morning was to see the old chap. Are you sure he's not in? Have you been to his office? He may have come in early and be stuck in his den concocting more schemes to make money. Trot along, old dear, and see what kind of a mood he's in. Let me know if he shows rough and stormy with cold, biting winds, or whether he's fine with a few fogs. I don't want to see him till I know."

Lethbridge looked sceptically at Hugh. "I happen to know Sir John's habits a little better than you, young man. However, we'll soon see if he is in his office."

He turned to the telephone. "Give me Sir John, please." He held the receiver to his ear for a minute or two. "Doesn't seem like it, does it?" he said in an aside to Hugh.

Then the girl at the switchboard spoke. "Sir John doesn't answer," she said. "I don't think he has come in yet."

"Well, that's that," said Hugh as Lethbridge informed him of the telephonist's reply. "I'll trot along then, and improve the shining hour—if it's possible to find one in this cursed winter weather. Now smile sweetly, Georgey! I know you're sorry to lose me."

Lethbridge growled a curt response and went on with his work. He only tolerated his employer's elder son because he could not well do otherwise.

He suddenly recollected the message he had had from the police, and shrugged his shoulders in disgust at the thought of climbing the stairs to make the necessary investigations. He cursed the front doors. He laboriously swung his chair round, and then, instead of getting up, swung it back again and turned to the telephone. It was said that George Lethbridge would be the very first subscriber, when pocket telephones were invented.

Certainly he never seemed to do anything that the telephone would do for him.

"Miss McGowan," he said, "tell Mr. Smith that the front doors were found open last night and that I want him to report to me if there has been any attempt at burglary."

A little later he received the report that there were no traces of disturbance in any of the offices or the strong room. He was somewhat mystified at the strange occurrence, but in the absence of any ill result he dismissed the thought of it, and buried himself again in his work. Several times he was interrupted by telephone inquiries regarding matters connected with the various companies which the great House of Palliser controlled. The concise, competent manner in which he coped with them was ample proof, if any were needed, of the judgment that Sir John had displayed in the appointment of Lethbridge as his secretary.

As he finished the last of the correspondence, he looked at his watch. He muttered a curse. Nearly twelve o'clock already! He had not dreamed it was anything like so late. Of course that young cub Hugh had wasted a lot of his time, and then that affair of the doors. The mail clerk's inquiry whether he had anything for the post recalled to him, at the same time adding to his irritation, that it was Saturday. He cursed his absent-mindedness, the more intensely, because he had never known himself guilty of such mental aberration. Then he

heard the closing of doors and the usual chatter of the staff as they left the building.

"An absolute dud of a morning!" he muttered.

There were a lot of matters needing attention. He scanned his memorandum tablet and noted the settlements for the coming week which should have been made ready that morning, also certain information required by the auditors. He had left the details with Sir John the previous day with that object in view. It was those confounded visitors with their extraordinary offer that had made him forget. Randall and—what was the other man's name? A Frenchman—de—something. De Fresnes, that was it. Then, of course, there was Sir John's strict injunction after lunch that he was not to be disturbed. He wished now that he had spoken to him before he had gone to his room. It might have saved some awkward questions later on. He cursed himself for not having foreseen this contingency.

He got up and waddled over to a safe in the corner, and after much puffing and grunting found his key of Sir John's office. It had been entrusted to him for use only in case of emergency, and although it had been in his possession for several years he had never used it until the previous night—but George Lethbridge did not care to remind himself of that fact.

He hesitated for a moment in the corridor, undecided whether to have lunch first and then to

get the papers from Sir John's office, or, whether to complete 'as much of them as he could before going out. With a shrug of disgust, he decided on the latter course and proceeded to the magnate's door and inserted the key. Although it fitted in easily and turned in response to his touch, the door failed to open. Upon finding that further manipulation of the key produced no better result, he applied his ponderous bulk in a final effort. The door remained immovable.

Lethbridge stepped back, puzzled. The key was unquestionably the right one. "It can't be bolted from the inside," he argued.

An appalling idea came to him. Hastening to the end of the corridor, he opened the back doors, and with surprising agility for one of his grotesque proportions jumped down the steps and ran to the window. He struggled to raise the lower sash, but it, too, resisted all his efforts. He tried to peer in, but the room seemed to be in darkness and the glass showed him only his own reflection and that of the plane tree and a portion of the lawn. Then he realized that he was looking at the curtains. He did not remember them being drawn when he had been in there the night before. With a growing feeling of alarm he sought for an opening in them. Presently he saw what appeared to be a small aperture, but it was so small that the darkened room made as dense a reflector as the curtains themselves, especially as, in bending to peer in,

his head inevitably blocked what light might have penetrated the opening.

He felt sure now that something was wrong, and, despite his endeavours to combat such an idea, every moment served only to deepen his conviction. Then, in a flash, he conceived the worst, and his vague forebodings were changed to a dire and terrible dread. For a moment he was tempted to fly. He wondered if, by any chance, he had been seen when he went to Sir John's room the previous night. Then his momentary panic passed and he decided that it would be less suspicious for him to remain. He would have to watch, though, he reflected, and be ready to leave at a moment's notice if things did start to move against him.

He went back to his office, endeavouring to calm himself sufficiently to ring up the police. As he was about to take up the receiver, he observed with disgust his fingers smudged with green paint. He was puzzled for a moment; then it dawned on him that, in his anxiety to see into Sir John's room, he had not noticed the wet paint on the window frames. Indeed, he had forgotten the very existence of the painters who had been at work on the building for the past week or two. He wiped off the sticky mess as well as he could and again turned to the telephone.

To the police he very guardedly outlined only the result of his investigations, making no mention of his forebodings. The inspector to whom he spoke seemed to take the matter quite calmly,

informing him that, as he could not furnish evidence of anything untoward, it was hardly a case for the police. Lethbridge was reluctantly forced to voice his suspicions, whereupon the inspector agreed to send a constable and a locksmith round as soon as possible and a detective later if circumstances warranted.

As Lethbridge hung up the receiver he recollected the matter of the front doors. He had not rung up Sergeant Gibbs because the head clerk, Smith, had reported that everything appeared to be in order—that is, he reflected, everything except Sir John's room, which, being burglar-proof, Smith would have taken for granted upon seeing the door shut. The lock, as Lethbridge well knew, was constructed to resist all the usual contrivances, short of explosives, to open it. Moreover, only he and Sir John had keys to it. He wondered whether there was any significance in the fact of the front doors having been left open; if they could have any bearing on the mystery that enshrouded Sir John's room, or afford any explanation as to how the window and door came to be fastened from the inside.

In due course the constable arrived, accompanied by the locksmith. Lethbridge accompanied them to the door of Sir John's room. The policeman produced notebook and pencil, and after carefully inspecting the door and the window, and succeeding no better than Lethbridge in seeing into the

room, very solemnly made a record of his investigations. Meanwhile, his companion unpacked a tool bag and produced chisels, a hack saw, a small oxy-acetylene steel-cutter and one or two other curious looking implements.

"Better tackle the door, Fred," advised the constable. "The window looks easier, but in case there's something wrong, it might disturb any evidence there."

"I don't know that you would find it easier," said Lethbridge, "because the window frame is of steel and there's an iron grille also protecting it inside."

The mechanic gave a surly grunt. "And even the bloomin' door is steel-backed, isn't it?"

"That is so," replied Lethbridge. "I mentioned it to the inspector as I thought you might have come prepared only for the usual type of door."

Beyond inquiring the position of the bolts, the man worked on in silence, pausing only to change his tools. He soon had two rectangular panels cut out of the woodwork of the door, one near the top and the other at the bottom. He then pressed a tool against the steel which was now visible and gave an irritable grunt. He turned to the policeman.

"Good hour's work there yet, Bill, and I ain't had any grub. What about it?"

The constable scratched his head and looked at Lethbridge. "It's for you to say, sir," he said in a tone that left no doubt as to what his opinion was.

Lethbridge drew out a five-pound note and

flicked it into the tool bag. "Better a good lunch late than a poor one punctual," he observed dryly.

"Very true, sir," agreed the constable, beaming.

"Abso-blooming-lutely!" added Fred, his disgruntled air completely gone.

He put on a pair of heavy goggles, lighted a strange-looking instrument, and set to work to burn through the steel backing of the door. "Better not watch too closely," he warned. "The glare of this light isn't too good for the eyes."

The constable and Lethbridge turned away. "We might as well sit down," the latter suggested. "Come into my office." He ushered the man in and handed him the cigars.

The constable was soon puffing away at a Corona-Corona, if not strictly in the manner of the connoisseur, at least with evident enjoyment.

"You say Sir John hasn't been in this morning," he observed casually, more for the sake of sociability than from any professional motive. "Surely that's not very remarkable, is it?"

"Not at all," replied Lethbridge, "but doors and windows don't bolt themselves from the inside. Somebody is in there, and I want to know who it is. If it isn't Sir John, I can't imagine who it can be. Nobody else has any right to be in there."

"Well, we won't have long to wait, sir. Fred is a demon when he gets his torch going." He applied himself again to his cigar as though endeavouring to produce a smoke screen, much to his host's

secret amusement. "That room seems to have been made pretty secure," he resumed. "I noticed, too, that the frames of the old-fashioned windows were of iron, and that the panes were so small that a man couldn't get through one of 'em, even if he did break the glass. And then you say there's a steel grille back of the curtains. What about a chimney?"

"There isn't one. The room is specially ventilated so that even with the door and window shut it doesn't become close. The heating is provided by radiators. There's not the slightest chance for a burglar."

The policeman smoked in silence, pondering over this unequivocal announcement. He coughed once or twice and then rather diffidently propounded the conclusion that he had apparently arrived at. "You don't think it's a matter of suicide, sir—financial trouble, anything like that, do you? There was McArthur yesterday; and this morning two large firms closed their doors. It's in the air, sir. Also, several big men absconded last week—or are missing. We don't know whether they've skipped or whether their bodies will turn up in the river. This financial business is beyond me, Mr. Lethbridge, but it seems a merciless sort of game. High and low, we all seem to get knocked by it." He looked intently at the secretary as he spoke.

Lethbridge answered in a low voice:

"It's suicide that I'm afraid of. Sir John's

financial position is very strong, but he has had several reverses lately and seems to have been worried. But it's not mere monetary loss that would cause him to do such a thing. It would be rather the blow to his pride. Ever since I've been associated with him I've observed how very proud he has always been of his judgment, his shrewdness, his capacity for work. But for some time past I've noticed little slips of memory, a slight hesitation as to a decision, and other things, quite unlike the man of a few months ago."

The constable nodded comprehendingly. "Shall we go and see how Fred is getting on?" he suggested. "He ought to be nearly finished by now."

The two men rose and joined the now perspiring mechanic. They saw that he had cut the top panel through and had almost finished the lower. Lethbridge watched as though fascinated, his hands clenched tensely. The last few minutes were an agony to him. He seemed unable to keep his eyes from the flickering glare of flame as it bit through the last inch of steel, until, almost blinded, he was forced to turn away.

With a grunt of satisfaction, the mechanic knocked the loose panel clear, and slipping his hand through the aperture, pulled back the lower bolt; then reaching up to the top one, repeated his action. He turned the key and the door swung open. "There you are, Bill," he said with a grin of satisfaction. "Is that——"

"Yes, thanks, Fred," interrupted, the constable abruptly, anticipating the mechanic's question, "we won't want you any more." Now that the job was done, and in view of the possibility of the magnate's suicide, the constable was anxious to be rid of him. If it had been an ordinary case, he would not have been particular, but with an important personage like Sir John, it might be necessary to keep things quiet for a little while.

Nothing loath, Fred picked up his tools and made his exit with all speed, fervently hoping that the policeman had forgotten the fiver.

As the front door slammed behind him the latter stepped forward, notebook in hand, with Lethbridge at his heels. After the blinding glare of the oxy-light they could scarcely see in the comparative gloom in which they found themselves. The glow of a radiator alone seemed to stand out—like the solitary red eye of some strange monster—uncanny, ominous, in the darkness and deathlike stillness of the room.

Trembling, Lethbridge fumbled for the switch near the door. As the light flooded the room a ghastly sight met their gaze. John Palliser lay in a huddled position on the floor, his head resting on the corner of his favourite and most valuable Ch'ien Lung rug. As they stepped closer they saw the dark red of dry blood on his head, an ominous stain on the rug, and a patch that had spread beyond on to the polished boards. A small writing-table lay

overturned near the window; and a travelling clock, a reading lamp, an inkpot were scattered about. Close to the dead man was a revolver.

"My God!" breathed Lethbridge in an awe-struck voice, his heavy-jowled face ashen, his lips quivering.

The policeman saw merely a man lying dead—a man of some importance certainly—who obviously had committed suicide. Here was a situation that he could cope with, a situation that demanded professional calm rather than the exercise of an imagination that could visualize all the possible repercussions of such a tragedy.

Lethbridge, however, in the first moments of realization, was conscious only of the terrific reaction that the event would have upon an already panicky financial world; saw only the glaring headlines of the press; heard only the clamour of re-
crimination and derision as the sluice-gates of gossip were flung open by the dead magnate's rivals, eager to take advantage of the slump that would be precipitated by the news of his death. One thought alone afforded him any consolation: the discovery had been made while the staff was away. He shuddered at the thought of the immediate publicity that would have ensued had the tragical *dénouement* happened a few hours earlier. With the weekend before him, there would at least be a chance to think before the news need be made public.

The policeman bent over the huddled form and noted the wound in the head. Then he glanced at the upturned clock. He turned to Lethbridge.

"Dead, sir. No doubt about it. The clock says three minutes to twelve. Looks as if it stopped then—the glass is all splintered. He must have fallen against the table."

Lethbridge felt his legs giving way and sank into a chair, while the constable, pencil in hand, unconcernedly proceeded with his notes. After making a few entries he paused.

"About the revolver, sir. Do you know who it belongs to? Was it Sir John's?"

"Yes," Lethbridge answered. "I know it by the butt. He'd had it for a good many years, I believe. You'll notice it's an old-fashioned one."

The constable solemnly recorded the information, and then stood for a moment biting at the end of his pencil.

"Case for the D's,* I think," he muttered to himself. Then, turning to Lethbridge, he added, "Please don't touch anything while I'm away, sir. I must telephone."

Lethbridge pointed to the right of the door. "You'll find one there."

The constable called up Headquarters and made his report. Hanging up the receiver, he turned to Lethbridge. "They'll be along within a quarter of

*Detectives.

an hour. What about the relatives? Will you tell them now or wait till the investigation's over? As it's not likely to be long, sir, I'd advise leaving it till then, just in case— All the same, I think it's a straight-out matter of suicide. Haven't the slightest doubt about it."

Lethbridge shivered as he replied:

"Yes, I think you're right, constable, but I wish I knew just why he did it. There's going to be hell to pay when the news gets round, as it must I suppose, on Monday."

"You'd better speak to the inspector about that, sir. He's sure to be able to help you as far as the newspapers are concerned. We've a special department which censors all press reports relating to suicide, and any details that it's thought best the public shouldn't get hold of are simply cut out. Of course I can't say what the boss will do in this instance, but there's no harm in putting your case to him."

Lethbridge heaved a sigh of relief. "No, I certainly shall," he agreed readily.

A few minutes later the front door bell rang. "That'll be them, I expect," said the constable, and hastened to answer the summons.

He returned, ushering in two men whose calling was evinced by their entire sang-froid as, with a keen glance, they summed up the situation.

"Have you or this gentleman touched anything, Jackson?" the elder one asked curtly.

"No, inspector. Everything is as we found it. I didn't even switch off the radiator."

"Allow me to introduce myself, inspector," interposed Lethbridge, now somewhat calmer. "I'm George Lethbridge, Sir John's secretary."

Inspector Hansen acknowledged the introduction and volunteered his own name and that of his colleague, Detective Arnot.

There was another ring at the door. The constable returned from answering it, accompanied by a man whom the inspector greeted cordially.

"Good afternoon, doctor. Glad you were able to come so promptly. Just have a good look at the body, will you?"

The doctor knelt down and examined the prostrate figure. The detective produced his notebook and stood near with pencil poised in readiness for his verdict.

"Shot through the right temple," began the doctor. Then, after a pause, he added, "Get me a bowl of water, some one. I want to see if there's an outlet wound."

Lethbridge crossed to a cabinet which concealed a washbowl. Filling it with water, he handed it, together with a towel, to the doctor.

"Bullet apparently deflected by a bone," the latter continued as he washed off the blood from the left temple and revealed the outlet wound. Then he turned again to the hole in the right temple. "Skin around entry wound scorched—shot must

have been fired at close range." He looked up at the inspector. "Anything else?" he asked. "Do you want me to give him a thorough overhaul? It's pretty obvious that the wound in the head was the cause of death."

"Better give him the 'once over', doctor," replied the inspector, "in case there are any other wounds."

With skilful movements the doctor set to work and made a complete examination of the dead man.

"How long has he been dead?" asked the inspector.

"Eight to ten hours at least, I should say. The body is quite cold and stiff."

"Any other wounds?"

"No, except a bit of a scratch on the inside of the right forefinger, and another small one on the inside of the second finger of the left hand. I can't say how they were caused—probably done as he fell," he concluded, rising to his feet.

"Well," said the inspector, "if you're quite satisfied as to the cause of death, I won't keep you any longer."

"Quite," replied the doctor. "The bullet must have passed through the brain. Death would have been instantaneous."

"Right," said the inspector, "we'll just have a look round, but if everything is as the constable stated I'll report to the coroner that there aren't any suspicious circumstances. I don't expect there'll be

an inquest.* Let me have your certificate before you go, will you?"

The doctor sat down at Sir John's big desk and presently handed the inspector the required document. Nodding a comprehensive farewell, he took his departure. As the door closed behind him the detective stepped forward and held out the clock for the inspector's scrutiny.

"Have a look at that, sir," he said, handing it to him. Then he picked up the revolver. "Only one shot fired; I've got the bullet. That's the mark over there." He pointed to the wall opposite the window where the plaster was broken. "I haven't discovered the empty shell yet," he added, glancing down at the floor.

"Here it is, sir," cried the constable a moment later as he caught sight of it close to the window curtains.

"Good!" replied the detective, taking it from him.

"Now, let's have a look at the door and window, Arnot," the inspector directed. "If they are burglar-proof—as Jackson stated—there's no doubt whatever that this is a case of suicide."

The two men inspected the grille carefully, and pulling back the curtains, examined the window,

*For the benefit of the non-Australian reader it should be stated here that in several of the Australian States it is not unusual for a coroner to declare an inquest unnecessary when the fact of suicide is held to be proved in the police report, and where any public enquiry would serve to satisfy only the morbid curiosity of a certain section of the public.

noting the steel mullions and framework, and the patent burglar-proof fastenings.

"No doubt about that," said Hansen. "Now for the door." He put several shrewd questions to the constable regarding the nature of the work performed by the mechanic. Then he drew back the *portière* and examined the steel casing and the heavy bolts.

"H'm!" he grunted. "Nothing wrong there. Now I'll have a look outside. You go on with the prints, Arnot."

Lethbridge rose to show the inspector the way, while the detective produced brushes and powder and proceeded to test the revolver for finger-prints.

"By the by," said the inspector as he noticed the key in the lock, "whose is this?"

"Mine," answered Lethbridge readily, "or rather one kept in my office safe—in a drawer known only to me," he added. He explained briefly how he had come to use it and to leave it in the door. He then showed the inspector out to the courtyard, the constable following close on his heels as though anxious not to miss any of the words of wisdom that might fall from the lips of his superior officer.

Lethbridge chuckled half-hysterically as the inspector, in attempting to open the window, unsuspectingly gripped the still sticky handles, and swore vigorously in consequence.

"Sorry, I should have warned you, especially as

I was caught that way. The painters have been here for the past fortnight."

"Yes, and I didn't miss my share," the constable added, extending a pair of large and horny hands. "Pity it's not St. Patrick's Day!"

The inspector led the way back to the office, wiping his hands on his handkerchief as he went.

"Got a note of everything you want, Arnot?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. There's nothing much, though. The only prints on the revolver are those of the dead man."

"Quite so. It's a straight-out case of suicide, right enough," the inspector replied. He looked at his watch and then turned to Lethbridge. "We've another case this afternoon, so I'm glad we haven't had to spend much time on this." He took up his hat from the desk and held out his hand, but Lethbridge detained him with a gesture.

"Sorry to keep you, inspector, but there is a very serious aspect of this terrible affair to which I must draw your attention. I refer to the question of the press reports."

He then detailed briefly the effect the news of the death of such an important figure as Sir John Palliser would have on the financial interests of the country. Therefore, in order to minimize the inevitable publicity, he appealed to the inspector to obtain the coroner's verdict without delay, so that, in the event of an inquest being unnecessary, the burial

might take place on the morrow. Such a procedure, he pointed out, would very largely deprive the press of any sensational descriptions with which to aggravate an already panicky situation in the commercial world.

The inspector was not only visibly impressed by his earnestness and the soundness of his arguments, but displayed also a ready understanding. "I will certainly do my best, Mr. Lethbridge. Following upon recent affairs, I quite see your point. The newspapers made far too much of the McArthur case. They won't get much from us concerning Sir John, I can promise you that. It's fortunate, in this instance, that there aren't any Sunday papers in Melbourne. Let me see—it's just after two o'clock. I'll telephone you by half-past three if I possibly can. Will you be here?"

"Yes," replied Lethbridge, adding his appreciation of the inspector's generous attitude. "I've now the sad task of informing Sir John's relatives," he concluded.

The inspector nodded to the constable who remained on guard outside Sir John's room. "Absolutely no admittance to anyone, Jackson, until you hear from me."

With that he and Arnot hurriedly made their exit.

CHAPTER VIII

THE APPOINTMENT OF DETECTIVE TREVELYAN

LAVINGTON was not in a very pleasant mood. Even the recollection that it was his Saturday afternoon off had failed at first to dispel his gloom. The fact was that he had woken up with a thick head, due to a rather liberal indulgence—for an habitual beer drinker—in Millwood's, the head gardener's, whisky. They shared an outside room near the garage, and Lavington, on his arrival home the previous night at half-past ten, had found Millwood struggling manfully to assuage a violent toothache with the aid of Johnny Walker. The gardener's voluble insistence that Lavington, too, was suffering from the same complaint kept them both exceedingly well occupied until after midnight.

However, they managed to stagger off at last to their respective beds. But, half stupefied as he was, Lavington could not sleep; for the drunken gardener was soon raving and groaning about a toothache that must, in his state, have been entirely imaginary. Then, during a quiet interval, when Lavington had almost succeeded in getting off to sleep, the whirr

of self-starters, the engaging of gears, and above all, the gay chatter and farewells of the departing guests at two o'clock in the morning, roused him to a drunken rage.

The succeeding hours were a series of nightmares to him, punctuated by the groans of the gardener, with whom, in one dream, he would be carousing; while in another he was strangling him. And waking up at dawn with an extremely sore head, and a mouth—to use Lavington's own expression—"that tasted as if a blinkin' cat 'ad slept in it", though it was a change, was no great improvement on the preceding hours.

Little wonder therefore that Lavington should throw his uniform into the drawer of his chest and close it with an unnecessarily violent shove of his foot. He scowled at the drawer as if he never wished to see the uniform again, though it was a quite handsome one—with gold-braided epaulettes, too—and of a much better cut and material than the clothes he was now wearing.

However, in his gloomy universe there was a glimmer of interest whose radiance gradually increased. The football semi-final was to be played off this afternoon and he was going to see it. Moreover, the rain had cleared off and it was turning out to be a fine day, which meant that there was bound to be a big crowd present and he must therefore go early.

He slammed the door behind him and set out

briskly towards the tradesmen's entrance, but had hardly gone more than a few yards when he heard his name called. He muttered a curse and, turning round, saw Hugh Palliser coming towards him.

"I say, James, old cock," Hugh began, "I didn't know it was your afternoon off. What about my car?"

"Well, sir, I ain't 'ad no time ter do it," replied the chauffeur, flushing. "It's in an 'orrible state—and I gave it a good doin' only the day before yesterday."

Hugh frowned at the recollection of his journey on the previous night. "Yes—I forgot—I did get it in a bit of a mess, but I must have it to-morrow afternoon, old stick. Here's a quid. Will you fix it for 'me?"

"Yes, sir, course I will," responded Lavington in mollified tones, pocketing the pound note. "I'd 'ave done it this mornin' if I could 'ave, but I only got one pair of 'ands. I orter 'ave some 'elp, sir, that's wot I ort. There's too much 'ere fer one shuver."

"I can't help that, James, m'boy. I'm not the boss here yet."

"I wouldn't mind if yer was, sir," Lavington replied in an ingratiating voice, at the same time pushing back his hat and scratching his grey, grizzled head reflectively. "Yer've always been pretty decent ter me, 'ir."

A strange look came into Hugh's eyes. "Well,

I'll be boss some day! James, but Sir John looks good enough for another twenty years."

"Yes, sir, 'e does, but yer never knows, sir. My ol' man looked 'ealthy enough, but 'e just sort of faded away like after the day 'e stepped on a bit of orange peel and broke 'is sack-a-rum."—Observing Hugh's puzzled expression, he added, "Bottom of the spine, sir. Sack-a-rum—or some such name—the doctor called it."

"Oh, yes, sacrum," replied Hugh, repressing a grin. "But look here, James, old cock, we've wandered a bit from the subject. Seeing that my car isn't ready, I want you to do a little job for me."

Lavington made no attempt to conceal his displeasure at the request. "But I'm goin' ter the football, sir. It's the semi-final."

"All right, old buck. It won't take you long. You can have the guv'nor's car—that'll land you at the Oval in plenty of time. Look—I want you to call at the office—here's my key. You'll find a parcel in the hall addressed to me—some clothes. They weren't ready when I called this morning and being Saturday the blighters wouldn't send them out here."

Lavington's expression had changed when the car was mentioned and he replied cheerfully:

"All right, sir, I'll get 'em."

Hugh frowned as he watched Lavington drive off. "Strange that things haven't started to move yet," he thought. He realized that it would not do

for him, to be seen going to Palliser House until the body had been discovered. By sending Lavington in he would soon know whether or not there was any news—and nobody would be any the wiser as to his intention.

After casually making it known to his aunt where he would be spending the afternoon, he sauntered off.

Upon the departure of Inspector Hansen and the detective, Lethbridge returned to his office and braced himself for his unenviable task. He would speak to Miss Palliser first, he decided as he took up the receiver, and then, if possible, to Geoffrey. He knew that Hugh, as the elder, should be consulted, but his dislike of him made the idea repugnant.

With guarded brevity he broke the news as gently as he could to Sir John's sister, thankful that she took it with apparent fortitude. Not that she betrayed no emotion, but it seemed to Lethbridge that amazement at his news outweighed any other feeling she might have had. She informed him that she had understood that Sir John was away at his country cottage, and for that reason she had not been at all disturbed in mind at his non-appearance the previous night, Sir John having mentioned to her that he might leave by the Friday night train rather than the early one on Saturday morning.

Lethbridge listened a trifle impatiently and then proceeded to impress upon her the necessity for secrecy, pointing out that it was essential that she

must on no account let the servants or anyone—except her nephews—think otherwise than that Sir John was away for the week-end. He suggested also that, subject to any wishes she and her nephews might have, he would be glad to save her any distress he could by attending to the funeral and other necessary arrangements. He then inquired perfunctorily for Hugh and was relieved to learn that he was not at home. Geoffrey, she informed him, was in the library. Would he like to speak to him? Perhaps, she suggested, it might be better if she conveyed the news. Lethbridge gladly acquiesced.

“Well, that’s over, thank God!” he said to himself as he hung up the receiver. “But, by Jove! she took it calmly enough—just as though it was a matter of no consequence at all.”

He suddenly realized that he had had no lunch. He rang up a neighbouring coffee-house and ordered some sandwiches to be sent round. Meanwhile he decided to fortify himself with a whisky and soda.

When the sandwiches arrived he called out to the constable to join him. The latter did so with alacrity, and when the sandwiches were all gone accepted also a long whisky and another cigar.

“Will I be in the way if I smoke it here, sir?” he asked, leaning back with a luxurious air in his host’s most comfortable chair. “It’s a bit more comfortable like than standing out in that there passage.”

“Stay, by all means,” responded Lethbridge,

turning to the telephone, "but you must excuse me. I've one or two calls—Sir John's solicitors and also the undertakers—still to make."

Lavington turned the key in the front doors of Palliser House and swung the left-hand one open and stepped into the thickly carpeted hall. As he did so he heard a voice from the office on his left shout in exasperated tones and with a suddenness and unexpectedness that scared the wits out of him.

"I am speaking up, Mr. Blackham," shouted the voice which he recognized as Lethbridge's. "I said dead. . . . Yes—d-e-a-d. . . . Yes—Sir John. . . . Yes, yes, Sir John Palliser. Committed suicide sometime last night. . . . Yes, I'll knock my phone again. Is that better? . . . Good. The police have been round. They say there's no doubt about it being suicide and that, in all probability, there'll be no inquest. . . . Yes, I'll let you know. . . . Yes, of course, an absolute secret for the present. It'll be quite bad enough when it does leak out. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . ."

Lavington had stood rooted, his mouth agape; then, realizing that it would be extremely awkward for him were he discovered there, hurriedly grabbed the parcel which lay on the hall table and made a swift exit.

"Cripes!" he muttered when he got outside. "Cripes!" he repeated as he jumped into the car and drove off.

After his conversation with Mr. Blackham of Blackham, Blackham & Blackham, Sir John's solicitors, Lethbridge continued to sit at his desk, one moment drumming impatiently with his podgy fingers, the next fidgeting with pencil and paper. At times he would stare fixedly at the telephone as though it could tell him what Inspector Hansen's verdict would be. When at last it did ring his hands trembled as he held the receiver. He half dreaded it might be Miss Palliser or the lawyer ringing up—anyone, in fact, but the one person he wanted to hear from. However, his fears were groundless. It was Inspector Hansen, who informed him that the coroner deemed an inquest unnecessary and that the matter therefore was now out of their hands.

"I'll give the constable his instructions to leave if you'll be good enough to call him," he concluded.

When the constable had hung up the receiver Lethbridge conducted him to the door and slipped a crisp note into his hand.

"In case you don't see Fred," he said.

The constable thanked him and grinned broadly.

Lethbridge heaved a sigh of relief as he returned to his office. The lawyer was going to arrange about the funeral, so that at last he could settle down in peace, he told himself. The coroner's verdict was a tremendous weight off his mind. It might still be possible for him to pull himself out of the mess he had got into. He went to his safe and from a

secret drawer extracted some papers and was soon deeply engrossed in them.

Presently he heard the sound of the front doors being opened. With a curse he hurriedly thrust the papers into a drawer of his desk and looked up to see Geoffrey and Hugh Palliser.

He had always remarked to himself on their utter unlikeness of character, but the dissimilarity had never seemed so obvious as now. They both entered quietly, were both subdued, but he realized that, in some subtle, indefinable way, their essential differences of character, influenced by the present tragic crisis, were even more accentuated. He sensed in their attitude, too, an underlying antagonism that might even lead to open enmity.

He uttered a few words of condolence. "This tragedy will mean the shouldering of a tremendous responsibility by you two," he added. "We may never know why it has happened. We must therefore just accept the fact of it and carry on. Whatever I can do you may rest assured I shall be only too glad to do."

"Thank you, Lethbridge," responded Geoffrey. "I'm sure Father couldn't have chosen anyone more fitted to protect the interests of those he has left than you."

Lethbridge smiled his appreciation of the frank acknowledgment.

"Yes, that's right, Lethbridge," said Hugh, "but what's happened? The Old Man's dead—

I know that—but how did it occur? Geoff's only just picked me up. I seem to be the only one that hasn't been told anything."

Lethbridge regarded him with an expression of hardly concealed contempt. "I rang you up, but you were not at home." He then detailed the events leading up to the discovery of Sir John's body, adding the opinion of the doctor and Inspector Hansen.

"Looks like suicide, right enough," commented Hugh callously. "The Old Man was certainly crusty the last day or so—to me, anyhow. Any idea what the trouble was, Georgey—anything gone wrong in the money line? By Jingo, I hope not!" he added, thinking of the money he had borrowed from Krakowski, and also of his other innumerable debts.

"The only thing I know of that might have worried him to any extent, and also have been inclined to unbalance him," replied Lethbridge, "was the suicide of McArthur of the United Provincial Bank. Sir John recently increased his holding of shares in that bank to a quarter of a million pounds, with the idea of getting on to the Board. Whether he learned something about the affair that is not yet public, and which might have caused him to lose his nerve, I don't know. As far as I am aware the bank is safe enough. Still, McArthur's death came as a shock to the business world, and certainly casts a reflection on the Bank itself. Un-

fortunately, I didn't get a chance to discuss the matter with your father, and I think therefore in the absence of any definite knowledge, however slight, that no good can come of speculating as to the reason he had for taking his own life. Time may reveal the secret; it may not. The only thing we can do is to prevent any harmful and destructive effects arising out of it, and to think as charitably as we can of one who certainly never lacked courage."

"Lethbridge," cried Geoffrey in passionate tones, "I can't conceive of Dad doing such a thing. There must be some mistake. It's incredible, impossible!"

"I wish it were, my dear chap," returned Lethbridge sympathetically, "but I'm afraid it's beyond question."

Geoffrey, with all the confidence of youth in its own opinion, obstinately refused to accept the idea of suicide. "No, there's something wrong somewhere. I'm sure he never shot himself," he persisted.

Hugh looked curiously at him. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said," Geoffrey responded firmly. "Dad was too much of a fighter to get out of it like that."

"The Old Man seems to have a great champion in you, now that he's dead," returned Hugh sneeringly. "Anyhow, I'm certain he committed suicide. You know as well as I do that, when his room is

locked and bolted, no one can possibly get in. His own revolver too! Do you think the police are all fools? You're simply talking out of the back of your neck—as you generally do! If you're so sure, why don't you get to work and play the sleuth? You ought to be in there now, looking for finger-prints and blood-stained knives. Go on, why don't you?"

Geoffrey flushed, but managed to keep his temper as he caught Lethbridge's glance of mingled protest and appeal. "Perhaps I may, but not just now," he answered quietly.

"Well, I'm going to have a look. I'm not squeamish. Is the key in the door, Georgey?"

Lethbridge nodded; he could not trust himself to speak. Hugh rose, completely ignoring the older man's expression of indignation and disgust, and left the room.

Lethbridge and Geoffrey were both too distraught to avail themselves of Hugh's absence to talk. Each sat immersed in his own thoughts; Geoffrey still struggling with the problem of his father's death; Lethbridge striving to rid himself of the forebodings that kept returning to him at intervals.

Presently Hugh returned, looking as if he wished he had not ventured into the tragic room. He helped himself liberally to the whisky. Geoffrey rose to go. "And there's really nothing we can do, Lethbridge?" he said.

"No, I'll attend to everything. All you two need do is to look after your aunt and to preserve the fact

of your father's death an absolute secret for the present."

"Right you are, Georgey," replied Hugh. "You're not a bad old sport. However, let's get out of this place. It's not exactly cheerful, is it?"

Lethbridge saw them to the front door, where Hugh, declining Geoffrey's offer of a lift, walked away briskly.

Geoffrey had already made up his mind what he would do regarding his father's death. He must see Harry Worrall; as the chief of the reporting staff of the "Daily Wail", his friend would be sure to know of a good man to get for the investigation. He was determined to exhaust every means before he would admit to himself the truth of the coroner's verdict. He decided to go to Worrall's flat immediately, on the off chance of finding him at home. It was hardly likely that he would be at his office on Saturday afternoon. Still, in case——

A few minutes later the two young men were shaking hands.

"Hope I haven't disturbed you, old man," said Geoffrey as he saw the litter of writing on the desk.

"Not at all, Geoff. Take a pew and make yourself comfortable," Worrall returned, regarding him critically. Then, as though receiving confirmation of the impression he had gained from his friend's distraught manner, he added: "What's the matter, old chap? You look as if you've got something on your mind. Anything I can do?"

"Yes, Harry," replied Geoffrey gravely and, after pointing out to Worrall the necessity for secrecy, he proceeded to tell him of his father's tragic death, of the circumstances surrounding it, and the decision at which the coroner had arrived. "But I'm positive he didn't commit suicide," he concluded vehemently.

Except for an exclamation of astonishment at Geoffrey's announcement of his father's death, Worrall listened to the recital without interrupting, his journalistic instincts nevertheless warring with his feeling of sympathy for his friend. He shook his head when Geoffrey had finished.

"Sorry, old man, but I think you're wrong. From what you've told me there can be only one opinion. However, that's beside the point. You want me to recommend some one. I don't know whether I can get the man I have in mind, but it won't take long to find out."

He turned to the telephone. "I want to speak to Mr. Gordon Trevelyan, please." He frowned as he heard the reply. "Very well," he continued, "if you are expecting him in any minute, ask him to telephone, or, better still, to come round and see Mr. Worrall. Tell him the matter is urgent."

He opened his cigarette-case and held it out to his visitor. "He lives not far from here, Geoff, so it won't take him long when he gets my message. He's a fine chap and as sharp as a needle. Takes nothing, absolutely nothing, for granted. Unlike the average detective, he's educated and has

travelled extensively. The standard he set himself when he was in the C.I.D. created so much petty jealousy among those who were nominally his superiors that he resigned. He's much happier now, and is certainly earning a great deal more money. I come in contact a lot with him in the course of my work. He was the man who cleared up the Bentham poisoning case and also the Dewald mystery. You may remember the Dewald case—a girl's body was found hacked to pieces in a trunk at the bottom of a well."

Upon Geoffrey replying that he did not know the case, Worrall embarked upon the gruesome story with all the eloquence of one who had written it up for his paper. He was nearing the most dramatic part of his recital when there was a sharp knock at the door, and the hero himself walked in without waiting on ceremony.

"Hullo, Worrall." Then seeing Geoffrey, he added, "Sorry, I thought you were alone."

"Quite all right, Gordon. This is Geoffrey Palliser; he is actually the cause of your visit."

The two men shook hands cordially.

"Shall I tell him, Geoff?" asked Worrall. "I expect you've had enough for a while, although I think, Trevelyan will want to ask you some questions."

Geoffrey nodded a grateful acquiescence.

With a newspaper-man's skill Worrall outlined the affair, setting out the essential details with a

sequence and clarity that Geoffrey in his normal state of mind could not have approached, much less have accomplished in his present overwrought condition. "The culminating point, Gordon," he concluded, "is that Palliser refuses to believe that his father committed suicide. Hence my telephone call."

Trevelyan leaned back in his chair, mentally reviewing the points that had been presented to him. To Geoffrey, in his nervy state, the detective's cogitative silence seemed an eternity. He had almost been ready to believe that Trevelyan, so eulogistic had been Worrall's description, would have been prepared to concur without hesitation in his own belief; have even offered an immediate solution as to how and why his father was murdered. Instead, Trevelyan broke the silence with nothing more definite than to say:

"There is a chance, but a very remote one, that you may be right, Mr. Palliser; it depends on how much of that minutia of evidence, which invariably escapes the lay and, indeed, often the trained mind, I can find. Did your father have good sight?" he added casually.

"Yes, I think so," answered Geoffrey, rather puzzled.

"Then can you tell me how his room was lighted, and of what candlepower the lamps were?"

Worrall smiled at the questions. He had more than an inkling as to the drift of them.

"There are two fairly strong reading-lamps with

heavy shades, as far as I can remember," said Geoffrey, "one on the main desk and the other on the small writing-table near the window. There is also a ceiling lamp, but that gives only a subdued flood light."

The detective thanked him, and then glanced over to the window. "A little finer than it was, Worrall," he observed. "It's been wet and cold for days."

Worrall smiled knowingly. "In other words, you've got an idea."

"I've got lots, but unfortunately most of them usually turn out to be like the curate's egg. However, haul out the whisky, there's a good chap, and then we'll have a look at Sir John's room. There's time before it gets dark if we don't loiter. Then I may be able to relieve some of Mr. Palliser's anxiety, though I'm afraid it won't be much comfort in the circumstances."

"On the contrary," said Geoffrey gravely, "it means a great deal to me to have the stain of dishonour removed."

They finished their drinks in silence.

Within a quarter of an hour Geoffrey landed them at Palliser House. He led the way to his father's office.

"I haven't been in there yet," he said with a shiver, realizing now that he must face the ordeal.

Worrall gripped him sympathetically by the arm. "Steady, old man," he whispered. "A lot may

depend on you at this juncture. Trevelyan will need your help."

As they entered Geoffrey switched on the main light, but, despite his attempt to hide his emotion, shuddered as he forced himself to look down upon the tragic figure of his father. As his gaze wandered to the gruesome stains he clenched his hands in the intensity of his effort to hold his feelings in check. Worrall led him to a chair at the desk and made him sit down.

Trevelyan, meanwhile, switched on the reading-lamp, after removing the shade in order to get the full benefit of the light. Then he stood near the door and surveyed the scene as though making a mental picture of the whole. Then, carefully and methodically, he examined the body of the dead man. Taking out a pocket lens, he paid special attention to the scorch marks around the bullet wound, and to the fingers of each hand. The floor, and the litter of overturned articles: the broken reading-lamp, the writing-table and the clock, each received its share of his keen scrutiny. He even collected the fragments of glass belonging to the clock, and wrapping them up put them in his pocket. Going to the window, he tested the grille and the fastenings; then, crossing to the wall opposite, he examined the broken plaster. With a decisive movement he returned to the writing-table, and, setting it on its legs, tried it in various positions near the window until at last he seemed satisfied.

Both Geoffrey and Worrall watched him intently throughout these operations endeavouring to follow his thoughts, and to deduce from his movements whatever conclusions he might have arrived at. Once Geoffrey had made as though to speak, but had been silenced by a gesture from Worrall who knew Trevelyan's methods of procedure and his dislike of interruption during his initial investigations. Worrall was aware, also, from past experience, that the detective would not himself break the silence until he had found a clue or at least reached a point, sufficiently important, to enable him to formulate a theory. It was therefore with almost as eager an anticipation as Geoffrey's that Worrall waited for Trevelyan to speak. The manœuvring of the table was, apparently, sufficiently significant to the latter, for, after finally adjusting it, he looked inquiringly at Geoffrey.

"Is this the usual position of the table?"

"Yes, within an inch or two, I should say," answered Geoffrey.

Worrall looked a little puzzled. He noted that the table stood fairly close to the window, but there seemed to be no point in that. It was obvious that the window was impregnable. He took a step or two nearer the table. "Devilish lot of blood on it," he muttered. He wondered if that was what Trevelyan had in mind.

The latter, upon receiving Geoffrey's reply, picked up the overturned chair, and sitting down

at the table, placed his elbows on it, supporting his head between his hands as though immersed in thought.

It seemed a strange procedure to Geoffrey.

Apparently satisfied, Trevelyan rose and went over to the *portière* and held it aside, but gave only a glance at the steel backed door and the bolts.

"I'd like to have a look round outside now," he said.

Geoffrey led the way to the courtyard. The rain had ceased and there was a good light. The winter sun, low down in the frosty sky, was reflected on the panes of the window. The detective, however, paid no attention to it for the moment, but poked about among the litter of ladders and material that the painters had left in a corner. Then he proceeded to examine the window.

"You didn't tell me about the painters being here," he said.

"You don't really think it could have been one of them, do you?" Geoffrey answered in astonishment. "I quite forgot to mention it, I know."

Trevelyan ignored the question and went on with his examination. After having satisfied himself that it was impossible for the window to have been opened from outside, he turned to Geoffrey.

"Well, I think I've seen everything that matters at the present stage. I'll take the clock away with me, the revolver, I understand, the police took. However, that's of no consequence now. Any

evidence it might have afforded must have pointed to suicide or Hansen wouldn't have made the report he did to the coroner. Anyhow, I can easily find out. I shall need some information from Lethbridge, but Monday morning will do quite well for that."

They went inside. Trevelyan put the clock in his pocket, switched off the lights and closed the door behind him.

"If you don't mind running us back in your car, Mr. Palliser," he said as they left the building, "we can talk as we go. I can't say definitely yet that your father was murdered, but I do know this: that if anyone with sufficient motive had desired to murder him, they could have done so, in spite of the locked and bolted door and the impregnable window."

"You mean, of course, by shooting him," said Geoffrey eagerly as he pressed the self starter.

"Yes. In other words, there is as much evidence in and about the room that your father was shot as there is that he shot himself. As the result of an experiment I shall make to-night, the evidence in favour of the theory of murder may outweigh that of suicide. However, in making up your mind as to whether you wish me to go on with the investigation, you must do so on the assumption that so far the evidence for murder or suicide is about fifty-fifty. If you do wish me to proceed, I must have your full authority to question whom I like and to

have access both to Sir John's office and his house at such times as I may find necessary."

"Mr. Trevelyan, I am very grateful to you," replied Geoffrey. "You have my full authority to act as you consider necessary. My aunt and I discussed this matter directly we heard the news, and agreed upon this course of action."

"Very well, Mr. Palliser. Assuming your father was murdered: there arises the question of the murderer. Will you want me to attempt the elucidation of that aspect of the crime or would you prefer to hand it over to the police?"

"No, Mr. Trevelyan," replied Geoffrey emphatically, as he pulled up outside the detective's rooms, "I would rather you carried it right through."

"Thank you," said Trevelyan cordially. "I'm glad you decided that way."

"Just put me down at the corner, old man," said Worrall as the car moved off again. "I expect you won't be sorry to get home."

"No," replied Geoffrey, "I certainly shall not." He paused for a moment and then added abruptly, "Of course, Harry, I can't feel overwhelmed with anguish regarding the pater's death. He never seemed to take much interest in us boys, or in Mother, either. He always appeared to be immersed in business or, since we came to Australia, in getting on in the social world. Why, he was absolutely unbearable for days before he got his title—and insufferable for days after he did. It's the shock

and horror of his death that upsets me; for, whatever he was, he wasn't a coward. I want to be fair to him, and that's why I'm anxious for the investigation to go on."

"I think I understand, Geoff, old chap," returned Harry. "The trouble with so many parents—especially the male species—of your father's generation is that they can't adjust themselves to the extraordinary changes that the War has made. As for us, even if we don't say so outright, we feel subconsciously that the old blighters have made such a mess of things that it's up to us to formulate a new set of rules. 'We may be wrong, but it's our turn', is our attitude." He grinned cheerfully. "Consequently, the two generations are rather apt to be at loggerheads. However, run along, old man, and don't worry. Leave that to Trevelyan."

CHAPTER IX

GATHERING UP THE CLUES

TREVELYAN entered his study feeling tolerably well satisfied with the result of his initial investigation. He realized, of course, that in the inquiries he had yet to make lay the confirmation or negation of his suspicions. Even so, he was fairly certain of one thing: John Palliser did not die by his own hand. The difficulty lay in proving it. He had purposely questioned Geoffrey as to his father's eyesight and the illumination of the room, because he had seen subtle evidence overlooked time and again by the police, simply owing to inadequate or deceptive lighting. In such circumstances, and certainly on a gloomy day like the present, a thorough investigation was out of the question. The police too, like medical men, he knew from experience, were prone to jump to conclusions, to accept obvious, prima facie evidence when they were harassed by overwork.

He had observed, too, that crime always showed a tendency to increase in times of financial stringency and unemployment, and that really big crimes often received insufficient attention because of the in-

numerable burglaries and other petty offences that hard times seemed to engender.

It appeared to him that there was one thing the police had not taken into account, and that was the slight scorch mark on the fingers of the right hand of the dead man. He admitted to himself that, without the aid of the reading lamp, even he would not have noticed it. Moreover, he had acted in circumstances which gave him an overwhelming advantage over the police—and which he did not for one moment overlook. Whilst he had made his investigations in the hope of proving murder, they had gone, with minds already prepared by the constable's report, expecting to find an obvious case of suicide. Any credit that he took to himself therefore was of a very modest nature—the more so, in view of the fact that, even though his discovery appeared to be inconsistent with the conclusion at which the police had arrived, it was insufficient to disprove their verdict. Still, he argued, the position at which the bullet entered the temple was such that to have shot himself Sir John must have used the right hand. This being so, how came he to scorch the fingers of that hand? Moreover, the scorch marks round the bullet wound were divided by lines of unscorched skin. This point impressed itself particularly upon him because, owing to the bullet having entered close to the hair of the head, he had only made the discovery after the most careful scrutiny. He had ascertained that Sir John was

not left-handed. Had he been, he might possibly have managed to get his left arm round into the position indicated by the wound—but why have fired through the fingers of the right hand? The idea was absurd.

In his opinion, Sir John came to his death while seated at the little writing-table, his head bowed in the attitude of one tired or worried. That the latter was not unlikely, he gathered from what he had heard of Lethbridge's theory regarding the effect of McArthur's suicide on Sir John, which Worrall had included in his narration on behalf of Geoffrey. Without doubt, whatever had taken a great figure in the commercial world like Sir John back alone to his office until such an hour—for, judging by the clock, it was decidedly late—it must have been of very great importance and have involved a very heavy mental strain. From these facts it appeared to him not merely that Sir John had sat with bowed head, but that he supported it with *both* hands. Therefore some one else must have fired the shot—for there was absolutely no evidence of any mechanical contrivance whatsoever by which the revolver could have been fired by Sir John himself.

He had re-enacted the pose of the dead man at the table for the express purpose of considering the likelihood of such a theory. In confirmation, too, were the slight scratches on the inside of a finger of each hand, as though the bullet in entering and

also—strangely enough, in leaving the head—had grazed the skin.

If his deductions were wrong, he told himself, he could conceive no other theory that satisfactorily accounted for the peculiarities of the scorch marks. If, however, his deductions were correct, there was only one place from which Sir John could have been shot, and that was from the window. Yet he was satisfied that the window could not have been opened from the outside; nor was there any evidence that a pane of glass had been removed for the purpose. Still, he could see no other answer to the riddle.

As for the door—that seemed utterly out of the question. It had neither false frames, secret springs nor sliding panels. It was obviously solid and substantial. The window was the only solution, or else his reasoning was at fault. He resolved to make another examination of it. As for the motive for such a crime—he refused to think about it. He had enough to do without indulging in mere speculation.

He unwrapped the fragments of glass that he had brought away, and carefully flattening out a bit of wax to the size of the clock face, he proceeded to fit the pieces together, pressing them on to the wax to hold them in place. He found, however, when he had used them all up that there was still a portion missing. He searched in vain in the paper which had contained them. He turned his attention to the clock to make sure that he had not left any in the rim, but here, too, he met with no success. He

decided that this also would necessitate a further visit to the room of the dead magnate. Then, with an exclamation of surprise, he observed that the clock showed twelve o'clock and not three minutes to, as it had when he first saw it. It was not going and, although he shook it repeatedly, he could get no further movement out of it.

He wound it up, but with no better result; and an examination of the spring showed that the cause of the trouble was not there. Then he endeavoured to turn the hands, but they remained immovable. Taking out his pocket lens, he carefully scrutinized them and saw they were caught, the tip of the little hand being bent up in such a manner as to obstruct the passing of the minute hand. Had either hand been bent down, he could have readily understood it—the fall would have accounted for that. But for one hand, especially the little one, to be bent up, seemed strange.

Was the murder, if murder there had been, committed earlier than three minutes to twelve or later? And was the condition of the hands accidental or the result of a deliberate attempt to prevent the clock from functioning after midnight, in order to make it appear to be the hour at which Sir John died, thus providing the murderer with an alibi in the event of a verdict of suicide not being recorded? It was an ingenious theory, he reflected, but too vaguely supported at the present stage. As a precaution, however, he decided to submit the clock

to his friend, Inspector Hart of the Finger-prints Section, in case there should be any evidence there. He would also endeavour to get a report of a similar nature concerning the revolver, provided Hart could get access to it without arousing comment.

He leaned back in his chair, and lit his pipe; then, picking up the evening paper, was soon immersed in the news of the day. As he turned over a page to see the late cables, he saw the glaring headlines reporting a brawl between two gangs of hooligans the previous night at the rear of Palliser House. He read the account avidly in the hope that it might contain some clue for him, but, though he scanned every line carefully, he could see nothing relevant to his present problem in the highly coloured and sensational journalese.

Laying down the paper, he leaned back again in his chair, pondering the situation anew. On further consideration he decided to telephone Lethbridge and arrange to meet him at Palliser House next morning instead of waiting until Monday. Also, he reflected, it might not be a bad idea to have a word with the policeman who had been on duty in Collins Street East the previous night.

Making Lethbridge his first call, he informed him of his appointment to investigate the case and arranged to meet him at ten o'clock next morning. Lethbridge told him that the undertakers would be arriving at eleven to prepare the body for cremation—which would give them a clear hour to discuss

the affair—and that being Sunday morning they would be assured of absolute privacy. Lethbridge also explained to him that arrangements had been made with the undertakers to use a packing-case to enclose the coffin which would be removed in a carrier's van. The undertakers' men would also be suitably attired to maintain the illusion. "The secret must be kept at all costs," he had concluded.

Trevelyan's next move was to ring up Russell Street, to find out the name of the constable who was on beat in Collins Street East up till ten o'clock and also who it was that took the all night watch. Being on excellent terms with the C.I.D., although he was no longer officially connected with it, he was accorded the information freely. Johnson, the man who went off at ten, was a stranger to him; but Carter, who relieved him, he knew well as one of the most promising of the younger men, and to whom he had given assistance and encouragement at various times. He would have no difficulty with him.

Having decided on his plan of action regarding Carter, Trevelyan proceeded to satisfy himself concerning another point. Turning again to the telephone he rang up the Finger-print Department. With the exercise of considerable tact he learned from his friend, Inspector Hart, without having to give his reasons for inquiring, that the finger-prints on Sir John's revolver were—as he had already surmised—those of the dead man.

A little after ten o'clock he met Constable Carter

sedately doing his beat. He asked after the man's family and then talked current "shop" for a few minutes.

"What about the brawl last night, Jack?" he inquired, casually changing the subject. "You weren't in that, I suppose. According to the papers, it was all over before ten."

"No, I wasn't, thank God," replied Carter. "I got smashed on the head with a bottle in the last one I tried to stop."

"Nothing particular arising out of last night's affair, I suppose—the brawl, I mean," Trevelyan inquired, not knowing whether Carter had heard about Palliser's death, and not wishing to tell him just then if he had not.

The constable shook his head. "No, it was just the usual vendetta between rival gangs."

"I was wondering if it had anything to do with the job I have in hand, that's all." Trevelyan spoke in a confidential manner as though he would not object to telling Carter what that job was. "You see, Carter," he continued, "I've been asked to keep an eye on Palliser House for a while. Sir John's house at Toorak—his study—was burgled early in the week, but nothing of value was taken. He keeps a lot of documents of importance there relating to his business affairs that would mean more to certain people than the usual haul of jewelry or a bundle of notes. You understand."

The policeman nodded.

"Of course this is all strictly in confidence, Carter."

"That's all right, sir. You did me a few good turns, one way and another, in the old days, so you can trust me."

"Only too glad to do anything I can for you," Trevelyan responded, not at all ill-pleased at the turn the conversation was taking. "But what I was going to tell you is this"—he determined to make a shot in the dark—"someone got into Palliser House last night, though apparently nothing was taken."

To Trevelyan's surprise, for he had heard nothing of the front doors having been found open at 2 a.m., Carter replied:

"Then that accounts for the doors," and he informed the detective of his strange discovery. "I had a good look round," he continued, "and even went through to the courtyard and tried the windows to see that they were fastened, but found nothing amiss. The curtains were drawn, so I couldn't see in. I was a bit puzzled over the doors, especially as I had given them a good shake just after midnight, but all I could do was to close them again and report the matter."

Trevelyan, too, was exceedingly puzzled by the announcement, for he had observed the bolts and the heavy slam-to lock when he had been there during the afternoon.

"Anyhow, I'm glad there's nothing missing,"

added Carter. "I've heard nothing more about it, I guess everything's all right."

"That's just the trouble, Carter, it isn't all right. What I'm going to tell you is going to give you a bit of a shock, but on no account breathe a word of it to anyone until you hear of it officially. Some time last night Sir John Palliser committed suicide in his office." He uttered the last few words in little more than a whisper. "If Carter does know anything, that ought to fetch him," he thought.

Carter gave a gasp of astonishment. "Suicide! Are you sure of that? Do you really mean to say Sir John Palliser's dead?"

"No doubt of it," replied Trevelyan, who had not the slightest intention of betraying his suspicions and incidentally casting a reflection upon Inspector Hansen. In a few words he explained to the constable the impregnable nature of the room and all the obvious evidence of suicide that it had disclosed.

"Fancy, Sir John Palliser!" Carter exclaimed. "He's the second one lately. If it hadn't happened in a room like that I'd have said that the front doors being open might have had something to do with it. 'From what you tell me they can't have.'" He paused a moment. "Any idea what time it took place? Because, now I come to think of it, I remember hearing what may have been the pistol shot. I wasn't more than a hundred yards from Palliser House at the time. I took no particular notice of it, thinking it was a blow-out, especially as the sound

coincided with the skidding of a car at the corner."

"What time was this, Carter?" Trevelyan's voice was calm, but he himself was tense with expectancy.

"Let me see, shortly before midnight, I think. Yes, it was, because I remember bumping into young Palliser a few minutes later—and that was just after twelve o'clock had struck."

At this announcement Trevelyan only barely managed to restrain himself. He had not dared to hope for such information as this.

"Young Palliser!" he repeated. "Which one? Can you describe him?"

"Yes, rather fairish, I should say, although I didn't have much chance to get a good look at him. Geoffrey, he said his name was. I was just going to try the doors when he came bundling out in a great hurry. Said he'd been looking for his father and was going on to the Club to see if he was there."

"Geoffrey!" said Trevelyan to himself. The son he knew as Geoffrey was dark. Aloud he replied: "Then you don't know how long he'd been inside?"

"No, I had a look at him and as he seemed all right, I simply let him go. Of course if I'd only known about this other affair . . . But I hadn't the remotest suspicion. You see, I knew Sir John had been working late, because just after I came on duty I spoke to his chauffeur, who was waiting for him. He told me he'd been instructed not to wait

after ten and was, in fact, on the point of going when I spoke to him. We didn't say much. He asked me what all the firing was about and said he hadn't gone round to see because he was expecting Sir John to come out any minute." Carter rubbed his chin reflectively. "And to think of me doing my blessed beat all night and Sir John lying dead in his office! What a fool I was not to have tried to see into the room when I went to try the window. Finding it fastened and the curtains drawn, I didn't trouble any further. By Jingo, though, it's a good thing for young Palliser that it's suicide. He'd have been in Queer Street otherwise."

"Yes, you're right, Carter. However, don't forget, mum's the word until you get the news officially. In the meantime, keep a good eye on those front doors, though I don't suppose there'll be any more trouble with them. Still, it wouldn't do any harm to have a look at them now."

They walked along to Palliser House and Trevelyan shook the doors violently; but, beyond rattling a little, they were as firm and secure as anyone could wish.

"Doesn't seem to be anything wrong with them, sir," commented the policeman, "but neither did there when I tried them last night. However, I'll let you know if I find them open to-night."

Trevelyan thanked him and then made his way home, as much puzzled as he was elated over his night's work. The matter of the doors seemed

mysterious enough, but not half so disturbing as the news about Geoffrey. Surely it could not have been he who had been at Palliser House at midnight. Could it have been his brother, Hugh? Certainly the description—fair—fitted him; but, according to Geoffrey, Hugh was in bed at the time Carter mentioned. However, it should not be very difficult to get proof of Geoffrey's movements. If it was Hugh that Carter spoke to, then he must have had something to hide.

Still, he was not going to indulge in mere speculation, or jump to any conclusion, however apparent, until he had established that relation and sequence of events which alone could justify it beyond all shadow of doubt. The behaviour of Hugh or Geoffrey Palliser—whichever it was—certainly seemed suspicious, but Trevelyan knew he had yet to prove that Sir John had been murdered. If he could only prove it he would feel that more than half his task was completed.

Worrall must help him—and if it transpired that Sir John had been murdered it would prove a big "scoop" for the "Daily Wail". Late as it was he decided to call on Worrall on his way home and to enlist his services and set him to work without delay.

CHAPTER X

MURDER WILL OUT

TREVELYAN woke next morning with a sense of expectancy, an eagerness to begin the day. The weather, though cold enough, promised to be fine. He therefore donned his tweeds and got out his golf-clubs, hoping that he might finish his investigations in time to have his customary Sunday morning round. He ate a light breakfast leisurely, preparing himself for the work of the day with the subconscious impulse towards orderliness that becomes natural to the trained mind.

The streets, as he traversed them on his way to Palliser House, had the deserted appearance common to all big cities on a Sunday morning. It was too early for most church-goers, and except for a figure lounging against a porch opposite Palliser House there was not a soul to be seen when he arrived there.

After waiting a minute or two Lethbridge appeared. As they entered the building Trevelyan slammed the door to sharply, and then with a quick movement opened it a fraction.

"Mr. Lethbridge, have a good look at that man

on the other side of the street. Do you happen to know who he is?"

Lethbridge, somewhat surprised, did as he was requested. There seemed to be something familiar in the man's appearance, and he tried to recall where he had seen him before. Then, as the man commenced to stroll up and down, he recognized the figure by a limp in one leg.

"No, I don't know who he is, but I remember seeing him yesterday when I left. There aren't many people about in this part of the town on Saturday afternoons or I don't suppose I should have noticed him. Still, I don't see where he comes into the picture."

"I soon will, though," said Trevelyan to himself, as he closed the door again and accompanied Lethbridge to his office. Then, by the supplement of a question here and there, he elicited the secretary's account of the tragedy, his views concerning Sir John's motives for committing suicide, his estimate of the magnate's financial position, and his opinion of the two sons. Lethbridge seemed a little uneasy at first under fire of the detective's very searching examination, but gradually lost his nervousness.

At the end of half an hour, Trevelyan thanked him for the concise manner in which he had given his answers, and rose, intimating that he would now like to inspect the room and would be glad if Lethbridge would accompany him.

"By the way," he added, "where do the painters

keep their brushes and paints and other small paraphernalia? The bits of spare scaffolding and so on are in a corner of the courtyard, but nothing more."

Lethbridge led him down the corridor and opened a big cupboard under the staircase. "There you are, Mr. Trevelyan. This is really the charwoman's cubby-hole, but as there is plenty of room the painters were allowed the use of it."

"What time does the charwoman do the cleaning?" asked Trevelyan.

"Any time between six and eight in the morning," replied Lethbridge. "She also opens the back door when the painters arrive so that they can get their gear."

"I assume she is thoroughly trustworthy."

"Quite," answered Lethbridge. "She's been doing this place for years and, of course, has the key to the front entrance. She does not, however, clean Sir John's room or the general office or my room. They are done by one of the office boys."

Trevelyan turned to John Palliser's office. "I know this isn't a very pleasant matter for you, Mr. Lethbridge, and I shall therefore not prolong my investigation longer than I can help."

He turned the key, which had been left in the door, and entered the room. Everything was as he had left it the day before. He made a further rapid but thorough examination of the door, the iron grille, and the window fastenings, and then a most exhaustive search for the piece of glass that he had

overlooked. Lethbridge stood quietly watching him.

To his mystification he could find no trace of it, and after convincing himself of the uselessness of further search, turned his attention to the small waste-paper-basket that stood near the window, and straightened out the solitary crumpled sheet of paper which was in it. Except for a few Chinese characters drawn here and there at random, as though experimentally—much the same as an artist sketches in miniature on the margin of a drawing a repetition of some part of the work on which he is engaged—it revealed nothing. His eye wandered to the big Chinese dictionary that lay open on a reading-stand.

“Sir John was a Chinese scholar, apparently.”

“Yes,” replied Lethbridge, “and he must have been at work on a translation on Friday—judging by that bit of paper—because the basket is cleared every morning. Not yesterday morning, of course. Finding the door locked, the office boy would simply have left it till later—or forgotten it.”

“Thanks,” said Trevelyan, pocketing the paper.

As he signified that he had finished as far as the room was concerned, Lethbridge, apparently as an afterthought, gathered up some documents which lay on the big desk and thrust them into a drawer. Trevelyan looked at him inquiringly.

“They’re the papers I told you about,” said Lethbridge, “the ones I left with Sir John on Friday morning. He must have overlooked them,

for they're not signed." He took them out again and handed them to Trevelyan who, after a brief glance, passed them back.

"No, Mr. Lethbridge, I don't think they're of any interest to me." He stepped towards the door. "I should like to take the key of this room with me, however. I'll let you have it back as soon as possible. Better still," he added, "you could use Sir John's, if necessary." He stooped over the form of the dead man and removed the watch chain, to which several keys were attached.

"Very well," replied Lethbridge as they left the room.

Trevelyan pulled the door to and then put his hand on the key to remove it from the lock and was surprised to find that he had to exert some force to withdraw it. "Seems a bit stiff," he said.

"It went in easily enough yesterday," replied Lethbridge. "Try it again."

The detective carefully pressed the key into the lock, but experienced the same difficulty as he had previously in withdrawing it. He made no attempt to force it in further, but pulled it out and examined it. "That's the trouble," he said, looking searchingly at the secretary. "There's wax on it."

Lethbridge turned red. "But it's a brand new key, never been used before. Also it's not been out of the door since I put it in yesterday. I'm positive, there was no wax on it then. It was as bright as a new penny."

"All right, Mr. Lethbridge," said Trevelyan without commenting on his statement. "Perhaps you can tell me who was the last to enter this room up till the time you left yesterday."

Lethbridge pondered for a moment or two, his expression one of uneasiness, perplexity, astonishment. "I—I—feel so upset about the whole affair that I can hardly think," he stammered. "Let me see . . . the policeman and the mechanic, then the inspector and the detective. . . . That's all, I think. Wait a moment, though. Hugh and Geoffrey came later on, and Hugh said he was going to have a look at his father."

"Thanks, Mr. Lethbridge," was Trevelyan's non-committal response. "Now I think I'll have a look outside."

As he opened the back door he glanced up appreciatively at the blue sky, glad that the sun was sufficiently high to give an excellent light to the courtyard.

"By the way, Mr. Lethbridge," he said, as they stepped on to the lawn, "why didn't you tell me that the front doors were found open in the early hours of yesterday morning?"

Again the look of uneasiness passed over Lethbridge's face. "Great Scott! I'd completely forgotten them. I'm awfully sorry. But I'm really so worried over the problems arising out of Sir John's death that I seem to be unable to concentrate my mind on anything that preceded it. I shan't feel

that I'm ready to cope with anything until the undertakers have been and the cremation is over."

Trevelyan nodded. "Yes, I don't underrate your responsibilities. At the same time I want all the help and information you can possibly give me, and, moreover, without expecting me to explain my reasons or give you any information in return."

"I will do all I can, you have my assurance of that," replied Lethbridge in a low voice.

Trevelyan made another examination of the window, carefully inspecting the iron frame round each pane, even scraping the paint off one of them in order to see whether they were set in with putty or with wood. His test showed that putty, as he expected, had been used. "Seems to be nothing wrong there," he muttered.

He realized that, after the amount of handling the window had received, it was useless to look for finger-prints; equally futile also to seek for foot-marks seeing that the lawn extended right to the edge of the building and to the surrounding walls on the remaining three sides. He went down on his knees, however, with another idea in his mind, determined to leave nothing to chance. He combed the grass with his fingers, probing here and there with infinite patience. At last he espied something shining as the sunlight caught it—a piece of glass, thin and just about the size and shape which he required to complete the clock glass. He slipped

it, unobserved by Lethbridge, into his waistcoat pocket, and smiled grimly.

Then, ignoring the paint, still slightly sticky, he gripped the upper portion of the frame of the lower middle pane with both hands and pressed upwards with all his force. The window refused to budge, but he did not seem disappointed. Instead, the grim smile returned as he endeavoured to smooth the paint where his fingers had gripped. "So that's it!" he said to himself.

"Mr. Lethbridge, would you mind going into Sir John's office, turning on the light and sitting at his small writing-table. I may want you to move your chair backwards and forwards. If I do, I'll tap on one of the lower panes, either the left or right, whichever direction I mean."

Lethbridge's anxious expression deepened, as though the ordeal had already been trying enough, but he complied with the request.

Trevelyan watched him as he sat down and presently signalled to him to move slightly back, then forward, then back again.

Apparently satisfied with his experiment, he went inside. Lethbridge looked inquiringly at him.

"No, Mr. Lethbridge," he said, "Sir John undoubtedly appears to have committed suicide." He spoke truthfully enough. Sir John had done so, apparently; but he knew now that the dead man had been murdered. That fact, however, he was

not prepared to tell anyone until he had found the murderer.

"I do not see how you could have arrived at any other conclusion," remarked Lethbridge emphatically.

Trevelyan looked at his watch. "No, just so," he replied with a rather absent-minded air. "However, it's close on eleven, and as I expect you'll have your hands full presently, I shall not detain you any longer."

"You mean that your inquiry is ended?" said Lethbridge, his manner a little less tense.

"No, I didn't mean you to infer that. There still remains the other part of my commission—" he paused for the fraction of a second as he somewhat mandaciously added—"that of clearing up the mystery of the burglary at Sir John's house last week and the possibly related affair of the front doors here. Still, compared with his death, that's a small matter."

"Yes, quite," returned Lethbridge, "but I didn't know you'd been requested to investigate those matters. However, it's a relief to me to know that the manner of Sir John's death is settled."

"Not more than it is to me," thought Trevelyan, "though not in the way you presume it to be, my dear Lethbridge."

He held out his hand. "Well, thanks awfully for your help." He slammed the door behind him, and without appearing to notice the figure on the

opposite side of the street filled his pipe before getting into his car. As he did so the man limped off leisurely, apparently tired of keeping his appointment. A few moments later a taxi that had been waiting further up the street followed him.

"Well, I hope he doesn't lose the trail," said Trevelyan to himself. "He's under cover of a taxi, so he oughtn't to. There's something doing here that I don't quite understand. Why should the place be under observation? Also, what is the reason of Lethbridge's queer nervousness?"

He wasted no further time in colloquy, however, but starting up the engine, was soon speeding out to Sir John's house at Toorak. Any thought of golf was far from his mind.

CHAPTER XI

THE INVESTIGATION AT ARLINGTON

IN response to Trevelyan's request to see Miss Palliser, the maid showed him into the library, informing him that her mistress might be a few minutes because she was somewhere in the garden.

Trevelyan welcomed the opportunity to be alone for a while. He looked around him in mild surprise. Judging by what he had learnt of John Palliser, he would not have expected to find such an extensive collection of books. However, it was for such additional sidelights of Sir John's personality that he had paid this visit; for most of the information to which he had had access in the brief time at his disposal had been necessarily restricted. Certainly, Worrall's budget of newspaper cuttings, which in his professional capacity he had been able to make available, had proved very useful, but they were of too impersonal a nature to give anything like a complete portrayal of the man as distinct from the magazine. However, from them he had gathered a good deal of information regarding Sir John's apparent appreciation of Chinese art; his financial affairs; his

social and political ambitions—thinly veiled by a philanthropy far too ostentatious to have been altruistic; but from none of these things had he been able to derive any clue relative to the state of mind of the murdered man on the evening of his death. He knew that if only he could learn enough of John Palliser to see with his eyes, to think with his mind, to grapple with the problem that had confronted him on that fateful night, he would be able to find, if not the murderer, at least a motive for the crime.

Where would there be more likelihood of seeing the real John Palliser than in his home? thought Trevelyan. Here, in this very room, there might be some link; for he was well aware that books and pictures, but especially books, often reveal more of a man's nature than perhaps any of the other things he gathers about him. He took therefore more than a mere literary interest in the shelves.

Almost without exception, the volumes were bound in the choicest examples of the binders' craft. There were polished calf tomes, ranging from folio to 12mo, in deep rich shades of blue or green or brown; others in crushed levant, in lamb-skin, in Turkey morocco; all richly tooled and ornamented in gold. He pulled out a volume here and there and remarked upon the unread appearance of most of them. He was strongly tempted to scribble in one of the margins what Burns had once done in a like situation:

“Through and through th’ inspired leaves,
 Ye maggots, make your windings;
 But oh! respect his lordship’s taste,
 And spare the golden bindings.”

Only those that appeared to bear some relation to the dead man’s financial, social or political ambitions seemed to have received any attention. Trevelyan noted typical examples: James’s “Trade, Banking and Finance in China”; “Notabilities of North China” (containing a full-page portrait of Sir John); Morse’s “International Relations”; Hansen’s “Trade Monopolies of the Yang-Tze.”

He rapidly surveyed the shelves of biography, history, travel—the latter mostly relating to the Far East—and the large section devoted to books on Oriental art. The rest of the library consisted only of sets of the nineteenth-century novelists, usually to be found in every “gentleman’s library”, and therefore of no great interest to Trevelyan in the present circumstances. Of the essayists and poets, or anything of an imaginative nature, there was no representation.

Two things struck him most: the mania Sir John seemed to have had for creating a grandiose impression; the other, the entire absence amongst his books of anything that suggested a deeply cultivated mind or even a normal moral sense. In a library of such size he did expect to find something of a philosophical or ethical nature. The cumulative effect of

his cursory examination of it made him feel that even Sir John's seemingly artistic tastes were a pose, and that his motive for gathering together rare and beautiful objects was more for the sake of their rarity than their beauty. There was an element of callousness in this expanse of bindings, most of them far too good for the books they unnecessarily decorated. It seemed to him, as he took in the impression of it all, that John Palliser had been the type of man who would not have scrupled to sacrifice anything or anyone in order to maintain or further his own aggrandizement.

His train of thought was interrupted by the entrance of Miss Palliser. He rose to greet her, instinctively aware of her cordiality, the soft modulation of her voice, before she had spoken. Her faint colour, the steady grey eyes, the glint of gold in her hair, and the slim figure with its simple grace of movement as she came towards him, were all acutely impressed upon his consciousness as a feeling rather than something merely seen. He vaguely remembered having heard that she was much younger than Sir John; but, even so, he had not expected this. Why, she hardly looked as if she had reached the thirties.

"I'm very sorry you've been left alone so long, Mr. Trevelyan," she said as she held out her hand, "but I was in gardening shoes and gloves when I heard of your arrival. It's very good of you to have come this morning."

"Not at all, Miss Palliser," replied Trevelyan. "I'm only hopeful I can do something at this unhappy time that will be of service to you. I understand from your nephew, Geoffrey, that my appointment has your full concurrence."

"Quite—but let us go to a more comfortable room. This one rather depresses me, I'm afraid." She led the way to a cosy little morning-room, simply but charmingly furnished, bearing all the evidences of a woman's hand in its colour scheme and arrangement.

They sat down before the fire and she rang the bell at her side. "Now, Mr. Trevelyan, except for the arrival of coffee presently, we shan't be disturbed, so I'll be glad to answer questions and assist you in any way I can."

"That's very kind of you," returned Trevelyan, "and I'll be glad to avail myself of your help. First of all, will you let me have a list of the servants, giving the positions held by them and their length of service? I hope it won't be necessary to question any of them because it's absolutely essential at present that the news of Sir John's death should be kept secret.

"However, what I'm chiefly concerned about just now is to find out what had been worrying him. I've inquired discreetly of members of his Club, who referred to his unusually preoccupied manner at lunch on Friday. At the Cecil, where he had dinner, he was extremely upset to learn that it was

McArthur, and not McCartney, who had committed suicide that morning, making him a possible loser of a quarter of a million pounds. Also, he was the recipient of a note from two strangers who sat at an adjoining table. He must have destroyed the note when he left the hotel, because I've not succeeded in finding it, and the waiter assures me it was not left on the table. The waiter says further that Sir John seemed reluctant to receive the men, but nevertheless gave instructions for them to join him. They were in conversation for nearly an hour, one of the strangers doing most of the talking. Sir John finally gave them his card as though making an appointment.

"I've also traced the taxi which took him from the hotel to his office. That was about nine o'clock. Why did he go back? Why didn't he leave at a quarter to ten when his own car was awaiting him? What effect did his interview with the two strangers at dinner have upon his plans? Who are they, and what did they want with him?" Trevelyan smiled. "If only you could answer some of those questions, Miss Palliser! But seriously, if you know of anything that would have contributed to his unquestionably disturbed state of mind, I beg of you to tell me."

Trevelyan had gradually leaned forward as he made his appeal, his quietly modulated voice growing vibrant and persuasive, his dark eyes lighting up and leaving no doubt in Anne's mind as to his eagerness and sincerity. She regarded him with a

new interest. Truth to tell, she had only agreed to the investigation because Geoffrey had been so insistent, though she had by no means shared her nephew's disbelief in Sir John's suicide. Now, as the result of Trevelyan's incisive, competent manner, the surprising extent of his information, and the pertinence of his questions, she felt considerably less certain of her opinions. There was a lot more behind her brother's death than she had imagined.

Trevelyan, observing her hesitation, her slight frown—as though she were confronted by the thought of a distasteful task—instinctively knew that he had not appealed in vain.

Anne smiled as she caught his glance. "You are making me see things in a different light, and I'm therefore going to be more frank with you than I anticipated. Although I concurred with Geoffrey about this investigation, I must confess I wasn't very enthusiastic. You will understand that lifting the veil of family affairs is not always a very pleasant task."

"But it may be of tremendous assistance to me," responded Trevelyan eagerly. "Remember, I'm not here to show any curiosity or make any comment unless it concerns the problem I've undertaken to solve."

Anne did not fail to note the assurance which underlay the latter remark.

At this moment a maid entered with coffee and toast. When she had gone Anne drew him, little

by little, though hesitatingly at first, a picture of the real John Palliser, the uncommunicative man of affairs, with his occasional pompous outbursts of vanity, his extraordinary obsessions, his utter lack of feeling for home life. She showed him a man, seldom stirred by impulse, with everything calculated, measured, set to a time, moving with ever increasing egotism along the way he had set himself.

"But to be more explicit," she continued, "I agree with you in thinking there had been something on his mind lately, although that seems to me rather to support the theory of suicide. How much the general financial depression affected him I am not in a position to say, but I think it made him nervy and irritable and less able to keep up the 'strong, silent man' pose, and certainly less capable of treating calmly a purely domestic matter that he would have passed over lightly a few months ago. I am referring now to the violent quarrel which took place last Thursday between him and Hugh over Hugh's continual gambling.

"I had always been puzzled over the utter unlikeness of the two boys, both in appearance and character, until I read this." She unfolded a paper and handed it to Trevelyan. "My brother's wife sent it to me from China as soon as she realized she had not much longer to live. On the envelope was inscribed: 'Only to be opened after John's death'."

Trevelyan read with considerable surprise:

MY DEAR ANNE,

I think some one should be in possession of the facts concerning Hugh, in case anything should transpire after I am gone to make their disclosure advisable. John refuses to make them public at this stage for fear that it might lead to gossip and any reflection be cast on him.

Hugh is not our child, but was adopted by us whilst we were in Melbourne in 1898. The doctors had told me that I would never have any children, and I proposed the arrangement, knowing how eager John had been for a son. A little later I had a talk with a specialist who recommended an operation. To my joy it was successful, and in due course Geoffrey came.

I think Hugh should be made aware of his adoption; then the matter can be left to him. It can remain a secret or he can endeavour to trace his parentage, whichever he desires.

I wonder how many years will pass before you read this. I thought the children would make a big difference in John's nature, but their coming seems only to have made him the more ambitious and grasping and egotistical. I am leaving the boys to you. Don't let them become like their father. I have done my best, but it has been difficult with Hugh.

John will be dead when you read this. Sometimes as I have heard of his stupendous financial deals, and knowing his unscrupulousness, I have felt he would meet a violent death, either at his own or some one else's hands. He is the sort of man who will fight ruthlessly to the end—but would rather die than face utter defeat and its humiliation.

You will come to see him as I have done if he lives long enough. Therefore you will know that I have not sat in judgment but only endeavoured to explain him, and to warn you for the boys' sake.

I shall have passed on even before this reaches you. Good-bye, my dear. Look after the boys, especially my Geoffrey.

Your affectionate sister-in-law,
CATHERINE PALLISER.

"Thank you, Miss Palliser," said Trevelyan gravely, as he returned the letter, "I'm greatly obliged to you."

Anne smiled at his non-committal reply. "I want you to understand, Mr. Trevelyan, that my sister-in-law was right. I have come to see my brother as she did, and much as I dislike saying it I must confess I can't feel an intense sorrow at his going. I agree with Geoffrey, however, that the stigma of cowardice should be removed if it is undeserved. That is our duty."

Trevelyan nodded understandingly. "How did you come to hear of the quarrel between Hugh and Sir John? Were you present?"

"No," replied Anne. "I knew that Hugh had been warned several times about his profligate living and his gambling debts, but I had never regarded his father's warnings very seriously because of the fact that he partly encouraged the boy by repeatedly condoning extravagance as an evidence of his own wealth and position. The quarrel, or rather, part

of it, was overheard by the butler, Jenkins, a servant of the old school, who was so perturbed by the incident as to come and tell me, hoping I might be able to act as mediator in case of necessity. You see, the most serious part of it lay in the fact that Sir John threatened to cut Hugh off with a shilling—and to do so without delay. Hugh was in need of money, apparently; this time a very much bigger amount than usual.”

This was news indeed, thought Trevelyan. “And did Sir John make any reference to the quarrel to you, Miss Palliser?” he asked.

“No,” she replied, “and I thought it best, in the circumstances, to say nothing myself, hoping that matters would right themselves. I was confirmed in this opinion too, largely by Hugh’s attitude at dinner that night, when he seemed almost deferential to his father.”

“How about the following night?” asked Trevelyan. “I understand you had a party here.”

“Yes,” replied Anne, “but I was kept fairly busy with my duties as hostess, and I’ve no recollection of anything that I should connect with my brother, nor do I remember seeing Hugh, except in the earlier part of the evening. I did ask Geoffrey about him once, and he said that Hugh had not been feeling well and had gone to bed. I guessed what that meant—Hugh is too fond of whisky—and therefore didn’t go up to see him.”

Trevelyan looked at his watch. “I think, perhaps,

I had better postpone my interview with the servants. It's rather late now, and also the information you have given me may make that course unnecessary. But I'll be glad to have the list of them. By the way, what is the chauffeur's name? Lavington, isn't it? How long has he been with you?"

"Yes, James Lavington. My brother engaged him soon after he arrived from China six years ago. He is an excellent driver and very useful as a handy man. We've never had any fault to find with him. He must have been the last of the servants to have seen him alive; that would have been at lunch time. When he returned from the City at about half-past two, he told the butler that his instructions were to take Sir John's travelling bag to town and to call at the office at a quarter to ten, but not to wait after ten o'clock. You see, my brother intended going to his country cottage at Mount Macedon for the week-end. Lavington went to town, but returned about half-past ten and sent me a message to say that Sir John had not come home with him and that he had therefore left the bag at the Club."

Trevelyan rose to leave. "No thank you, Miss Palliser, it will be wiser for me not to stay to dinner," he said in reply to her invitation. "And many thanks for your very great help. I'll need to have a look at Sir John's study, possibly this afternoon, although I don't expect it to yield any clues. In the meantime, would you be good enough to lock the door and keep the key? I'm glad there isn't

to be any ceremony in connection with Sir John's cremation, because that practically assures us of secrecy. I've arranged that the newspapers will not know about it until to-morrow night."

"Yes, very well, Mr. Trevelyan," replied Anne, "and once again many thanks for the trouble you are taking."

As the front door closed behind him he hesitated before getting into his car. It was a nuisance about Geoffrey not having returned, he reflected. He looked again at his watch. "It's only five past twelve," he said to himself, "I'll risk it. I must get all the information I can about Hugh." He glanced around to make sure there was nobody in sight and then hurriedly deflated the tyre of his spare wheel and then one of the front ones. With another cautious glance round he strode off along the drive towards the back of the house. "My lucky day!" he said to himself as he caught sight of the chauffeur cleaning a car. Lavington looked up expectantly as the crunch of footsteps sounded on the gravel.

"Sorry to trouble you," said Trevelyan, "but Miss Palliser said she thought I should find you here. You're Sir John's chauffeur, aren't you?"

"Yes, that's right," replied Lavington politely enough, but with an element of surliness in his manner. He was wondering whether this was a week-end guest as he looked at the well-knit figure of Trevelyan in golfing rig-out, and if it meant

another job for him. He had not forgotten the previous week-end when, owing to the arrival of unexpected visitors, he had had to forgo his Sunday afternoon off.

"Well," resumed Trevelyan, jingling the loose silver in his pocket, "I've just been to see Sir John, and unfortunately when I came out to my car I found I'd a puncture, and my spare's flat too. Can you help me? I'm in no hurry, so if you want to finish cleaning your car I can wait."

"Yes, sir," replied Lavington in a more cordial tone, "I'll mend the puncture all right if you're not in a bustin' 'urry. I'll just finish cleanin' this car. Mr. Hugh ain't 'ad it done since Friday. 'E's 'ad it out so much I 'aven't 'ad a chance ter do it before."

Trevelyan looked at it appraisingly. So this was Hugh's car. Judging by the rivulets of muddy water that flowed away from it, it had certainly needed cleaning. Friday night, he recollected, had been particularly wet and muddy. Pulling out his cigarette-case, he offered it to the chauffeur and then lit one for himself.

"Well, you can't expect the young fellows of to-day to be staying at home when they've got a car," he said. "Does Mr. Geoffrey still run his little Astley?"

"Yes, sir, and a good little car it is. 'E's out with it now."

Trevelyan pulled out his watch. "I'm sorry I

haven't been able to catch Sir John. I wanted to see him urgently too. I called at his office yesterday morning, but Mr. Lethbridge said he hadn't come in. I've been away since then and only got back this morning."

"Didn't Miss Palliser say where 'e'd gone?"

"No," replied Trevelyan, thoroughly enjoying his—to put it mildly—verbal inexactitudes, "now I come to think of it she didn't, but I gathered he was away for the week-end. When did you see him last? I suppose he didn't give you any information when he would be back."

"Well, sir, if Miss Palliser ain't told yer where the gov'nor's gorn, it ain't my place to."

"Quite right, quite right," commended Trevelyan. "Only I didn't mean that Miss Palliser refused to tell me. She merely said he was away at his country cottage. I presumed she meant the one at Mount Macedon. However, I'm not so much concerned as to where he is as to when he's returning. Miss Palliser wasn't sure. She thought it would be on Tuesday." He jingled the coins in his pocket once more.

"Well, sir," replied Lavington in a more mollified tone, "all I knows is I've got ter meet 'is train at 8,40 on Monday night." And he told the detective in practically the same words what he had already heard from Constable Carter in reference to calling for Sir John at a quarter to ten.

Trevelyan let the conversation lapse. He had

certainly drawn a blank here as to Sir John's movements. The chauffeur seemed to know 'no more than himself. He watched Lavington as he washed the last of the mud off the car and proceeded with the drying and polishing. Should he take this man into his confidence? he asked himself. Would it be wise to disclose his identity yet? He was very much tempted to. Although a bit grumpy, the man seemed honest enough and might be able to give him some useful information about Hugh.

Then his native caution asserted itself. He resolved to hold his hand until the morrow. Servants were prone to gossip and, no matter how careful he might be in what he said, there was bound to be talk if he acted precipitately.

Lavington straightened himself up as he put the last finishing touch to the car. "That orter do," he said, gazing with satisfaction on his work.

"Couldn't be better," said Trevelyan.

Lavington proceeded to divest himself of his muddy overalls. "Shan't want these for your little job. They ain't the most comfortable things when it comes to bendin'." He disclosed a well cut, dark-grey uniform of excellent material with a little ostentatious gold braid on the epaulettes.

"Another typical Palliser touch," thought Trevelyan.

He followed the man round to the front of the house. "Nice little bus, sir," commented the chauffeur. "Bet she can do sixty without any

trouble." He inspected the racer with the interest of an expert.

"Say seventy," replied Trevelyan with some degree of pride, "and you'll be nearer the mark. All I want now is a chauffeur with a nice rig-out like yours and I'd be set up for life—Sir John certainly does you well." He felt the material of the arm nearest him. "I suppose this is a special livery for Sundays! You don't use it for everyday wear, do you?"

"Bet yer life I do," replied Lavington. "New one every six months too. Got this one only last week."

He bent down at the front wheel.

"It may only be a leaky valve," said Trevelyan. "Try that first before you go to the trouble of taking the tyre off. I only want it to last until I can get to a garage in the City."

Lavington tried the valve and then set to work with the pump. Trevelyan's thoughts seemed to be centred elsewhere. He frowned for a moment and then pulled out his pipe and instinctively blew at the mouthpiece before attempting to fill it. There seemed to be a choke somewhere. He knocked it against his heel and tried it again, but without success. He began to search his pockets for a knife.

Lavington looked up at him. "Pipe choked up?" He stopped pumping and felt in a side pocket and produced a jack knife. "Not much of a one, but it'll probably do," he said.

Trevelyan opened the blade and manipulated it about in the bowl for a moment or two, and then putting the pipe again to his lips, blew through it with evident satisfaction. He finished filling it and lighted up as Lavington put away the pump.

"Think you'll find it all right, sir," Trevelyan pulled out a pound note and thrust it and the knife into his hand. "Thanks, sir," said Lavington, beaming. "Very good of you, sir, for such a little job."

The detective glanced hurriedly at his watch and then jumped into the car. "Not at all, I'm very much obliged to you, but it's later than I thought. I'll have to hurry off," he said in the one breath and stepping on the self-starter at the same time. He swept out of the gates at a furious pace, leaving the chauffeur gaping after him.

"Decent sort of bloke," said Lavington to himself as he folded up the pound note and put it in his pocket. "There can't be any 'arm tellin' 'im wot I did about the guv'nor."

CHAPTER XII

UNEXPECTED ALLIES

TREVELYAN did not slacken speed until he reached Police Headquarters in Russell Street, where, after a brief conversation with Inspector Hart, he left his car. He took a taxi to his rooms. He noted with satisfaction that Worrall's car was outside. He hurried upstairs and found his friend comfortably ensconced in an easy chair.

"Hullo, old man," he said, "hope you haven't been waiting long."

"No, I've only just arrived. Had a good morning?"

"Fairly," replied Trevelyan. "What's your news?"

Worrall took an envelope from his pocket. "Here are the names and descriptions of the two men you wanted. At least I think I've struck the right ones. It's a good thing I was able to get to the top of the tree; you know what the Home and Territories Department is like. However, Jamieson showed me the passport photographs of all non-resident first-class passengers who arrived during

the past fortnight. With the aid of the descriptions you got from the waiter, Saunders, my job was comparatively easy. I then examined the registers of the principal hotels and at last traced them at the Australia."

Trevelyan scanned the details handed to him by Worrall. "H'm!" he muttered. "Arthur Langdon Randall, late C.O. —th Battalion, B.E.F.; Paul de Fresnes, vigneron." He then read carefully the descriptions of height, features, etc., as given in accordance with passport regulations. "They seem likely enough, Harry," he commented. "Anyhow, we shall soon know."

"Also," said Worrall, "I've seen Geoffrey. He found out from the maid who looked after the house switchboard on Friday night that Hugh did telephone his father—about a quarter to ten. She put the call through to Sir John's private line, but got no reply. Hugh—impatiently, she considered—then asked her to connect him with central so that he could try himself."

Worrall paused a moment. "But about Geoff's movements on Friday night," he continued. "It was as I thought. He motored Ruth Madison home—she had a headache. I remember them leaving—it was about 11.30. Geoff says he didn't get back until about 12.30—had engine trouble or he'd have been back sooner. Her place is only a mile or two away. However, he was back in plenty of time because dancing didn't finish until two o'clock."

Worrall frowned momentarily. "But still I don't see why you should want to know about Geoff. You can take it from me that there's nothing doing in that quarter. I'd stake my life on him any day."

To Trevelyan, however, the news of Geoffrey was a little perturbing. Was he telling the truth or had he taken the opportunity after motoring Ruth Madison home of going to Palliser House? And, if so, was it Geoffrey and not Hugh who had run into Carter at that fateful hour? Three minutes to twelve Sir John's clock had said. What if the hands had not been altered?

Not to anyone, least of all to Worrall for fear of hurting him, would he have voiced his thoughts, however. His brief reply was entirely non-committal.

"Good man," was all he said, "you've saved me no end of trouble."

"That's all right, m'lad," returned Worrall. "Great shall be my reward. It'll be a big scoop for me when you've finished. In the meantime I'll adhere to my part of the bargain and ask no questions. Still, if you've anything to tell me I shan't refuse to listen," he added dryly.

Trevelyan looked quizzically at him, "Well, there is something I can tell you now, but which I wouldn't dream of passing on to anyone else. Sir John was murdered. I've proved it. For the details of how—see the next thrilling instalment of this

great story', as you newspaper men are so fond of putting it."

"H'm!" grunted Worrall. "You'd have spoilt the story if you hadn't discovered that. Now, is there anything else you want me to do?"

"Yes," replied Trevelyan, pulling out his watch. "Come and have grub with me at the Australia. Our two mysterious friends may be there and I'd like to see something of them. If you don't mind we'll go in your car."

[With practised eye, Trevelyan, from a specially chosen point of vantage in the big dining-hall of the Australia, soon picked out the table at which Colonel Randall and Monsieur de Fresnes were seated.

"Spotted 'em yet, Harry?" he asked.

Worrall grinned. "Give me a chance. I've only half finished." Then, as his nonchalant glance reached the two men, he turned to Trevelyan. "Those two over by the middle window, I think."

"Yes, they're the ones I picked," replied Trevelyan.

They leisurely followed the two men from the dining-hall at the end of the meal. Randall and de Fresnes paused for a moment in the foyer, glancing at the clock as they did so, and then passed out into the street. Trevelyan and Worrall allowed them a good start and then proceeded to keep

them in sight. Within five minutes Randall and de Fresnes were crossing Spring Street at an angle that would land them at the alley running at the back of Palliser House.

"The scent's getting hotter, Gordon," said Worrall excitedly. "I'm on my native heath around here."

Trevelyan murmured something, but made no attempt to cross the street; he led Worrall straight on and slackened pace only when they came level with the alley.

"Now then, Harry, get an eyeful quickly."

As they looked Randall or de Fresnes—they could not see which—was just about to unlock the postern gate.

"Give them a minute or two," said Trevelyan as he and Worrall reached the corner of Collins Street. They slowly sauntered back, and seeing the alley clear, crossed over and made their way quickly to the gate. Trevelyan tried it carefully, but found it locked.

"Very good, Harry, we'll get in the front way. What's the time? Two o'clock, is it? And the undertakers are due at three."

They strolled leisurely round the corner and passed Palliser House without so much as a furtive glance at it. There was no need for caution, however, on this occasion. The watching figure of the morning was no longer there.

A little further on Trevelyan nudged Worrall

and they stopped beside a taxi drawn up at the kerb. The driver looked sharply round and then gave them a grin of recognition.

"Just take us round the next corner, Bill," said Trevelyan.

To Worrall's amazement he discovered inside a very disreputable looking Geoffrey. Trevelyan cut short his expression of it, however, by turning to the latter:

"As quickly as you can—what's the news?"

"The man who was watching here this morning went to Little Bourke Street and entered a big galvanized iron gateway adjoining No. 17, apparently Yat Loon, the furniture maker's entrance. I hung about for a while, but he didn't come out. Just as I was going to clear off who should come along but Hugh. I watched him go in by the same way, and although I waited at the corner for a long time I saw no more of him. It was too late then to get home by twelve o'clock, so I came back here on the chance of seeing you. Hope I haven't messed things up."

"No, it's all right. Only I wondered if anything had gone wrong when you didn't turn up. Anyhow, you can go on to my digs and change. I don't think you'll need to watch any more."

"And don't forget to have a good scrub, Geoff," advised Worrall as a parting shot as he and Trevelyan got out of the taxi. To the latter he added as they turned back towards Palliser House:

"You're a dark horse, if ever there was one! I didn't know you had Geoff on the job too."

Trevelyan smiled. "Well, you know now." He might have added that he had enlisted Geoffrey because he was anxious to avoid professional help. His real reason, however, was that it gave him a better opportunity to observe the boy unsuspected.

Arriving at Palliser House, Trevelyan produced the key to the front doors with which Geoffrey had provided him. Unlocking them he peered within. The sound of voices reached him from one of the back rooms. In a moment he and Worrall were inside. Closing the door behind them they crept stealthily down the corridor, Trevelyan with his hand upon his automatic.

They paused within a few feet of Sir John's office. They could now hear the voices quite plainly. Then they stepped forward and stood in the doorway. An extraordinary spectacle met their gaze. Lethbridge was on his knees before a small safe, poring over a quantity of papers that he had taken from it. Colonel Randall was busy at the big desk, pulling out the drawers and examining them as though expecting to find a false bottom or some other secret contrivance. Monsieur de Fresnes was standing beside Li Wan Chên, apparently intent upon the latter's efforts as he bent over the figure of the Buddha. Randall was just saying, "I hope the undertakers don't arrive early, Mr. Lethbridge."

"I hope so too, Colonel Randall," said Trevelyan with a smile.

Randall had nerves of iron, as he had often been called upon to prove, but this occasion appeared to test him to the uttermost. He gave a start; Lethbridge gasped and turned almost yellow. On de Fresnes' face was an expression of mingled amazement and anger. Li alone remained impassive except for a gleam that came into his eyes.

In a moment Randall recovered himself. He glanced at Lethbridge, but the latter was quite incapable of speech.

"I have not the honour of your acquaintance, gentlemen," he said in level tones.

"That is of no consequence just now," replied Trevelyan easily, stepping forward. He glanced round the disordered room and noticed the long packing-case—Sir John's last resting-place—which had been blocked from his view by the door. Lethbridge, having struggled to his feet, was breathing heavily and manifestly endeavouring to regain some degree of composure. "Mr. Lethbridge, I want an explanation at once of your own strange conduct and the presence of these gentlemen in this room."

Lethbridge was stung by the peremptory tone of the demand as Trevelyan intended he should be. "I—I—must refuse then," he replied with a not altogether successful air of bravado.

A look of annoyance came into Trevelyan's face.

"Harry, just ring up Chief Inspector Allison, will you?"

Worrall turned on his heel, but paused at the door as Lethbridge, more scared than ever, cried out:

"No, no, Mr. Trevelyan, for God's sake don't call the police! I'll explain if Colonel Randall will allow me. The police must not come into this."

There was a momentary silence and Monsieur de Fresnes held up his hand. "Permit me, my dear Mr. Trevelyan. I do not think our friend, Mr. Lethbridge, is in a state of mind conducive to coherent explanation. I take it that you are a detective, a private one I should say, and if you are the person I have in mind our explanation will entirely justify our presence here and, I hope, the conduct of Mr. Lethbridge." He eyed Trevelyan critically. Would his appeal to curiosity, to vanity, have any effect? he wondered.

"No, Monsieur de Fresnes," replied Trevelyan, "nothing doing. Show me your credentials and I'll agree to hear your explanation and perhaps waive that of Mr. Lethbridge. My identity does not appear to me to have anything to do with the matter."

"Very well, Mr. Trevelyan, if our explanation is satisfactory, will you present me with a signed copy of your monograph: 'Psycho-Analysis and the Detection of Crime'?" asked de Fresnes with a chuckle.

"So that's what you are!" exclaimed Trevelyan, who knew that his monograph had been very care-

fully kept from public sale and allowed to reach only those professionally interested in criminal investigation. "Yes, that's a bargain."

De Fresnes handed over his warrant of identity and authority from the Paris Préfecture. "You see, being here unofficially is a bit of a handicap at times."

The two men shook hands cordially, while Randall and Lethbridge looked slightly puzzled at the turn the conversation had taken, and then relieved as they realized that in some miraculous fashion the antagonism in the atmosphere had cleared.

"It's all right, Randall," said de Fresnes, and then turning to Li, he presented him to Trevelyan.

Worrall, who had been vastly interested in the proceedings, was then introduced all round.

Trevelyan looked at his watch. "Sorry to break up the party, gentlemen, but I think it would be wiser for us to adjourn. The undertakers may arrive any minute now."

Lethbridge hurriedly thrust the papers back into the safe while Randall replaced the drawers of the desk. They finished just as the bell rang.

"That'll be the undertakers at the back gate. You'd better all go out the front way," said Lethbridge. As they turned to go Trevelyan whispered to him, "I shall have something more to say to you later."

Trevelyan made sure the coast was clear before opening the door wide. "I shall be glad if you'll

come on to my rooms, gentlemen. It will ensure privacy and I'll endeavour to make you comfortable. Worrall has his car at the Australia and will drive us."

"So that's where you picked up our trail," said Randall with a chuckle as they left Palliser House. "That suit you, Chên?" he added, turning to Li.

"Delighted," replied the latter. "But, in view of what we've learnt, I think some one should be on the premises until we can continue our search for the documents."

Worrall glanced at Trevelyan inquiringly. "Just a moment, gentlemen, before we go any further," said the latter, stopping. "Mr. Chên's remark has, no doubt, a certain significance to you. It's meaningless to me, but it may have some bearing on the problem I'm chiefly concerned about. Do any of you know how Sir John Palliser came to his death?"

"Yes," answered Li quickly, "he committed suicide; never mind for the moment how I know."

To their astonishment, Trevelyan interposed firmly:

"Sorry to contradict you, but Sir John was murdered."

"*Sacré nom de dieu!*" cried Monsieur de Fresnes explosively. "Then that explains Krakowski's latest moye, and also looks as if his story, and Budge's was a put up job. Budge must have killed him before we arrived."

It was Trevelyan's turn to look astonished.

"Look, gentlemen," he said in tones of suppressed excitement, "we can't have the whole story here. In order to relieve your anxiety concerning these documents—or whatever it is you are after—I would suggest that my friend, Worrall, should go to Palliser House as soon as the undertakers and Lethbridge leave. He could then keep an eye open for any of the unwelcome visitors you are apparently expecting. You won't mind, Harry?"

"Try me," replied Worrall with a grin.

"Excellent idea," agreed de Fresnes.

Trevelyan handed Worrall the front door key and then, as an afterthought, his revolver.

"Better have it in case of accidents. I'll call for you about five. I'll give three knocks at the door. Make yourself at home in Lethbridge's office. You'll find cigars there and also whisky. So long, m'lad."

Worrall nodded and turned back while the four men walked quickly on to the Hotel Australia.

Upon leaving the city, Trevelyan kept his foot well down on the accelerator of Worrall's car, all impatience to get to his rooms and to hear the explanation of his visitors, realizing now the definite relation it might have to the problem he was trying to solve. It seemed to him, even from the little he had heard, that their story might upset his calculations. The whole affair was certainly much bigger than he had thought and assuredly more complicated and puzzling.

After what seemed an eternity to him he pulled up outside his rooms; a few minutes later he was handing round whisky and cigars. As he took up his own glass he looked expectantly at Paul de Fresnes.

"Yes, Paul, I leave it to you," said Randall, observing the glance.

"Same here," said Li, "although I may contribute a verse or two later."

"Very well, then; I'll get it over as quickly as I can, because I rather imagine your contribution may be a bit of an eye opener, Chên. You're rather a dark horse!"

Li smiled enigmatically.

"Now then, Trevelyan," continued de Fresnes, "let me say first of all that we are very fortunate in having been discovered by you. Another man might have made things awkward for us, but that is not altogether why I used the word 'fortunate'. Your name had already been mentioned to us by Sir James Montgomery, the Commissioner of Police, for the business we have in hand. As you will see presently, we could not effect our purpose through ordinary legal channels because of the necessity for absolute secrecy. For this reason we even decided not to come to you, in spite of the high recommendations of Sir James, unless our own efforts proved abortive."

He then told the story of the documents, to Trevelyan much as Randall had given it to Sir

John Palliser at the Hotel Cecil, adding now the fact of the papers Li was interested in.

“We only arrived last week—on the same boat, too, as Chên, unaware then of his interest in Palliser. We made known our business to the Prime Minister’s Department and were promised every assistance, so long as it could be given in an unofficial manner, and were introduced to the Commissioner of Police to begin with.

“We then called on Sir John on Friday afternoon, but were informed that he was in his private office and had given strict instructions that he was on no account to be disturbed. We returned several times at brief intervals, receiving the same reply in each case. As time was precious, we decided, in desperation, to sound the secretary. After producing our credentials, we told him merely enough to convince him that Sir John had criminally withheld certain documents of international importance from their rightful owners and impressed upon him the fact that his employer’s life was in danger if the Soviet traced them to him, and that, moreover, if the worst came to the worst and we had to use diplomatic pressure, Sir John would be ruined.

“Lethbridge demurred a little, but at length promised to try and get the documents for us. We pointed out the danger of delay. He then stated that he would make an attempt to get them as soon as Sir John had left his office. Lethbridge departed at the usual time and waited near until Palliser left

—which was not until after six o'clock. He then returned to Palliser House, while we followed Sir John to the Hotel Cecil.

“Our arrangement with Lethbridge was that we would telephone him within half an hour to learn the result of his search. He gave us Sir John's private number. His answer was to be just yes or no. We left word at the office of the hotel asking them to telephone him at 6.30. The answer came to us while we were at dinner, keeping an eye on Palliser. As it was in the negative we then decided to approach Sir John, hoping that by an offer of £100,000, or failing that, by threatening him with exposure of certain of his questionable transactions in China, we might get the documents.

“He denied any knowledge of them, but admitted having received the despatch-case. We endeavoured to counter his statement by declaring that we were willing to purchase the empty case, hoping that the papers had been secreted in it. He promised to give us a reply at midnight at his Club—but of course he didn't keep his appointment.”

Trevelyan gave a whistle of surprise. “Pardon me interrupting,” he said in an eager voice, “but while you were at the Club, did you see anything of Palliser's son, Hugh? And can you describe him?”

“Neither Randall nor I know him, but a young man—fair I should say—did come to the lounge soon after midnight and inquire for Sir John.”

"Thanks," replied Trevelyan, more than thankful that Geoffrey's alibi now seemed fairly well established. "I'll explain later."

Monsieur de Fresnes nodded. "And now to go back a little in the story," he resumed. "We followed Palliser to his office after dinner, feeling sure he would make another inspection of the despatch-case to see if the documents had been secreted. We got in the back way and fortunately were able to see through a chink in the curtains. Sure enough, he had the case before him at a little table quite close to the window. I saw him examining it carefully; then he ripped open the silk lining and extracted the very papers we were after. Satisfied that he had them, we made our exit, thinking it best to wait until midnight. We went back to our hotel. *Sacré diable!* I wish we had got them when we had the chance. God alone knows where they are now! However, later on we went to the Club and waited there until one o'clock. In desperation we then decided to reconnoitre and, if necessary, to break into Sir John's office."

He then briefly described their capture of Budge Thompson, the sudden appearance of Li Wan Chen, the exchange of confidences regarding their respective interest in Palliser, their interview with Krakowski and the offer they had made him. At this point he made a *moue* of disgust.

"*Vingt noms de dieu!* It was an unlucky night for us as it now transpires. Your announcement of

Palliser's murder is the—what do you call it?—the last straw. You see, we've just heard that Krakowski has been approached by the Soviet by cable, informing him that they will pay any price for those documents, and giving him details as to their importance that we had purposely kept from him. The strange thing about it all, however, is that we searched Budge thoroughly when we got him, thinking he had been there for the same purpose as ourselves, but the papers were not on him. His story was that he'd gone there to burgle the place for money. We received independent confirmation of this from Krakowski. Thompson gave as his reason for clearing out in such a hurry that he didn't want to be concerned in a robbery which might lead to the hangman's rope. He mentioned also the fact that he had expected to find the back doors open. Krakowski had apparently arranged with some one regarding this, but——”

“Good God!” exclaimed Trevelyan, realizing now something of the part Hugh Palliser had probably played. “Sorry, please go on,” he added in a normal voice, ignoring the general look of inquiry that was directed towards him.

De Fresnes smiled comprehendingly. “The doors weren't open, it appears, so Budge went to Palliser's window, with the idea of testing the possibility of breaking in. As he flashed his torch through the gap in the curtains he saw Sir John lying dead. According to him, he made a bee-line for the back

gate. In his haste to get the gate open he made sufficient noise to put us on our guard, and the moment he opened it we grabbed him."

"What time was this?" asked Trevelyan.

"About 1.30," replied de Fresnes. "But what puzzles us is, if Budge did shoot Palliser, why is it he didn't get the documents? I'm positive we didn't overlook them when we searched him, because we knocked him unconscious and had ample time to examine him.

"Chên was certain they would be in the Buddha; using bronze figures for such a purpose is an old dodge in China. The larger ones are sometimes fitted with a secret spring; in this instance by pressing the left eye an arm moves and reveals an aperture. The cavity is there all right, as we discovered this afternoon, but it was empty."

"And the right eye?" queried Trevelyan. "Nothing doing, I suppose?"

"No," replied de Fresnes, "we tried that, but it had no apparent effect. Until you exploded your bombshell about Palliser having been murdered we naturally assumed it was a case of suicide. Even now Chên asserts that it is. If it isn't, then all I can say is that Krakowski is only making game of us and knew all about the documents before we met him, and employed Budge to get them. Whether intentionally or not, Budge must have shot Palliser—between nine o'clock, the time when we were first there, and half-past one, when we returned.

Whether he got the documents is another matter." He relapsed into gloomy silence.

"It's the very devil!" muttered Randall.

Trevelyan leaned forward in his chair, staring into the fire and turning over in his mind the theory of Budge Thompson as the murderer. There was motive here, undoubtedly, and yet he was far from satisfied with the evidence.

"No," he said at last, looking up. "I don't think Thompson committed the murder—I know him and he's too squeamish for that. In any case, whether he did or didn't, he couldn't have got into that room. Therefore your documents must still be there. You can make another search to-night, if you like, and I'll see you're not disturbed this time. If the theory I have is correct, there's only one man who can confirm Budge's story, and I'm going to wring the information out of him if I have to half wring his neck."

"Something worse than that will happen to Krakowski before I'm done with him," said de Fresnes. "When I'm travelling abroad I always carry a little album of the finger-prints of our best-known absentee friends on the off chance of coming across them. I got Krakowski's prints the other night. His record is in the album under the name of Bořodni and about a dozen *aliases*, and his dossier credits him with a long list of crimes, including murder. He must have come out here when your immigration laws were not so strict as

they are now. I'm going to have him—and at the earliest possible moment—but I want to make sure of the documents first."

"Well, gentlemen, you can count on me—if I can be of any assistance," said Trevelyan. "You've already given me a lot of help for which I'm exceedingly grateful, but I'm still anxious to hear what Mr. Chên has to say in explanation of his statement concerning Palliser's death."

Randall and de Fresnes thanked him cordially for his offer of help. Li smiled.

"My thanks too, Mr. Trevelyan. But about the other matter, I'm not so sure now that I am right. However, I'll give you the facts and you can form your own conclusions.

"I also visited Palliser's courtyard on the eventful Friday night. It must have been soon after Randall and de Fresnes left. I knew nothing of their visit. Between 9.30 and 9.45 I was at Sir John's window and saw him at work translating the document I am after. Just before a quarter to ten, I should say it was, I saw Sir John deliberately take up his revolver and put it to his head. I started involuntarily, and, being cold and cramped, I bumped against the window. Sir John appeared to have heard me, for he, too, gave a start, and putting down the revolver got up from his desk. I cleared out as fast as I could, pulled back my improvised gangway and turned off all lights.

"I stayed listening, expecting to see him come

to the back door to ascertain the cause of the noise, and hoping that eventually he would return to his room and carry out his intention of committing suicide. I'm afraid I had no pity for him. I knew too much about him. It seemed to me he was a long time making up his mind. Five minutes passed, but there was still no sound and the chink of light between the curtains continued to be visible.

"Then suddenly came the sound of running feet, and my attention was distracted by a brawl that was going on below me. In a minute or two half a dozen of the hooligans were using their revolvers. The noise was enough to have wakened the dead. It was certainly exciting too—I even forgot Palliser and the documents.

"When it was all over—and it was only a matter of a quarter of an hour—I glanced towards Sir John's window. It was in darkness. I cursed the brawlers, thinking they had disturbed him and that he had gone. When I learned a few hours later of his death, I naturally assumed he had shot himself during the brawl, which would have accounted for my not having heard the report of his revolver."

"That brawl was a lucky thing for somebody, Mr. Chên," said Trevelyan. "You say your attention was taken off the window for about a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time no light was visible there. That's very important to me, I won't bore you with my hypothesis, though." He turned to de Fresnes. "Usual thing—no apparent motive.

I've still got to bridge the gap between murder and murderer. However, I'm very greatly obliged to Mr. Chên for one or two details which support the theory of murder rather than suicide. But, about to-night. Would you like to make another examination of Palliser's office then?"

"Most decidedly," said Randall, "and we would like you to be present. Could you manage it?"

"Yes," replied Trevelyan, "but not before eight o'clock. I'll wait inside for you. Give three knocks at the back door—it'll be better to come in that way. And now I must ask you to excuse me. I have to call for Worrall at five."

CHAPTER XIII

THE READING OF THE WILL

WORRALL settled himself in the most comfortable chair in Lethbridge's office. Placing Trevelyan's revolver on the desk, he helped himself to the secretary's excellent whisky and cigars and proceeded to write up the gradually accumulating, though somewhat disconnected, facts relating to Sir John's death. He was well on the way with it when he heard the click of the front door opening and the sound of voices. He grabbed the revolver and rushed to the corridor. He gave a gasp of astonishment as he beheld Anne Palliser, Hugh and Geoffrey, and a very important looking personage carrying a leather folder from which protruded a sheaf of documents.

His surprise was only exceeded by that of the quartette who started back at sight of his grim expression and outpointed revolver. He grinned feebly, dropping the weapon into his pocket.

"What—what—" began the important looking personage.

"Awfully sorry, Miss Palliser," Worrall managed to say. "Would you mind if I postponed my explanation?"

Geoffrey, guessing the reason of his friend's strange behaviour, murmured something to her.

Anne smiled. "It's quite all right, Mr. Blackham. This is Mr. Worrall, a friend of Geoffrey's and also well known to my brother. Mr. Blackham is our solicitor, Harry."

The two men shook hands. Hugh stood frowning, but said nothing.

"Very well, Miss Palliser, it's none of my business," replied the lawyer. "But, Mr. Worrall, I've been trying to get you on the telephone. I have come here to read the will of the late Sir John Palliser, and have been endeavouring to communicate with you as one of the beneficiaries. Our meeting here therefore is not altogether inopportune. Which is the most convenient room, Geoffrey?"

"Let's go into Lethbridge's," replied Hugh without giving Geoffrey a chance to answer.

The lawyer looked at the latter.

"Yes, I think that's the most comfortable place, Mr. Blackham."

Hugh scowled at the snub. The lawyer had not seemed any too friendly towards him, he had noticed. He wondered for a moment whether the Old Man had made any alteration to the will unknown to him. Surely he couldn't have gone straightway to the lawyer's after their quarrel over the telephone on Friday night! Hugh shuddered at the thought.

When they were all seated, the lawyer very

portentously unfastened the leather cover and straightened out the folded folios, beribboned and sealed as befitted not merely Sir John Palliser, but the old-established firm of Blackham, Blackham & Blackham. Then with great unctuousness he started to read.

To his listeners the long preamble, following upon, "This is the last Will and Testament of me, John Seymour Philip Palliser", seemed painfully characteristic of the departed magnate. Even in the directions—that it should be read "at Palliser House within forty-eight hours of my decease in the presence of my beneficiaries"; that "my body shall forthwith be cremated and my ashes scattered to the four winds"; that "no mourning shall be worn nor any ceremony be conducted or action taken which may be construed as an expression of sorrow at my demise"—there was a false note of abnegation and humility that could only be interpreted by those who knew him best as an attempt to gain publicity in an original, though rather eccentric, manner.

There was, perhaps, more than a slight suggestion of tenseness in the atmosphere as Mr. Blackham, warming up to the full consciousness that Messrs. Blackham, Blackham & Blackham were appointed executors, came at last to: "I give devise and bequeath unto . . ."

Hugh paled visibly and clutched the arms of his chair as the lawyer commenced the list of bequests

with the name of Geoffrey and not his. He could hardly believe his ears as he heard that, subject to certain minor legacies, amongst which Worrall's name occurred, his younger brother should receive half the estate upon reaching the age of twenty-one, in the case of his father's death before that event.

Then he heard with mingled amazement and relief: "To my adopted son, Hugh Palliser, one quarter of my estate." Adopted! The word rang in his ears. What did it mean? He could hardly restrain himself from screaming the question.

"To my sister, Anne Palliser, a life interest in the residue of my estate", the lawyer continued. Then followed a number of clauses and covenants relating to the bequests, directing their disposal in the event of the death of any of the beneficiaries prior to the fulfilment of the conditions of the will.

The lawyer folded up the documents while the legatees sat in silence, as though each waited for the other to speak. Then Anne Palliser leaned over to Hugh and whispered to him: "Don't worry, Hugh. I know it must be a shock to you. Come to me afterwards and I will tell you what I can about it."

Hugh growled a few words of thanks. He began to feel his position. . . . An outsider now. . . . Geoffrey with the lion's share of the estate . . . Jealousy, envy, long brooded over, tormented him with renewed intensity. He would have it out with him once and for all, he decided.

"Miss Palliser, may I drive you home," said

the lawyer, "unless you are going back with your nephews?"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"If you don't mind, Nan dear," said Geoffrey, "I rather want to stay. Shan't be very long, though."

"What about you, Hugh?" she asked.

"I shan't be long either," he returned shortly.

As soon as his aunt and the lawyer had gone Hugh turned on his brother. "Fine sort of blighter you are. You've known all along, I suppose, that I was only adopted. No wonder you've put on such airs and graces. Always were a Little Lord Fauntleroy. Always played up to the Old Man so as to get his money. You make me sick."

Geoffrey looked at him in astonishment and not a little anger. "Oh, cut it out and don't be a blithering ass. Of course I didn't know. Anyhow, what difference does it make? You're still Hugh Palliser, and as for the money the Old Man made it, so why shouldn't he do as he liked with it. However, there's another fortnight to go before I'm twenty-one, so if I peg out before that the will says you're to get my share. Damn the money, I say! Anyone would think you'd been cut off with a shilling. Don't be such an ungrateful swine."

Worrall had by this time discreetly withdrawn to the corridor. He knew his presence was not likely to help matters. It was close on five when he had looked at his watch a few minutes before, and he

was hoping that Trevelyan would not be late. He decided to wait outside for him. A minute or two later the detective drove up.

"Hullo, Harry, get tired of waiting inside?" he asked.

"Yes and no," replied Worrall, and told him of the reading of the will and his discreet retirement following upon Hugh's outburst.

"Still my lucky day, apparently," said Trevelyan. "I wanted to see that sweet youth. Come on, lead me to him."

As they opened the door the noise of angry voices reached them. Then as they entered Lethbridge's office they saw that Hugh and Geoffrey had their coats off and were squaring up ready to fight.

"Eh! you can't fight here," cried Worrall. "There's no room and you'll only bash yourselves about on the furniture. Don't be a pair of chumps. Have it out by all means, but put the gloves on and let it be fair and square."

"All right," said Hugh sullenly, "if you'll agree to the same stake, Geoffrey."

"Yes, I'll have to agree, since you won't consent to any other. I think you're a rotter, all the same, to suggest such a thing."

"Here, this is no good," broke in Trevelyan. "It's none of my business, but I'm going to see fair play. You're the elder, Hugh Palliser, what is the stake?"

"I refuse to say, also you can mind your own — business, whoever you are," replied Hugh in a furious voice.

Trevelyan's expression hardened. He turned to Geoffrey. "What is the stake, Geoff?"

"Sorry, I can't tell you. One of the conditions of the challenge is secrecy concerning the stake."

Trevelyan was angry enough to have forced Hugh to speak. He had only to ask him what he was doing at three minutes to twelve on the night of his father's death and he would get anything out of him. But he must hold himself back for a little while longer, he reluctantly decided. He had his duty to perform, and any precipitance might spoil all his chances of bringing the murderer of John Palliser to book. Yet he felt there was something wrong about this business of the stake. What devilry was there in Hugh's mind?

He went over to Geoffrey and whispered, "Don't let Hugh know who I am. I'm sorry I butted in so uselessly, but don't fight until you have seen me again."

"Very well, then," he said aloud, "have it your own way. I'm off. You coming, Harry?"

Worrall picked up his hat and coat, and, with a nod to Geoffrey, followed Trevelyan from the room.

"I wish I'd stayed in there, Gordon," said Worrall as they left the building. "God only knows what rotten proposition Hugh has taunted Geoff into accepting as the stake. He's a bad egg, that

Hugh. No wonder people used to remark on the difference between them. It's clear now that one knows they aren't of the same blood."

"He's so bad or so foolish—or both," said Trevelyan, "that he's very nearly brought himself within reach of the hangman's rope."

"Good God! Trevelyan, you don't mean to say Hugh murdered Sir John?"

"No, I won't go as far as to say that—yet. But if he didn't, he's been such a damned fool that it's going to take me all my time to prove he didn't. However, I want to run round to Russell Street for a few minutes. Then let's get home."

CHAPTER XIV

THE OPENING DOORS

AT a quarter to eight Trevelyan and Worrall stepped out of the former's car in Spring Street, just round the corner from Palliser House.

"Keep your eyes well skinned, Harry. We don't want to be seen going in, if we can help it."

"Can't see anybody," said Worrall as they turned into Collins Street. "But the porches are such deuced likely hiding-places! Let's take a turn along each side of the street first."

After making a reconnaissance without seeing anyone who seemed in the slightest degree suspicious, they entered Palliser House. Worrall switched on his torch and followed Trevelyan to Sir John's room, where the latter produced from the attaché-case he had brought with him a bundle of heavy black material, a hammer and tacks. Pushing the small writing-table close to the window, he climbed on to it and proceeded to tack up the black material in such a way as to prevent any light from being visible to anyone in the courtyard, even if they came right up to the window. Then, drawing the red curtains close, he pinned them together, completely

hiding his improvised screen from within. He reckoned also that the extra curtain would make the room sound-proof—except for the door—and he had his plans for that.

Having finished the window, he fished out of the bag two squares of copper, and with the aid of sticking-plaster soon had them in place over the apertures that had been cut out of the door. Then, dabbing a liberal quantity of strong paste round the edges of the door and here and there on the surface of the metal backing, he laid on a slightly overlapping length of baize that completely covered any crevices that existed between the door and its frame. Not until he had finished did he venture to switch on the light.

“I shan’t worry about the fanlight over the back door, Harry. As long as this one’s not open too wide when the others come in, the reflection of light from the corridor won’t amount to much.” He pulled out his watch. “I’ll leave it ajar now or we won’t be able to hear them.”

A couple of minutes later they heard three sharp knocks at the back door. Trevelyan took up the torch and went to answer the summons. Standing cautiously on one side, he swung the door back sharply. Randall, de Fresnes, and Li entered quickly and he closed the door behind them.

“Any sign of light at the window?” he asked.

“No, we thought you hadn’t arrived. We went right up to the window too,” replied Randall.

The three men inspected the curtains and the baize on the door.

"You're well prepared against a surprise visit," said Li, "but what if Krakowski comes after we've gone?"

"The answer, I hope, is that we're not going to go," replied Trevelyan. "Anyhow, come out here."

They followed him out to the corridor, where he cautiously directed his torch on to the upper part of the opposite wall. Almost in the same instant he lowered it.

"No, we'd better not have a light on here. Come to the middle room, this side of Lethbridge's office. The most important part of the gadget is there."

He led the way, and when they were all within the room and the door closed, switched on the lights.

"There's no fanlight or window here, and the door fits close to the carpet, so it suits my purpose admirably. I—or rather Worrall and I—are going to wait here for your friend, Krakowski, or whoever he sends along."

"What about us?" said de Fresnes. "We'd be only too pleased to keep you company—unless, of course, you'd prefer to carry out your scheme alone."

"No, we'd be very glad to have you. There may be plenty for us all to do before the night's out. However, here's the gadget. It's quite simple."

He pointed to a fine wire that entered over the top of the door and which, after passing through an improvised pulley, was kept taut by a cone-shaped

metal weight attached to the end of it. The weight hung just above a small table on which a bowl of water had been placed.

"Sound scheme," said Randall. "I take it that the wire is connected to the back door. If it's opened it allows the weight to drop. Anyone watching here would therefore be immediately made aware of the fact. I don't quite see the idea of the water, though."

For answer, Trevelyan unscrewed the metal weight at the centre and, emptying out the water it contained, dried both halves on his handkerchief. Then, taking some powder from a packet, filled the lower half.

"You see, there are two inlet holes in the part I've just filled. When it reaches the water the moisture causes the powder to fizz loudly enough to attract attention in case no one was observing it at the moment. The reason it had water in it just now was due to your entrance."

"Whenever did you find time to do all this?" asked Worrall, who knew perhaps better than anyone else how busy the detective had been.

Trevelyan grinned. "I didn't. Geoffrey fixed them up this afternoon after we left."

"Them?" exclaimed Randall.

"Yes, the other one is connected to the front doors. It's over in the corner, which reminds me that I must fill it too."

"Well, Trevelyan, if you should ever want a

recommendation for thoroughness, don't forget the Paris Prefecture," said Paul de Fresnes.

"Thanks, I may one of these days," replied Trevelyan. "However, what about your little job? If you three will go on with the search for the documents, Worrall and I will stay here and keep an eye on the door signals. If you bolt the door of Sir John's room from the inside, you'll be safe from interference in case Krakowski's men should come early. Also, you can make as much noise in there as you like. You won't be heard. But there's one other thing, before you go. Now that you know where you stand with Krakowski, I take it you'll have no objection to my having any crooks he may send along arrested. It is understood, of course, that you'll neither be seen by the men nor by the police; nor, will you in any way figure in the matter."

"No objection at all, have we, Randall?" said de Fresnes.

"No, certainly not, in those circumstances," replied the colonel.

"Very well then, we'll see you later," said Trevelyan. "Hope you have good luck in your search. By the way, if it'll save you any time, I've ascertained that the foundation of the floor is concrete and that there aren't any loose floor boards."

"Good," said de Fresnes as he left with Randall and Li.

A couple of hours later the trio returned, looking

tired and disgruntled. They brightened up a little as they caught sight of the whisky and sandwiches which Trevelyan had prepared against their vigil.

"No need to ask any questions," murmured Worrall, as he poured out a stiff whisky apiece.

"No, it's the very devil!" growled Randall.

The drinks were consumed in gloomy silence. Presently Paul de Fresnes, who had sat moodily hunched up in his chair, staring at the empty glass which he still held, suddenly looked up.

"You know, Trevelyan," he said, "I'm beginning to wonder if Lethbridge is quite O.K. He had ample opportunity of searching Palliser's office yesterday between the time the police were here and your arrival. Also, he's the only other person who knew about the documents. I'm positive they're not in there. We tested the walls and the granite facings of the base on which the Buddha rests. It's solid concrete, and the figure is apparently cemented in; anyhow it's immovable. The safe has no secret drawers; we ransacked the big desk; we tried the skirting round the walls and hunted in every conceivable place that might conceal the documents. In spite of what you said, we finished up by trying every floor board. No, they're gone, there's no doubt about it. Bah! it makes me mad when I think of the opportunity we missed on Friday night."

"I think you're also slightly annoyed to think you protected Lethbridge to the extent of not mentioning to me that you had offered him a reward

for the documents," said Trevelyan. "You will remember you told me that you played upon his sense of duty. I guessed you had also offered him money. I'm correct, I think."

"You devil!" said de Fresnes, laughing. "Yes, our offer of money was the culminating argument—possibly the whole box and dice of them. That's what makes me suspicious now. I always distrust the man who will take a bribe. I refrained from mentioning it to you because I didn't want to give him away unnecessarily."

"The reason I asked for confirmation," said Trevelyan, "was not out of idle curiosity. Suppose Lethbridge needs even more money than you've offered him. Wouldn't he be inclined to boost you up a bit by keeping you on tenterhooks? As you are aware, I haven't had much time to spare during the past day or two, but I've learnt enough to show me that George Lethbridge was ruined unless he could raise a large sum of money. Like Sir John and others, he's been hard hit lately. The fact that he assisted you in the search this afternoon proves nothing. He may have been innocent of duplicity or merely acting a part. I'm not, of course, overlooking the fact that he may be relying upon the tragic intervention of Sir John's death to give him time to cover up his defalcations. However, you needn't worry about him. He's being watched now and has been for more than a week past—not by me directly—but by Sir John's auditors. They've

been suspicious of him for some little time and have had his affairs under observation."

"Well, Trevelyan," said Randall, "all I can say is that I'm sorry we didn't come to you in the first place. I think you'd have succeeded in getting the documents for us and saved all this worry and, moreover, I believe you'd have even averted the death of Palliser. I can't pay you a greater compliment than that except to say you'll receive an offer of a very important post in England when this affair is over."

"Thanks, colonel," said Trevelyan. "I'd like to have been given your commission. I can't undertake it now, however, but I may be able to help you indirectly. I must clear up the matter of Sir John's murder, and I make no secret of the fact that I am subordinating all else to it. As to his death, I'm not at all sure I could have averted it merely by getting those documents for you, because I don't think they had anything to do with it. Anyhow, we shall soon know, I hope."

"Well, all this is hard lines on you, Chên," said Randall. "Our affair is bad enough, but yours is worse because it's a personal loss. It certainly doesn't look as if we are going to lay hands on those papers."

"Gentlemen," said Li earnestly, "I can't answer for you, but I am going to leave no stone unturned to get the documents left me by my father. You are mistaken, however, in thinking my loss would be

purely personal. Were it merely that I should not be so concerned. I am not overlooking the fact that my father's fortune, like many another in the China of Yesterday, was gained in a manner that would be regarded as discreditable in the Western world. That is beside the point. I want his fortune in order to give it back to the China of To-morrow."

Li's eyes shone; his face lighted up with the intensity of his feelings. His listeners watched him with a new interest.

"Chên is only part of my name. I am Li Wan Chên, the son of Li Sung Huang, of honourable memory amongst all who are not traitors to their country."

"Good God!" burst out Randall. "You Li Sung Huang's son! Then let me say there is no Chinese name that is more honoured by the foreigner than your father's. You may not know, because you must have been only a child at the time, but it was due to your father that the lives of hundreds of foreigners were saved during the Boxer Rising. All the world knows of the infamous telegram of the Dowager Empress: 'Slay all foreigners', but it is not perhaps so widely known that your father was responsible for altering it to: '*Protect all foreigners*'. Your father left Peking to throw in his lot with Yuan Hsi Kai, then Governor of Shantung, thereby saving himself from being beheaded when the alteration of the telegram was discovered and traced to him."

There was a tense silence as Randall finished his dramatic appreciation of the illustrious Li Sung Huang. Li's expression, like that of the others, was grave at the thought of how narrowly a gigantic tragedy had been averted.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "Whatever my father did was done not only to save the foreigner but out of loyalty to his country. Rigidly conservative, reared amidst all the traditions of the Old China, that tragic act of folly awoke him, I think, to the grave peril in which the country was about to be plunged. He must have realized then that China could no longer ignore the West. He was statesman enough to face the inevitable. On his return to power he sent me to Europe for my education."

Li paused a moment as though hesitating whether to continue, but the expectant, sympathetic silence that greeted his words rather than his own decision swayed him to an eloquence that was as vibrant and stirring as before it had been quiet and restrained.

"Gentlemen, my country is in sore straits. One moment it is rent asunder by faction and prejudice; the next bolstered up by an apathy which in its turn rests upon an ignorance that is tragical. China is a giant, stricken down by every conceivable malady, in whose most vital blood-streams the fierce germs of greed and corruption are continuously at war with the corpuscles of sanity and idealism;

whose voice, reduced at times to a feeble whisper; at others, raised to the incoherent clamour of delirium, endeavours vainly to state its needs.

"I am my father's son, a Northerner of the Northerners, yet I would welcome a conquest from the South if it would end the present tragic state of affairs. Think of a China with one spoken language as you have throughout the British Empire; a system of housing and sanitation; a group of independent governments, yet all speaking as one in times of need!

"I am not overlooking the predatory commercial instincts of the West; I am far from being unaware of the exploitation that my country has endured, or unconscious of the humiliation that is ours through many of the treaties that have been forced upon us —yet I feel that we have got no more and no less than we deserve. A united, educated China, imbued with a creative idealism, would not find Europe unwilling to revise the more burdensome treaties. Rather, I believe, would Europe stand by us, shoulder to shoulder, as equals, in the accomplishment of a common task.

"Gentlemen, you know now why I want the document my father left for me. With his fortune I could help to do what I have so inadequately described."

Li had spoken with such sincerity that his audience was carried away. The silence that

followed seemed intense, vibrant, like the stillness after the last poignant note of a violin.

"Li," said Randall, "you've made me see things in a different light. I will not rest until you get back that document."

"Nor I," echoed de Fresnes.

"That applies to Worrall and me too," said Trevelyan. "'One for all and all for one'."

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Li. "And now there's only one thing more. I promised to explain——"

Li did not finish. Instead he, as well as his audience, gave a start as the weight connected with the front doors came down with a splash into the bowl of water.

They all jumped to their feet, revolvers drawn, and listened. Worrall grabbed the sizzling weight and smothered its sound with his handkerchief.

"Switch out the light," whispered Trevelyan to Randall, who was nearest to it, "and then open the door and let me out."

In a second he was at the door, peering towards the entrance. Both the front doors were wide open and the light from a lamp on the far side of the street dimly irradiated the hall. There was not a sign of anyone. "Come on," he whispered to Randall.

They crept quietly forward and peered outside, revolvers ready, while the others searched the room, on the ground floor. To their amazement they

found nobody. After closing the doors again and shooting the bolts carefully, top and bottom, Trevelyan turned to de Fresnes.

"Better have a look upstairs," he said. "Will you come up with me while the others stay and watch below?"

After a brief but thorough search they returned.

"Nobody up there," said Trevelyan as he led the way back into the middle room. "The whole thing's absolutely uncanny. Those doors seem secure enough. There was certainly no trouble with them last night, yet on Friday night when they opened like this a man was murdered!"

"Eh! steady on, m'lad," said Worrall. "You'll give us the creeps. Who's going to be the unlucky one to-night? Is—good God!" his voice sank to a hoarse whisper. "Look at the blinkin' signal again!" He stared at the slowly descending weight as though fascinated.

Trevelyan made a dash for the door, switched off the light and then peered up the corridor. This time it was in darkness. He switched on his torch with his left hand and flashed it up and down, shielding his body in the doorway, his revolver ready in his right hand. To his utter amazement there was again nobody to be seen in the corridor—and the doors were closed.

"Come on," he jerked out. "Make a rush for it. Let's settle the thing this time. Same search as before."

He and Randall reached the front doors just in time to see a fat waddling figure disappear round the corner of the street.

"Good God!" exclaimed Randall. "I believe it's Lethbridge. Let's go after him."

"No need; there goes his shadower," replied Trevelyan in a tone of relief, as though glad of even a partial explanation of the uncanny affair, and pointing to the figure hurrying across from the other side of the street. "Still, Randall, you go and make sure, if you'd rather. Give three knocks when you want to come in. I must get back in case our other friends arrive."

Randall returned a few minutes later and was admitted by de Fresnes.

"Yes, it was Lethbridge all right," he said as he rejoined the others. "Strange that he didn't come in, or was he just going out when Worrall noticed the signal? I think, after what we took to be a false alarm, our attention was taken off it. Surely he couldn't have come in the first time, and then upon hearing us remained in hiding, waiting for a chance to slip out."

"The man who is shadowing him will probably be able to tell us whether he entered," said Trevelyan. "It certainly is mysterious, but I'm rather glad we didn't find him on the premises. I don't want to have to grab the estimable Lethbridge just yet if I can help it."

"If Lethbridge came in the first time," remarked

Worrall, "why did he open both the front doors when it was only necessary to open one? And, moreover, why have opened them with such a hell of a bang?"

"That's what's puzzling me," replied Trevelyan. "It's the queerest thing I've ever been up against. At the same time, I'm not going to worry too much about them just now. They may or may not have anything to do with Sir John's death. At present I can't see any relationship. Time's everything and I can't afford to waste any on side issues."

CHAPTER XV

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

THE five watchers in the middle room settled down again to their vigil.

"By the by, Li," said de Fresnes, "you were saying something about there being only one thing more to explain when that confounded door signal interrupted us. We'd like to hear it now if you feel inclined."

"Certainly," replied Li. "It may also help to while away the tedium—if any," he added ironically. "It's of no great consequence, however, even though it does concern the documents. The explanation that you and Randall made to Palliser on Friday evening is only part of the story. You are acting under instructions from your respective Governments and know only as much as they have chosen to tell you. It was I who gave them the information that led to them taking action, information which reached me only by the merest chance."

Randall and de Fresnes stared at him in astonishment.

"However, let me start from the beginning. The documents in code refer to the negotiations made

prior to 1914 between the Czarist Government and the then Chinese Foreign Minister for the cession of the Chinese Eastern Railway to Russia in exchange for all the Russian concessions and extra-territorial privileges in China and a lump sum in cash. Doubtless the Foreign Minister foresaw that his pocket would not suffer over the transaction! Such an arrangement would have been an act of the grossest treachery to China. Fortunately, the downfall of the faction then in power at Peking was suddenly brought about, and my father took over the Portfolio of Foreign Affairs and managed to get hold of the traitorous documents.

“Unfortunately, by another of those kaleidoscopic political changes, so common in my country, the government in which my father held office was, in its turn, threatened with ruin. His friend, Monsieur de Joinville, the French chargé d'affaires, was away at the time at Shanghai in consultation with the Consul there. My father, fearing assassination, and the confiscation of his fortune and estates, hastily removed the most valuable of his possessions, comprising money and jewels.

“He then secreted the political documents in the lining of a despatch-case, at the same time, writing to me informing me of the whereabouts of the treasure, sending my letter under cover of one addressed to Joinville and in a separate despatch-case—asking him to let me have the enclosure if anything happened to him. Next he chose his two

most trusted couriers, thinking they would be protection for each other, and sent them out to find Joinville at Shanghai. He himself hoped to follow shortly and find asylum in the International Settlement.

“The couriers, both experienced men, conscious of the risks they incurred, adopted every expedient to execute their commission. They were followed, needless to say, and for several days had incredible adventures and narrow escapes. They made the journey, here a bit by train, there a *détour* in sedan-chairs, a few miles by canal, or on foot, in order to shake off pursuit. To have travelled direct by the Blue Express would have been openly to court death. Even when they at last reached Nanking, and might reasonably have expected to find themselves out of danger, they were attacked. One of them escaped, fortunately with both despatch-cases.

“To aid him further in case of need, the surviving courier transferred the personal documents into the other wallet and sewed it inside his clothing, keeping the empty one in the hope that it would serve some strategical purpose in the event of a further attack. It did, apparently, and gained him just sufficient time to reach what he thought was the French Consulate, but which, as you know, was John Palliser’s residence.

“After delivering the despatches, he climbed over the adjoining wall, hoping to elude his pursuers that way. To his terror and amazement he realized

when he emerged from the gates that he was back at precisely the same spot as before and that he had delivered the documents to the wrong person. It was then that he was struck down.

"He survived, however, but his memory became a blank regarding the past, and for several years he eked out a wretched existence as a beggar, supplemented by an occasional job as a coolie. It was only when he reached France during the War as a member of a Chinese Labour Battalion and recognized me that his memory returned. I was on the British Headquarters Staff of the Chinese Labour Corps.

"Knowing of my father's downfall, I had, of course, made attempts to trace the servants, especially the *çouriers*, but without success. I thought there might be a chance that some of them would turn up in a Labour Battalion, but as time went on I gave up hope. And then the miraculous happened. All that I have just told you I elicited from him, bit by bit. That was in October, 1918. As soon as I could get away after the Armistice I took boat for China and made the most searching inquiries, discovering, of course, that the Consulate had been burned down on that fateful night.

"I then made known the principal points of what I had learnt to the French and British Embassies, realizing that their ability to recover the political documents would be greater than mine. You see, I had learnt to distrust the Soviet as readily as any

European and knew that the New Russia was even more eager to secure that strategic railway than the Old had been.

"So, gentlemen, whatever you are doing, you are doing not merely for your respective countries, but for mine also. You will not blame the wily Oriental for enlisting the services of two Great Powers to protect the interests of his own country."

There was a murmur of approval as Li finished.

"Gentlemen," said Paul de Fresnes, "I ask you to charge your glasses and drink to the health of a future President of the Republic of China, a great patriot, a diplomat of the highest order, and one of whom not only his own country but yours and mine may well be proud. Gentlemen: Li Wan Chên."

They drank the toast enthusiastically but quietly, not forgetting, even in their regard for Li, the stern and practical issues of which his story was but the prelude.

"And to think we travelled down from China in the same boat with you, Li, and knew nothing of your identity!" exclaimed Randall.

"Yes," replied Li, "I didn't know who had been appointed to the job by your Embassies or I should have made myself known. But what disturbs me now is the fact that I didn't bring the courier with me. If Soviet agents got hold of him they might succeed in getting information out of him by wiles or torture. That's the only way I can see that Krakowski can have heard."

"Unless," said de Fresnes, "he has put two and two together and cabled Petrograd, and their cable is only in answer to his. Anyhow, we can scotch him and his gang for certain to-morrow night."

"If we've any luck we'll get some of 'em to-night," said Worrall. "We've had two alarms. Third time ought to be lucky. Anyhow, it's nearly two o'clock, which would be my favourite hour if I were a burglar."

He poured out another round of drinks. Nobody seemed to have any desire to comment on his remarks. The strain of the past two days had been heavy on them all, and the tense waiting of the past few hours had only been made tolerable by Li's interesting recital. Now that it was over there was an element of reaction, even of anti-climax in Worrall's attempt to make conversation. The silence that followed seemed to hold them all like a spell. From the printing presses next door came a low hum, punctuated by a rapid staccato beat, scarcely noticed before, which now only accentuated the stillness. Its irritating monotony soon began to jar on them, keyed up as they were, and with nerves already more than a little frayed.

Whatever they may have felt, however, found no expression in words. Worrall and Li continued to watch the front door signals with undiminished attention, while the others, with equal stoicism, kept an eye upon the one connected with the back doors.

Suddenly the silence was rent by the sound of a

violent shaking and rattling of the front doors, the weight on the end of the wire oscillating in sympathy. They all started up as though electrified, but the sound ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

Trevelyan gave a nervous chuckle. "All right, it's only the policeman on the beat trying the doors. It's a pity I hadn't made this room sound-proof too."

He had only just uttered the words when he saw the back door signal begin to move. Slowly the weight came down. He grabbed it before it reached the water and pushed the bowl to one side. A moment later the weight rose as the door was shut. He went over to the telephone and, muffling the bell, moved the control hook up and down several times. Then he sat down again and put a match to his pipe. The intruders made no sound.

"Give them a few minutes to settle down," whispered Trevelyan, "then Worrall and I will see if they've left anyone to keep watch."

He leisurely began to pull out a couple of lengths of stout cord as he spoke and then produced a baton. He handed the cord to Worrall and then switched off the lights. With revolvers drawn, they cautiously opened the door and crept out into the corridor.

It was an eerie job in the pitch darkness. Trevelyan felt his way along the farther wall until he came to Sir John's office. Fortunately, the intruders had closed the door. With infinite care he felt for the new hasp and staple he had had fitted to it and fastened the hasp. Next he produced from a waist-

coat pocket a small but strong padlock, which he had already well oiled, and snapped it silently over the staple. He smiled grimly as he thought of the men within and the two squads of police which would be arriving in a few minutes in answer to his telephone signal. He switched on his torch and quickly searched the corridor and the stairs.

"Right, Harry," he whispered. "Outside now. You take the western wall, I'll take the eastern."

They cautiously opened the back door and then parted, each making a reconnaissance of his side of the courtyard. They met at the back gate, which was locked. Trevelyan opened it, and after peering out, switched on his torch again and flashed it up and down the alley.

"Doesn't look as if they expected to be spotted," said Worrall.

He switched on his torch and together they made a careful search of the courtyard.

"Nobody keeping watch," replied Trevelyan in answer to the general look of inquiry that greeted their return. "I've padlocked Palliser's door from the outside, so Krakowski's crowd can't possibly get out. Also the police will be here any minute now. They have a key to the padlock as well as to the door, so they'll have no need to worry us. Your dear friends will be caught *in flagrante delicto*. We do not appear in the matter."

"Excellent, mon cher Trevelyan," said de Fresnes admiringly.

Hardly had he uttered the words when both signals dipped, and they heard the sound of men entering. A few minutes later there was a yell, and the rush of feet, and voices raised in argument. Then silence again.

"They've closed the——" began Trevelyan, but broke off as a sharp knocking sounded at the door behind him. He whipped round as though shot. "Keep back," he cried. "There's something wrong." Drawing his revolver, he flung open the door. "Hullo, Clarke!" he exclaimed in surprise. "What's the trouble?"

Inspector Clarke looked at him with a not altogether pleased expression. "I say, Trevelyan, what sort of a wild goose chase have you brought us out on? There's only one person in that room, and it's Sir John's son, Hugh. We can't arrest him. Certainly he's got the office in a bit of a mess—safe open, papers on the floor, and all that sort of thing—but he's not trespassing."

"Good God!" cried Trevelyan. "See he's the stool pigeon." He hesitated for a moment. "All right, Clarke, old man, awfully sorry to have pulled you out for nothing—although it really isn't altogether wasted effort. You'll have your reward tomorrow night without fail. There'll be enough fight, I expect, to satisfy even your bloodthirsty soul. Yes, let young Palliser go, but it would be as well to see that he goes straight home."

"Righto. He doesn't suspect you're here. I

merely told him I was going to telephone to Headquarters for instructions."

"I'll deal with him later," said Trevelyan curtly.

"Well," said Trevelyan when the police had left, "it seems to have been rather a dud night as far as tangible results are concerned. It's my opinion that Krakowski is using Hugh Palliser for his purpose, though, what hold he has over the young man now that his financial prospects are bright, I can't conceive. I've strong reasons for not wanting to question Hugh at present, so we must simply possess our souls in patience until to-morrow night. The investigations I shall make to-morrow will bring me, I think, within reach of the solution of the mystery of Sir John's death—then for Krakowski and the documents! I've arranged with the police for the raid. Plans of the place have been prepared, so there should be no hitch. And now there's only one thing for us, and that's home, sweet home, and bed."

CHAPTER XVI

DEATH STILL LURKS AT PALLISER HOUSE

IT was a good half-hour after the quintet left Palliser House when Trevelyan and Worrall separated from the other members of the party at the Hotel Australia. They had stayed to complete their plans for the coming night, Trevelyan realizing he would have little time during the rest of the day to see Randall or de Fresnes.

"You'd better come and have a drop of something with me before you turn in," he said to Worrall as they motored home.

"Righto," said the latter, "and then I shan't be sorry to hit the pillow. It's been a fair innings, hasn't it?"

"Yes, decidedly, Harry, but I shan't sleep in comfort till I've solved the mystery of those confounded doors—in spite of what I said about them. I can't understand why anyone should want to open them with such damned suddenness? What's the object? The only other time it happened was the occasion of a murder. Thank God there wasn't another to-night to add to our worries. Palliser's is quite enough to go on with."

"I say, Gordon," cried Worrall as they turned

into Trevelyan's street, and completely ignoring, in his excitement, the latter's comments, "there's a car outside your place."

"By Jove! you're right," returned Trevelyan. And as their headlights flashed on to the other car they saw it was Geoffrey's.

They pulled up and hastened to it, while Geoffrey, at the sound of their car, clambered awkwardly out.

His two friends gazed at him in astonishment. His hat only half concealed the bandage round his head, and they could see that the arm of one sleeve hung loose at his side.

"Cheerio, m'lads," he said with attempted bravado. "I'm glad you've turned up. I'm still a bit groggy on my pins."

"Good God!" exclaimed Trevelyan; and then in a calmer voice, "All right, old man, give us your arm and let's get inside. You can tell us all about it later."

Together he and Worrall got the sorry figure of Geoffrey inside and up the stairs to the study. Trevelyan poured him out a stiff whisky and soda whilst Worrall proceeded to make coffee. The latter glanced commiseratingly at Geoffrey, wondering not only what had befallen him, but why he should have been waiting outside at three o'clock in the morning. Something of grave import must have transpired. He was on tenterhooks. He cursed the slowness of the kettle, and burned his fingers over the toast on the electric griller. Trevelyan, meanwhile, had

switched on the radiator and was wrapping a rug round the shivering Geoffrey, who was clad in the disreputable and not over-warm disguise that he had used in his previous watch upon Krakowski's premises.

As he grew warmer the colour began to return to his face, and after he had finished his coffee and toast he was quite ready to talk.

"I feel first rate now," he said as he set down his cup. "I think I was more weak from hunger and cold than the knock or two I received. However, I'd better start from the beginning."

"Stop if you don't feel up to it," said Trevelyan, "that's all I ask."

"I left by the servants' staircase just before eleven," began Geoffrey, "but recollected when I got outside that I hadn't my revolver. I turned back and was half-way up the stairs when I caught sight of Hugh, also ready to go out. I rushed down again, determined to leave without a gun, afraid that he might have seen me.

"I left my car in Elizabeth Street, close to the corner of Little Bourke Street, and made my way cautiously to Krakowski's, according to plan. Things were rather on the quiet side for a while until several men emerged from Yat Loof's gateway. I kept a careful eye open, but they only lounged about, smoking and talking. Presently they began to come in my direction, not seemingly with any set purpose, but just mooching aimlessly

along. I held my stick ready in case of accidents and kept well in the shadow.

"Then things got busy. There was a sudden rush and I was in the midst of a scuffle, fighting like hell. They were all Chinks as far as I could see. It was a good thing I had my stick because I managed to lay a couple of them out before it was wrenched from me. I waded in with my fists and managed to dodge their knives, but the fellow who had my stick gave me a crack on the arm. However, I broke away and ran towards Elizabeth Street, yelling for help, but I got a welt on the head that must have settled me, for I don't remember any more, until I found myself in the hospital.

"There I learnt that the policeman on the beat had heard my cries and was just in time to prevent them finishing me off. Apparently the bobby wasn't of the squeamish kind, but waded in with his baton and knocked out one of them, and when the rest started to run caught two more with his revolver. They're still in hospital. That bobby's going to be remembered in my will, I can assure you.

"The doctor tried to persuade me to stay all night at the hospital, and a policeman wanted my name and number and all the rest of it. I told him a fairy tale but couldn't shake him off. In the end I persuaded him to let me come to the police station with him and promised to explain to an inspector. I hadn't any bones broken and after being bandaged up I felt fairly fit.

"I told the inspector who I was. He certainly wasn't inclined to believe me at first, but when I mentioned your name he grinned knowingly and let me go. I tried to get you on the phone here, but couldn't raise you, so I took a taxi to Palliser House thinking you must still be there. I found Lethbridge's office door open and the light on, but——"

"What!" cried Trevelyan. "There was certainly no light on, nor was his door open when we left, I'll swear to that. What time was this?"

"Somewhere about half-past two, I should say," replied Geoffrey. "I tried the middle room, only to find you had all gone. But here's the strange part about it. I went on to the Old Man's door. It was closed, but as I stood there I'll swear I heard the sound of an explosion. It was very faint, but I'm positive it came from within. I knocked as loudly as I could but got no answer, and as I hadn't a key I couldn't investigate. I thought I'd imagined it until I recollected that I'd felt the vibration of the door.

"However, I didn't feel up to any further sleuth-like efforts, so I cleared out and taxied round to my car in Elizabeth Street, and just managed to stagger out here when you came along."

"Well, thank God you've come out of it so worse than this," said Worrall. "You're a stout fella all right, but for Heaven's sake don't go trotting out again on these jaunts without a gun."

"Not likely," returned Geoffrey, "not in these trousers, anyhow."

Trevelyan sat quietly smoking, pondering the extraordinary news he had just heard, while Worrall and Geoffrey watched him in silence.

"By George! I nearly forgot the other point," cried Geoffrey, suddenly breaking in upon the detective's cogitation. "I believe Hugh followed me. I took a roundabout way to Elizabeth Street and there was a car not far behind me all the way. I tried every dodge I knew, but I couldn't get away from it."

"I thought as much," said Trevelyan, "when you said you'd seen him coming downstairs. He must have guessed you were up to something, because neither of you are in the habit of using the servants' staircase, are you? He must have entered Krakowski's through the Piccadilly Café. It looks as if that attack was a deliberate attempt on your life, and that Hugh was at the back of it. He gets your share of your father's estate if you die within the next fortnight, I understand—which would mean, no doubt, a big slice for Krakowski. But I'd like to know more of the noise in your father's room. You can't have heard even an explosion very distinctly because I made the room practically sound-proof. But the matter of Lethbridge's door being open and the light on is unmistakable. I shan't rest until I've——"

The telephone bell rang sharply, making them

all start, and pulling Trevelyan up in the middle of his sentence. He muttered a fervent "damn" and went over to it, irritably jerking the receiver off the hook.

"Yes," he snapped.

"It's Anne Palliser this end. Is that Mr. Trevelyan? I've been trying to get you ever since midnight."

"Sorry," replied Trevelyan, and his voice lost all its irascibility, "but I've only just come in. Is anything the matter?"

"Yes," she continued, "but first of all, is Geoffrey with you? He hasn't come home."

Trevelyan set her fears at rest, but requested her not on any account to make it known that she had heard anything of him. "I'll explain later," he added. "As far as you are concerned, Geoffrey has not come home and you know nothing of him. Display to-morrow all the concern you naturally would at his non-appearance, but don't communicate with the police."

"I'm thankful for your reassuring news," returned Anne, "but there's something else. Ruth Madison has also failed to come home. Her aunt rang up just before midnight on the off chance that Ruth had called here on her way home. You see, she had spent the evening with friends not far from us. On learning that I hadn't seen Ruth her aunt immediately rang up the police. I heard about one o'clock from her that Ruth's car had been found

miles away, but no trace of her had been discovered. Geoffrey will be frightfully upset when he hears. I know you have quite enough on your hands now, but will you please try and help us in this matter?"

"Of course I will, Miss Palliser, but I must have something more to go on. Will you make sure that no one is within earshot before you say anything further? Where are you speaking from? And please don't use my name, call me Smith."

"My sitting-room, Mr.—er—Smith. I have a through as well as a switchboard line. I'm using the through one."

"Good!" replied Trevelyan. "I wish every one were as thoughtful as you when it comes to giving confidential information. However, put your receiver down a moment, keep on talking as though you are continuing the conversation, and go to the door and open it quickly."

He continued to hold the receiver to his ear, and a few moments later he caught the faint murmur of voices. "Thought as much!" he muttered, while Geoffrey and Worrall chuckled at his perspicacity. Then he heard Anne Palliser's voice again.

"I can't think how you guessed, but there was some one at the door."

"And that some one was Hugh, no doubt."

"Yes," she replied. "He was fully dressed too, and he'd had some trouble with his car and had only just come in. Noticing the light burning in my room he thought I might have been waiting up

for him—came to set my mind at rest! He's never shown any consideration for my state of mind before. However, I don't think he can have heard much, because I was speaking very quietly, and the phone is some distance from the door. I mean—even if he'd been eavesdropping, which is not very likely."

"But I know differently," said Trevelyan to himself. Aloud he answered, "On second thoughts, Miss Palliser, I think it would be wiser not to discuss the matter further over the telephone. I'll come and see you as early as I can to-morrow morning."

Worrall and Geoffrey looked inquiringly at him as he hung up the receiver, but he ignored their glance and, instead, began to fill his pipe. He was thankful that Geoffrey had not heard the news about Ruth Madison. He knew the boy was in no fit state to stand any further strain. The main thing now, he realized, was to pack him off to bed and then for himself and Worrall to get back to Palliser House as soon as possible. There had been enough delay as it was, and the noise which Geoffrey had heard might have some bearing on Palliser's death or even concern the missing documents. Even so, he gave a grunt of disgust at the thought of leaving the warm room. He glanced over to Geoffrey. "You're going to dig in here, m'lad. I'll get you some togs, but you'll have to put up with my sheets. Now then hop off to bed. Worrall and I are going to investigate your spook."

"My Gawd," drawled Worrall facetiously, "this bloomin' mystery ain't 'arf goin' to be a blinkin' serial! I've already written up about eighty columns."

"Well, Harry, it's only just started, it seems to me," said Trevelyan. "I thought I had it all mapped out nicely, but apparently I've still a lot to learn. Go on, get to bed, Geoff," he added, pulling on his greatcoat.

Arriving at Palliser House, Trevelyan cautiously opened the front door and switched on the hall light. Sure enough, Lethbridge's door was open. Geoffrey had even left the light on. He glanced swiftly round the room. Except that a drawer of the desk was open, nothing seemed to have been disturbed.

"O.K.?" asked Worrall.

"Apparently," replied Trevelyan non-committally.

"Sorry, Gordon, I forgot little boys shouldn't ask questions."

They tried the doors of the general offices, had a glance at the middle room, and then went on to Sir John's room. Trevelyan took out his key. To their amazement, although he turned and re-turned it in the lock, the door refused to open. They both swore softly but fervently. Then Trevelyan made a dash for the back door, pulling out his torch and switching it on as he did so, Worrall close upon his heels.

They both flashed their torches on to the window

and then Trevelyan tried to raise it, but it, too, resisted all his efforts.

"There must be some one in there, Gordon, but who the devil it can be beats me," said Worrall. "Surely Krakowski's gang can't have come along after all, using Hugh merely to draw us off the scent. Let's have a scout round the courtyard, although anyone on watch would have seen our torches."

They made a hasty inspection and opened the back gate and peered up the alley, but the place was as deserted as they hoped it would be. They returned to the door of Sir John's room.

"I'm going to burst in the two pieces of copper," said Trevelyan. "You stand guard with your revolver and shoot at the slightest sign of the enemy. Don't stand on ceremony—shoot, and we'll ask questions afterwards."

He produced from an inner pocket a very small but effective set of tools, and joining several pieces of steel together began to prise open the lower panel. He worked as silently as he could, but he expected every moment to be confronted with a knife or pistol, and he held himself ready to jump to one side in such an emergency.

Having loosened the metal sheet, he cut away the baize sufficiently to give him a grip, and soon had the panel clear. He counted on the *portière* to conceal his movements as he held his arm through the opening and laid the panel on the floor within. He crouched down, listening intently, but could

detect no sound. The stillness was uncanny. Then he cautiously reached through and drew the *portière* aside. The room was in darkness. He held the tip of his lighted torch to the opening, hoping thus to draw the fire of the intruders, but still there was no sound.

"Here goes, then," he whispered. "Get a chair from the middle room. I'm going to break the top panel in."

Worrall returned with one of the typists' chairs. Placing it against the door, Trevelyan attacked the top panel with a ruthless disregard of the noise he was making. He even cut the baize through in such a way as to let the metal sheet fall with a clatter to the floor. Drawing back the *portière*, he held up his torch and peered within. He was now able to see practically the whole room, instead of one side only to which the lower panel had restricted him. One glance told him all he needed to know. With a quick movement he jerked back the top bolt and got down from the chair, pushing it aside impatiently.

Bending down, he pulled back the lower bolt.

"Come on, Harry, you can put away your gun," he said.

He turned the key and the door swung back. As they entered he pressed the switch button and flooded the room with light. Worrall drew back in amazement and horror.

There on the floor, huddled in almost the identical position in which John Palliser had been found, was

Lethbridge. The light was reflected in the ominous dark patch alongside his head, and which slowly moved like a living, creeping thing upon the floor. The small writing-table was overturned and near it lay a revolver.

Trevelyan bent over and examined the wound and then felt the man's heart.

"No go, Harry. He's dead all right. Ring up Inspector Clarke, will you? I don't want the police butting in now and he may be able to stretch a point for me."

While Worrall was telephoning, Trevelyan pulled back the curtains and made a careful examination of the black felt he had tacked up. It bore no sign of interference.

Worrall held out the receiver to him. "Hullo, Clarke, sorry to bother you again. I'm back at Palliser's office. . . . Yes, got away shortly after you. Unfortunately, we left too soon. Lethbridge, Palliser's secretary, committed suicide about half an hour after. . . . Yes, in the private office. . . . Yes, suicide without a doubt. Can you come along? I don't want any report to go in until to-morrow. I must have another twenty-four hours on this case. Will you hang things up until Tuesday midday? . . . Right, old man, thanks. I'll wait here for you."

He hung up the receiver and turned to Worrall with a sigh of relief. "That's something, at any rate," he said.

"I'm afraid it's all double Dutch to me," replied

Worrall. "I thought I was beginning to get the hang of this case, but I'm all tangled up now. Poor old Lethbridge! He wasn't a bad sort. What the devil made him do it? Here in this room of all places! Surely it's not a case of the murderer returning to the scene of his crime."

"In a certain sense it is, Harry. If only Lethbridge had been a little more careful he would have stood to gain considerably—though fraudulently—by Palliser's death. As for actually committing the murder, he had ample motive, there's no doubt about that. The very obviousness of it has been a great stumbling-block to me. However, you're making me talk in riddles, and as I can't answer any questions just yet I'd better shut up."

Inspector Clarke arrived within a few minutes and made a careful examination of the dead man. Then he turned to the window; and ripping off the black felt tried the fastenings. He gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Yes, it's suicide, sure enough," he said, turning to Trevelyan. "My report will be practically the same as Hansen's on Sir John. Extraordinary for two of them to go off like this within a few days of one another! Almost looks as if the finances weren't too good, doesn't it? However, you can leave everything to me. I'll arrange to get the body away in about an hour's time—by the back way, so no one's likely to be the wiser. And mum's the word until noon to-morrow, but not a minute after."

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT

FÉODOR KRAKOWSKI sat back in his chair, mouthing rather than smoking a long and expensive-looking cigar. The spirit of levity which characterizes the innumerable Australian public holidays, of which this Monday was one, seemed not to have entered his den. His thoughts, judging by the scowlings, the puckering of his thick, sensual lips, and his grunts of irritation, were far from pleasant. Even Rachel, who lounged on a settee near, felt dubious of her powers to cope with his mood.

His sanguine anticipations concerning the ease with which he would secure the documents for his strange clients were far from fulfilment. All his plans had gone awry. And not only that, but there was now an element of mystery in the affair that he did not altogether like. Why had Lane Jimmy been permitted by the police to watch Palliser House until yesterday morning and yet be grabbed on a vagrancy charge in the afternoon? And not only Lane Jimmy, but the other man who had been sent to take his place? Just to keep them out of

the way for twenty-four hours or so—he knew the police dodge. There must be something in the wind.

And why had that confounded Trevelyan gone there on Saturday and Sunday? Also, what was young Geoffrey Palliser doing in Little Bourke Street last night—in disguise too? He did not like the look of things. He had generally managed to keep himself free from the attentions of the police—or at least from becoming involved in any court proceedings, but with this Trevelyan about it was a different matter. Trevelyan had a way of poking around that had proved exceedingly embarrassing to him on more than one occasion, and had involved some of his henchmen in serious consequences. Krakowski was not at all pleased with the way things were turning out. At last he broke the silence:

“No news yet from that young pig of a Palliser, and this is the last day we have to earn the £100,000 for those documents!”

“But the cable, Féodor, isn’t that a better offer?”

“Bah!” he exclaimed. “I do not trust my dear Soviet friends. They might pay more, but I would sooner this—what do you call it?—this bird in the hand. I might even push the price up a little; then we could get out of here, Rachel.”

“Yes, Féodor darling,” said Rachel dutifully.

“But for that damned pimp of a Trevelyan poking about the place I could have sent Budge along for them. What’s Trevelyan after? That’s what I want to know. It can’t be anything to do with old Palliser

because we know that's finished with. The police must have been satisfied that it was suicide or they'd be still swarming there—and yet there's no news of it in the papers."

"Well, it's bound to come out to-morrow," said Rachel hopefully. "Don't forget it's a holiday to-day and the office is closed. I don't suppose the relatives want to rush into print any earlier than they can help."

"No, there's something in that, my dear Rachel," the Jew replied, pondering over this aspect of the situation for a moment or two. Then he pulled out his watch and burst forth with renewed fury: "But here it is ten o'clock, and that son of a pig hasn't arrived. He promised to come along last night, after he had finished searching his father's office, whether he got the documents or not. By the beard of Moses, if he tries to double-cross me in this, I'll not only have his money but I'll kill him—I'll strangle him." His eyes lit up with a glare of rage and his cruel, talon-like fingers clawed the air expressively.

"Yes, Koffski dear," said Rachel, "and after you going to all the trouble and risk of trying to get his accursed brother out of the way, to say nothing of abducting that puny milk-and-water girl for him last night. What the silly young fool can see in her I don't know."

Krakowski grunted an inaudible acknowledgment of this flattering testimony.

"But Féodor," resumed Rachel quickly, "he'll do anything to get that girl. You've got him there—no papers, no lady love. He's simply got to produce those documents, Koffski. Take the risk and telephone him. Perhaps something has really happened to keep him from coming."

"No, I'll wait a little longer, Rachel, but I'll make him pay for keeping me waiting. There's more than the matter of that white-faced chit of a girl that I'll hold over him. Those men are coming to-night to see if I've got the papers, and I'm going to have them if I have to do the job myself."

He relapsed into his gloomy mood and resumed his facial contortions and swinish gruntings. Presently there was a knock at the door and a "boy" announced that Mr. Palliser wished to see him.

"Master can see, no can see?"

"Can, see," growled Krakowski.

A few moments later an immaculately dressed and very jaunty Hugh Palliser was ushered in.

"Morning, Rachel, this is an unexpected pleasure. How do, Krak, old boy—you haven't quite the schoolgirl complexion this morning. Come on, buck up, old stick, you've scotched Geoff all right and got Ruth safely. How's she taking it? Not too well, I expect. I'll do the grand rescue act to-night and she'll forget all about her troubles. Then we'll be married and——"

He broke off in the middle of his sentence and stared at the Jew in amazement. Krakowski

appeared as if he were about to have an apoplectic seizure. He was mouthing in a paroxysm of rage, making hideous noises in his efforts to speak. Then, hurling his half-smoked cigar at Hugh, he found voice and literally roared at him:

"Son of a pig, where are those papers? Why didn't you come round after you'd made the search? What do you——"

"Here, cut out the rough stuff, Krak," interrupted Hugh with an air of bravado. "I'm the king-pin now, kindly remember. I'm paying you, and paying you well for the jobs you fixed last night. Damn you and your mouldy old papers! You told me that if I got 'em you'd call it square about getting the girl. Well, I didn't blinkin' well get 'em, so I'll pay you instead for your dirty work."

Krakowski rose from his chair, his eyes glaring, his fingers clawing the air convulsively. "I'll strangle you yet, you little swine," he hissed. "Pay! And when will you pay? You haven't got your father's money yet, any more than we've got that precious brother of yours."

"What!" cried Hugh, his face paling. "He didn't come home last night. I thought you'd fixed him." His voice rose. "You blundering swine! What happened?"

The Jew's rage had again reduced him to a maniacal incoherence. Rachel impatiently stepped to his side.

"Koffski dear," she whispered, "let me deal with him. You can trust me."

Krakowski gradually subsided, muttering protestingly, but making no further effort to prevent her from carrying out her intention. She turned to Hugh. "I'll tell you quickly enough what happened," she said in a silky voice that only half concealed her rage. "Your precious brother laid out two of our men, besides raising hell outside, and the police did for three more—whom they collared, to make matters worse. Then we had the blasted patrol up and down the street all night. That's what happened to us. Now, then, what happened to you? And get off your high horse too, before you open your dirty little mouth again, or it'll be the worse for you."

Hugh looked at the woman, fear and sullenness mingled in his expression. He began to feel a little uncertain of his position. He had thought himself as the inheritor of his father's wealth, possessed of the upper hand; able to make these scoundrelly people grovel before him. There was something he did not understand. Perhaps he had better go a little more carefully.

"I tried to get those papers," he began, sullenly. "I got into the room all right, but I hadn't been there five minutes before the door was unlocked and a squad of police came in—about a dozen of 'em. They had keys to the back door and also to the Old Man's room. It seemed very fishy to me. I went

in the back way and I'll swear I wasn't seen. There wasn't a policeman or a soul about.

"I pitched them a bit of a fairy tale concerning some papers the lawyers wanted and managed to get out of it. Still, the inspector wasn't too friendly. He told me that, even though I wasn't trespassing, it would be better to let the lawyers come and do their own little jobs. I asked him how he came to be on the scene, and he told me they'd had a complaint about the front doors having been found open on the night the Old Man died, and that they'd been instructed to watch the place. The cow even insisted on sending a policeman home with me 'for safety's sake'. I didn't dare refuse. Also I noticed that the policeman hung about even after I'd gone in. They've got nothing on me in spite of the funny way they acted. Anyhow, that's why I didn't turn up as I promised."

Rachel looked at Krakowski. He had ceased his mutterings and appeared to be weighing every word of the story Hugh had told. He certainly seemed to have got over his ill-temper and Rachel resumed her lounging attitude on the settee.

"Yes, my young friend," said Krakowski, "that's all very fine, but it doesn't bring those papers any nearer. I'd like to know more about the mysterious opening of those doors. Has there ever been any complaint before or was the night your father died the first time they opened?"

"That was the first I heard of 'em acting like

it. They didn't come open on Saturday, or as far as I know last night: Anyhow, about those papers—why do you want 'em so badly?"

"Never mind, as I told you before. When you bring me those papers I'll let you know where the girl is, but not before."

"Yes, but suppose I can't find the damn papers, Krak. You can't go on keeping the poor girl. Hang it all, I didn't bargain for that. I told you I'd get 'em if I could, meaning that if I didn't I'd pay you for getting the girl. Damn it, isn't ten thousand quid enough for the job? I'll get you the money to-morrow and be done with it. And it's the last you'll ever blinkin' well get from me."

"No, no, my young friend, I want those papers and I want them to-night." He uttered each word with harsh, accentuated insistence. "Otherwise I will hang on to the girl."

"Very well, then, I'll tell the whole story to the police and we'll see how you get on!"

Krakowski never lost his temper when he was in a position to torture his victims. His lips curved cruelly and contemptuously.

"I do not t'ink you will, my dear young friend. If you did I might ask whether they have yet discovered your father's murderer. Bah! you young fool. I'm not blind. You pitched a fine tale to me about burgling the place and getting a haul of money, didn't you? You had a policeman all ready, no doubt, to grab Budge Thompson, the man I

sent to do the job, as soon as he was inside and have him sent up for it. No wonder you pretended to be so willing to leave the back door open. You purposely left it closed, hoping he'd break in, I suppose, and make the evidence still blacker against him.

"Fortunately, Budge tried the window when he found the doors closed, and discovered your father lying dead. You dirty little hound! You did the job yourself. Tried to put it over me, didn't you? Even came round next morning pretending you didn't know anyt'ing about it, wanting to borrow money one minute and the next trying to back out of it!"

He seemed suddenly to tower over the boy, his eyes glaring with all the hypnotic fascination of a snake. Hugh was speechless as the horror of the accusation came home to him. Then he began to tremble and cried out hysterically:

"You're a rotten swine, Krakowski, you know it's not true. I never killed him. You—you—I wasn't in the place three minutes. It's a lie—a lie. You can't prove a word of it." He sank into a chair, his face colourless, his whole frame twitching.

"My dear young friend, it is not my place to prove anyt'ing—that is for the police. I should, of course, be interested to know how you killed him, but that's only professional curiosity. Perhaps some time you will tell me. Just now I have not the inclination. You will not, I t'ink, talk to the police.

His voice suddenly grew harder, his manner tense. "I want those papers, Palliser, and you're going to get them for me. The police are not so likely to be suspicious of you. Have them ready by half-past seven to-night—without fail, mind—and I'll be outside the window of your father's office at that time. And now get out of this. I'm sick of you and your white-livered mouthings."

He jerked Hugh up by the coat collar and half pushed, half flung him out of the door. Then he leisurely stretched himself and lit another cigar, heaving a sigh of content as he settled himself in his chair.

"I t'ink he will not fail this time, my dear Rachel."

"No, Koffski, you handled him wonderfully," she answered with well-simulated admiration.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF RUTH MADISON

WORRALL was glad to learn when he arrived at Trevelyan's flat at nine o'clock that Geoffrey was still asleep.

He and Trevelyan had managed to snatch a few hours themselves, as only men can who are prepared for any emergency and the severest mental and physical strain.

It being a public holiday, Trevelyan had to spend some little time at the telephone before he succeeded in pulling the necessary strings that would enable Worrall to get him the information he needed from the Registrar-General's Department.

"I don't think you'll find it difficult, Harry," he said as he hung up the receiver. "You've got his Christian name and the date of his birth, and I think we can safely assume he was born in Melbourne. It's not likely you'll find there were more than half a dozen children named Hugh born on that day. Anyhow, check 'em all and telephone the result; then call round at Russell Street and see Inspector Hart of the Finger-print Section. He'll either give you a package or else tell you there's

nothing doing. Get back here before twelve if you can."

"Right, my beauty," replied Worrall, to whom the relation of Hugh Palliser's parentage to the mystery of Sir John's death seemed anything but obvious. "Ours not to reason why—unless it's on the sly! I'll be back well before twelve."

Trevelyan again turned to the telephone and rang up Anne Palliser. "I'm sorry," he began, "but I can't possibly get over to see you this morning. Could you come here? I have a visitor whom you will be glad to see. He's asleep at present."

He smiled at Anne's eager acceptance of his invitation and wondered if she would have been half as keen to come were Geoffrey not with him.

He liked Anne Palliser—instinctively, and his intuition, refined by training, was rarely at fault in appraising the qualities of those with whom he was brought into contact. In Anne's presence he was conscious of a *camaraderie*, a sympathetic magnetism, which is the heritage only of the keenly receptive and responsive mind. . . . Most decidedly she was likeable, he reflected.

He peeped into the bedroom and saw that Geoffrey was stirring. Going back to his study, he telephoned his friend, Dr. Hatherly, and then rang for a maid and ordered breakfast for the invalid.

Geoffrey had finished his meal by the time the doctor arrived, and except for his bandaged head

—he had discarded the sling—looked none the worse for his experience.

“H'm! Pulse all right,” said Hatherly, speaking abruptly and jerkily. “Let's have a look at the thermometer, young man. . . . 98.5—nothing to worry about there. Now for the arm. H'm!” he grunted as he felt it. “Muscle sore, eh? Lucky you've got some, otherwise you'd have had a broken arm. Head?” He deftly removed the bandage. “Swelling gone down. Three stitches. Sleep well? . . . Right. Keep him in bed three days, Trevelyan. Broth and a little fruit. Nothing much wrong with him.”

Trevelyan chuckled at Geoffrey's consternation.

“Eh! Doctor, that's no good to me,” the latter cried derisively. “I've got an urgent appointment to-night. I'd be up to 105 within half an hour if I thought I couldn't keep it. Come on, doctor, be a sport. You said there was nothing wrong with me. I'll stay in as long as you like next week, but I must get up to-night!”

The doctor looked at Trevelyan inquiringly and drew him aside.

“If he can stand it let him get up,” said the latter. “I'll look after him.”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. “He's young and healthy, but, even so, one must not neglect the ordinary precautions. Let him sit up after lunch; then he can try walking about a little. If he still feels fit after that, you've nothing to worry about.”

I'll leave this liniment for his arm." Then he turned to Geoffrey. "Right, you young fire-eater," he growled, "you may get up this afternoon if you feel like it. In the meantime go to sleep."

The telephone bell rang as he and Trevelyan entered the study. Hatherly waved a hand in the direction of the instrument.

"Go on. I'll let myself out. I know better than to stay and gossip when you're wearing a busy sleuth-like expression."

Trevelyan bade him a hurried good-bye and took up the receiver eagerly. "Yes, Harry. What's the news? . . . No child named Hugh born on the 7th, you say. Two born on the 4th. . . . Yes—that'll be the one obviously. Just a minute while I take it all down. Right. . . . Father—Silas Mitchell. Mother—Minnie Andrews. Child illegitimate, born at St. John's Maternity Home. Records state no fees paid. Mother destitute. Left hospital October 17th. Death certificate, suicide, October 19th. . . . Yes, I've got all that. Now what about the certificate of adoption? . . . You've got that—good. . . . October 29th. Thanks, Harry, that'll do to go on with. You can give me any other details later. Also, you needn't go to the Finger-print Department. Come straight back here?"

He hung up the receiver jubilantly. "Well, I'm damned!" he exclaimed, which, interpreted, meant that a certain Silas Mitchell rather than himself was in that parlous state. He sat staring at

the telephone, deep in thought, as though overwhelmed by the implications of the news he had just received. Then, with a sigh of relief, he pulled out a drawer of his desk and took from it the Criminal Record Sheet concerning Silas Mitchell, supplied to him by the Records Department. Its bald facts, read in conjunction with Worrall's news, gave him the solution to the mystery surrounding Sir John's death. Mitchell must have murdered Sir John. He was convinced of that. But was he merely the tool? Had Hugh, with or without the knowledge of his real parentage, put Mitchell up to it? He frowned momentarily and folded up the record with an air of finality, thanking his lucky stars that Mitchell had one; for, had it been otherwise, he would not even have known his name, and the finger-prints he had submitted to Inspector Hart would have told him nothing. The extraordinary part of it, he told himself, was the fact that the former crimes were a mere bagatelle compared with the present one, and had occurred more than twenty years before. He smiled grimly as he thought how little those who compiled that brief record realized the eagerness with which it would be scanned a score of years later.

Sitting back in his chair, Trevelyan reviewed the story as it now appeared to him. Judging by the dates, it must have been after his release that Mitchell got this girl, Minnie Andrews, into trouble; but before the birth of the child when

he enlisted in the Second Contingent for service in the Boer War.

Minnie Andrews would assuredly have written reminding him of her condition, and in her plight might have possibly appealed to him for money. If she had held any hopes of him the report of his death, which reached her about the time of her baby's arrival, must have been the culminating blow to her, and probably decided her on the tragic course that she took.

What touched Trevelyan most was the knowledge that the unfortunate girl, having suffered far beyond her deserts, should have been driven to suicide by news which afterwards proved to be incorrect.

When Mitchell did eventually return, Minnie Andrews had long been dead and the Pallisers back in China. Whether Mitchell's idea in searching the records was to trace the girl and to right the wrong he had done her, or in the event of her death, to find the child, was immaterial now, in Trevelyan's opinion. The fact that he had done so was the important point, which his subsequent actions confirmed and of which his murder of Sir John appeared to be the culmination. Mitchell, in searching the newspaper files and the records of the Registrar-General for information concerning Minnie Andrews and her child, Hugh, could hardly have failed to connect the latter with the one adopted by the Pallisers, seeing it bore the same name and was

registered by them within a few days of the unfortunate mother's death.

As for Hugh, unless he was a consummate actor, he had been ignorant of his real parentage, for, according to Worrall, he had shown the utmost consternation and surprise at the news in the will which revealed to him the fact of his adoption. . . .

Trevelyan took out his pipe and began to fill it. He would have confirmation of all these things by to-morrow. The main thing was that he had discovered the murderer, and not only that, but the motive for the crime. The question whether Mitchell or Hugh or both were responsible for the crime could be settled later. He would now be able to divert some of his energies to the problem of the missing documents and also—he reminded himself somewhat guiltily—to finding Ruth Madison.

Presently Anne Palliser was shown in and he was glad that he could now make some practical attempt to relieve her mind of anxiety regarding the girl.

“Geoffrey's asleep again. However, the doctor's been and given him a good report and——”

“But I didn't know there was anything wrong with him!” interrupted Anne anxiously. “Are you quite sure you're not keeping anything back from me?”

“Sorry, Miss Palliser. I forgot I hadn't told you anything about it. No, he's quite all right. He received a little knocking about last night, but he gave worse than he got.” He then described to her

briefly what had happened. "But before he wakes up I want you to tell me all you can about Miss Madison's disappearance."

Anne stated all she knew. Ruth's parents were away in Sydney and she had gone alone in her car to visit Eileen Westcombe and had started on her return journey at eleven. Several hours later the police had discovered the car intact miles away on a lonely road, but had utterly failed to obtain a clue regarding her disappearance.

"What other members of her family are at home?" asked Trevelyan.

"Only her aunt."

"Do you know of anyone else who would have been aware of her intention to visit the Westcombes?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. According to Eileen she only arranged the visit half an hour before."

"Well, Miss Palliser, would you mind ringing up Miss Westcombe and ask her whether she recollects Miss Madison mentioning Geoffrey's name when she arranged the visit? It's only a chance, but it's worth trying."

Anne spoke to Eileen for a moment and then handed the receiver to Trevelyan. "I think perhaps you had better."

"Yes, Mr. Trevelyan," replied Eileen. "Ruth did say she had just rung up Geoffrey, but as he was out and wasn't expected until late she intended coming alone."

"Was that all she said?" continued Trevelyan.

"No, she added something about—if I didn't mind. I guessed then that she was alluding to Harry Worrall and I told her that he couldn't come, so she said, 'Oh well, then I shan't be in the way'."

"What time was this?"

"About half-past seven."

"Did you tell the police all this?"

"No, Mr. Trevelyan, they only asked how Ruth came to arrange the visit and if anyone else would have been aware of it. I didn't tell them she had telephoned Geoffrey because seeing he was not at home I assumed she wouldn't have left a message."

"Quite so, Miss Westcombe. I'll do my best, you may rest assured of that. You've given me something to go on."

He rang off and turned to Anne. "I was nearly going to put you to a lot of bother, but I think I know of an easier way." He looked at his watch and then pressed a button on the desk. A minute or two later a maid brought in coffee and toast and some broth for Geoffrey.

"Now, Miss Palliser, if you don't mind putting up with a bachelor's bedroom we'll have our coffee with the convalescent. I'll see if he's awake."

"Hurrah!" shouted Geoffrey as Trevelyan opened the door, and Anne had no doubt then of her nephew's well-being. "When am I going to have some grub? I'm as hungry as fourteen

hunters." Then he caught sight of Anne. "Dear old Nan, fancy you being here! I thought Trevelyan was keeping the glad news of my survival from everybody. I'd even pictured glaring headlines in the papers: 'Mysterious Disappearance of one of Melbourne's Brightest Boys', and all that sort of thing."

Anne smiled as she bent and kissed him.

"But, Nan dear," he continued, giving her arm an affectionate squeeze, "you should know by now that the way to a man's heart is——" He broke off appropriately at the sight of Trevelyan returning with a well-laden tray.

The latter ignored the outstretched hands. "No you don't, m'lad. I've one or two questions to ask first."

"No, give me the grub now and I'll answer all the questions you like afterwards. Come on, be a sport, I'm starving."

"Honour bright, Geoff, you'll answer my questions if I do? Remember, you refused yesterday in Lethbridge's office."

Geoffrey coloured, and hesitated a moment before replying. "Yes, I'll answer them. Circumstances are altered now."

"Right then," replied Trevelyan. "Go to, but don't wolf it or you won't get any chicken and champagne for lunch!"

Anne poured out the coffee at Trevelyan's request, while Geoffrey began to make short work

of the tiny bowl of broth and the microscopic piece of toast that had accompanied it. A few moments later he very expressively turned the bowl upside down and gazed earnestly in the direction of the large plate of toast on the tray beside Anne. Trevelyan shook his head.

"All right, then," said Geoffrey, pulling a face, "fire away with the blessed questions."

"Where were you at 7.30 last night?" began Trevelyan.

"Gee whiz! That's a queer one. I was at home."

"Did you receive a message that Miss Madison wished to speak to you on the telephone?"

"Ah! Now I begin to see a little daylight. In other words, you want to know what the wager was that Hugh and I made yesterday afternoon. Well, I can tell you now. After the reading of the will and when the others had gone, Hugh began to sling off about my getting a double share. He was furious also at learning that he was only an adopted son. One word led to another, and he dragged Ruth Madison's name in and made pointed remarks that were not altogether complimentary to me.

"I offered him the chance to withdraw or fight. He showed signs of funk at first, but eventually agreed to fight me that night in the gym at home provided I did not hold any communication with Ruth in the meantime and, if he won, for a fortnight after. He called it—giving him a fair chance to win her'.

"I suppose I was a bit scornful, and told him I'd only consent if we fought there and then, and he should win. He reluctantly agreed, provided I made no mention of the terms of the wager to anyone. Then you and Worrall came in and stopped us. As you know we simply postponed the fight, both refusing to tell you anything.

"The dirty dog didn't turn up at ten, but simply left a note to say he was called away and would meet me another time. I knew then he jolly well wasn't game enough to have it out. That's why I've no compunction about telling you all this now.

"But to return to your question. Thinking he was sincere about the wager, and bound by it not to speak to Ruth until we had fought and settled the matter, I let him answer the phone when she rang. I thought the best way out of the difficulty was to let him tell her I wasn't home and wasn't expected till late. However, judging by the replies he gave, she must have asked him to give me a message, on the off chance of my returning earlier to say she was spending the evening at the Westcombes'. I didn't wait to hear any more.

"I hung about in the gym for some time before I found his note. I was pretty fed up by that time, I can tell you. Anyhow, I couldn't have waited any longer, because of the job, at Little Bourke Street. Now, does that answer your question?"

Trevelyan nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I rather

fancy it does, Geoff, I'm glad to say. So much so, in fact, that when you've had another nap and some lunch, I'm going to let you get up."

Geoffrey's jubilation was quickly cut short by Anne, who tucked him in as she would have a child, and then preceded Trevelyan from the room.

"Miss Palliser," he said quietly as he helped her into her furs, "I think you can count on seeing Miss Madison by nine o'clock this evening. I believe I know where she is, but it might mean failure if I attempted to get her now. She is being reasonably well looked after, unless I'm very much mistaken, though I'm not forgetting her own state of mind, I need scarcely tell you."

"I'm very grateful to you," Anne replied. "It seems miraculous to me how you manage to solve these problems when we poor mortals do not even know how to approach them."

"Some day when we both have a little more time I'd like to tell you, Miss Palliser. In the meantime, you will not forget, will you, that Sir John has been away for a long week-end and is returning this evening? Lavington is to meet his train at 8.40. Let him drop you at the Piccadilly Café on his way to the station. Perhaps he could also call for you and Miss Madison on his way back; say, about nine o'clock."

Anne looked at him in amazement. "I—I'm afraid I don't understand," she faltered.

"Yes, Sir John returns to-night. Will you please

treat him as you would ordinarily. He'll not be able to stay long, however, because he has to attend to one or two important matters at his office. On your return you will find a telegram from Mount Macedon, where presumably, he's been staying, advising that he'll be home a little after nine to-night."

Trevelyan smiled at her bewilderment. "My dear Miss Palliser, you're not meant to understand just yet. Whatever you do therefore don't question Sir John, because he is not quite himself—he has been ill. If you will allow me to see you to-night, or whenever you choose, I'll be happy to explain what now must puzzle you."

"I'm sufficiently on tenterhooks to say come to-night, Mr. Trevelyan."

"Even if it's late—after ten?"

"Even after ten," she echoed with mock solemnity, holding out her hand.

Worrall returned soon after Anne's departure. "You're a deep cove, you know, Gordon," he said good-humouredly. "You've got some blinkin' idea up your sleeve, and I've a pretty good notion what it is."

Trevelyan regarded him keenly. "I'll bet you haven't," he replied. "Spit it out, anyway, and let's hear what it is. Wait a minute, though. There is something I've been wanting to ask you. I've suddenly developed an interest in newspapers and printing. Wonderful thing,—printing."

"Heavenly!" breathed Worrall in mock ecstasy. "Go on."

"Well," continued Trevelyan imperturbably, "I was wondering when the presses in your new building started running."

"What on earth——" Worrall began and then broke into a grin. "Sorry, my mistake. Last Friday, about 6 p.m., though we didn't start printing until nearly midnight. The rest of the time was really for testing purposes."

"And they finished——"

"About three."

"And of course they weren't used on Saturday night," Trevelyan persisted.

"No."

Trevelyan paused a moment or two before he spoke again while Worrall eyed him curiously, wondering what was coming next.

"Thanks, Harry. A very interesting game—printing, I should say," Trevelyan observed, making an unsuccessful attempt to repress a smile.

Worrall raised his eyebrows. "Ho! Ho! m'lud. You've got another brain wave, have you?"

"Perhaps. At any rate I want to congratulate you on your brain wave in going back over the dates for Hugh Palliser's birth. I can quite understand how the discrepancy came about. The figures 4 and 7 are easily mistaken unless they're carefully written. You see, the scrap of paper that was pinned to Hugh when he was discovered on the Pallisers'

doorstep simply gave his Christian name and the date—presumably of his birth. They apparently took the first figure for a seven, when in reality it was a badly written four.”

“Yes, I quite realize that, Gordon. What interests me more is the fact that you changed your mind about my going on to the Finger-print Department when you learnt the names of the parents and especially, I think, the name of the father. In my opinion Silas Mitchell and George Lethbridge are one and the same person.”

“Is that so?” answered Trevelyan ironically. “And what then?”

“Well, seeing you’ve agreed to that,” continued Worrall.

“Oh, no, I haven’t agreed to anything, m’lad, except that I’m willing to hear your interesting hypothesis.”

“You blighter!” exclaimed Worrall in mock indignation. “You’d give away nothing. Still, assuming I’m right, Lethbridge, as the father of Hugh, had a strong motive for committing the crime. You told me Sir John threatened to cut Hugh out of his will. If that had been done, as probably it would have had the old man lived another twenty-four hours, bang would have gone all Lethbridge’s chances of romping home with his share of the swag—in the form of Hugh’s inheritance.”

“Excellent, Harry! Go on.”

"Well, then," continued Worrall with growing confidence, "Lethbridge had the keys to the place and could therefore more easily and safely have committed the crime, and with stronger motive, than anyone else I know of."

"When do you think the murder was committed, Harry?"

"From what you've told me, I should say between the hours of 9.30 p.m. and 1 a.m. on Friday night."

"Then perhaps it may interest you to know that Lethbridge was not at Palliser House after seven o'clock that evening."

Worrall made a grimace expressive of the utmost disgust. "Hell! Then I give it up. But are you sure of that?"

"Not absolutely, my dear chap, but as certain as one can be in the circumstances. Look—I was called in by the auditors a week before the death of Sir John, and unknown to him, to investigate Lethbridge's private life, and as far as I could without arousing any suspicions, his financial affairs. The auditors took this step on account of certain irregularities of an exceedingly complicated nature that pointed to criminal action to defraud on Lethbridge's part. Therefore the late secretary has been under observation ever since I commenced the investigation until he entered Palliser House and committed suicide.

"As for his death, even I didn't realize he was

feeling as desperate as that about his Stock Exchange gambling, his embezzlements, his fear of detection, and his still further urgent need of money. I think he must have 'smelt a rat' when he handed me the papers supposed to have been left by him on Sir John's desk, the originals of which had been secretly marked by the auditors. The ones he handed to me were carefully prepared copies with alterations made to suit him which he had substituted."

"Well, all I can say is that he must have put some one else up to committing the murder. He would still benefit that way."

"Then why should he commit suicide, Harry? Hugh's inheritance, according to your theory, would have solved his financial troubles, assuming that the estimable young man was prepared to disgorge."

"Yes, that's a bit of a poser, I admit. Perhaps his accomplice threatened to 'split' and that preyed on his mind—no, that won't do, because the murderer would necessarily have involved himself. All right, you blighter, I give it up."

"Just as well, Harry. Quite an ingenious theory, though!"

"Yes, until you started to pull it to pieces."

"That's 'what' I meant, of course," replied Trevelyan, dodging the book which Worrall threw at him.

CHAPTER XIX

KRAKOWSKI'S VICTORY AND DEFEAT

HUGH PALLISER made his way through the Piccadilly Café after his interview with Krakowski in a state of mingled rage and mortification. He entered the nearest hotel and gulped down a succession of whisky and sodas that only served to intensify his gradually increasing depression.

He went round to his father's office and searched for an hour, without success, for the accursed documents which now meant so much to him. If only he knew why Krakowski wanted them so badly he might be able to beat that bully, he thought. At last he gave up the search in desperation, convinced that, though they might have been in the office as Krakowski had asserted, they were no longer there.

He wandered aimlessly about by the river, growing more and more despondent as the hours went by. Indeed, he lost all sense of time; and any thought of food, of his inheritance, or even of Ruth, was numbed by the crushing burden of Krakowski's threat. In his half-drunken state fear, instead of

sharpening his wits, only muddled them. For hours he was incapable of reasoning, of perceiving any way of escape.

Dusk still found him undecided, but soon the cold wind that sprang up and his gradually growing hunger cleared his brain. He began to realize that he must do something, no matter how desperate, if he was to get himself out of his plight. He squared his shoulders and walked briskly on. Suddenly, like a flash, came the thought of his father's study at home. Perhaps the documents might be there; Krakowski was probably utterly mistaken about them being at the office.

He cursed himself for not having thought of it before, and hurried back to the City, where he had left his car. Ignoring all speed regulations, he literally tore home.

He was more than a little surprised to find the study locked and the key gone. He hesitated for a moment and then hurriedly let himself out by a side door into the garden and made his way round to the window. In a few moments he had forced the catch and was inside.

He ransacked the safe, the drawers of the desk and a small cabinet without finding anything that resembled the documents that Krakowski had described to him. Towards the end of his search he found, however, a long envelope addressed to Geoffrey, marked: "Not to be opened until my decease", and bearing Sir John's signature. He

ripped it open without compunction and hurriedly scanned the contents. On one sheet was a sketch of the Buddha and its secret cavity, and appended were the directions for opening it.

He heaved a sigh of relief. It seemed to him that, if the documents were in his father's office, they must be in the figure of the Buddha. A glance at his watch showed him that he would just have time to get them and to keep his appointment with Krakowski. He stuffed the directions into his pocket and, hurrying to his room for his revolver, rushed downstairs to his car and made off for Palliser House at breakneck speed.

He was totally unaware, however, that throughout the day he had been, and was still being watched, that as he sped towards the City another car, driven by Worrall equally as fast, though not so recklessly, was following him.

Nor did Krakowski, so certain was he of his own cunning, dream that he, too, was shadowed; that as he passed out of the Piccadilly Café Trevelyan himself had him under observation, ready to deal with him if he should attempt to upset the carefully thought out and elaborate plan of the night's operations. More than that, Trevelyan had seen to it that Palliser House itself was watched from both back and front.

Little chance had Krakowski therefore of seeing his hopes entirely fulfilled. For a brief span it was granted him to hold the documents. For a few

moments he was able to fill his sordid soul with the realization that the princely reward offered by Randall and de Fresnes was as good as in his possession. During that little while he visualized the wonderful future that would be his—in South America or some equally safe and congenial haven—with Rachel. He might even indulge in a little variety, he told himself as he hurriedly crept away from Sir John's window. In a few minutes he would be back in his den to receive Monsieur Paul and his friends and to exchange the documents for £100,000. And he had carried out his *coup* entirely by himself! With this bombastic reflection he arrived at the postern gate.

The next moment was, with the exception of a subsequent one when Madame la Guillotine claimed him, the most tragic of his life. He was scarcely through the gate, with the documents safe in an inside pocket, when it seemed as if a thunderbolt struck him. He never knew what actually did happen, for no one ever enlightened him. All he did know was that one moment he was exulting over his success and the next he was struggling in the folds of some suffocating material and being twisted round and round and buffeted and pommelled until it seemed as if he were being beaten to a pulp.

As suddenly as the cataclysm began, as suddenly did it cease, and when, a few minutes later, he was able to disentangle himself from the clinging fold

of the enormous canopy it was to find himself still in the alley at the back of Palliser House.

He tried to stand up, but he was too giddy. His first thought was for the documents. He put his hand to his pocket. In an agonizing flash, in which was a world of despair and chagrin and desperation, he realized they were gone.

Then he felt the normal reaction. Who had taken them? Were Monsieur Paul and his friends trying to evade payment, or had his Soviet friends got wind of the affair. He struggled painfully to his feet. He would soon know if it were Monsieur Paul and that stuck-up Englishman—and, if it were, they would not live another twenty-four hours.

He was extremely relieved as he passed unsteadily out of the lane to see a taxi standing near, and hailed it. He felt for his watch and then his money—only to discover that all his pockets were empty. He gave a sigh of relief. Then it was only the work of foot-pads, he told himself. With all his influence in the underworld he would soon get the wallet back, and his watch and money too—not that they were of any consequence in comparison. He heard eight o'clock strike, and, with a muttered curse, jumped into the car. He told the driver to hurry and to collect the fare on arrival from the cashier at the Piccadilly Café.

His visitors were already awaiting him in the foyer. He made as if to lead them through a doorway on the left but changed his mind and

motioned them to follow him through the main dining-hall.

"It is usually deserted at this hour, chentlemen; the theatres commencing early in this country, as you may have noticed. It is more direct than the other way to my room."

"As you wish," replied Paul de Fresnes.

Contrary to Krakowski's announcement the dining-hall had still a fair sprinkling of men in evening dress, lingering over their coffee or port, and apparently in no hurry to depart.

"Sorry, chentlemen," Krakowski apologized, "I should have chosen the private entrance, after all."

Arrived at his room, Krakowski appeared to manipulate a secret spring before attempting to open the door, or so it seemed to de Fresnes and his companions who were watching him closely.

He motioned them to chairs, passed round a box of cigars and then seated himself at his desk. Opening a drawer, he fumbled for a box of matches; but had he been more observant he might have wondered at the gleam that came into de Fresnes' eyes at that moment.

"Well, gentlemen," he began, when he had lit his cigar, and speaking in French, "about those documents. I'm sorry that I'm unable to give them to you at this moment, but if you will be good enough to call again, say at midnight, I can promise to hand them over to you—or better still, could you wait until the morning? I can assure

you they've left Palliser House and will soon be in my possession."

De Fresnes looked at his companions.

"As far as I am concerned, I've no objection to leaving the matter open until midnight," said Randall, "but I don't care about waiting until the morning. We've brought the money and it's rather a lot to risk carrying about."

"I would also prefer midnight as the time limit," said Li.

"Very well, Monsieur Krakowski," said de Fresnes. "If you are agreeable we will come again at midnight. Where shall we find you?"

Krakowski smiled to himself. He had been afraid that his clients might raise objections to any postponement. Even though he knew himself to have adequately provided for such an emergency he desired to conduct the business amicably, if possible. Moreover, he realized, since the offer from the Soviet, that as soon as he had collected the money from these men he could make a bold bid to recover the documents and resell them to his Russian friends. He foresaw this possibility in a flash as de Fresnes asked the question. If these men departed as publicly as they had come, and re-entered later on from Little Bourke Street, he would have them at his mercy. They would have been seen to leave his place but not to re-enter. Their bodies—he would see to that.

"Come by the entrance to which Budge

Thompson brought you: it's more private. You need have no hesitation. I'll see to it that you are in no danger of molestation when you leave the main street."

"Very good, then, Monsieur Krakowski," said Randall as he and his companions rose.

The Jew flicked the ash from his cigar and closed the drawer of his desk. Much as he longed to have his hands on the money, he resisted—not without difficulty—the idea of robbing them forthwith. But only the fact that he could get it at midnight without risk caused him to hold his hand. He rose to show them out. This time he held the *portière* aside and put his hand upon the door knob without any hesitation and opened the door wide.

"Au 'voir, messieurs," he said, bowing slightly.

His "Till we meet again" was very literally interpreted. Before he could so much as utter a grunt de Fresnes had him in a jiu-jitsu strangle hold. At the same moment Li closed the door and Randall whipped out cord and gag, and in less than two minutes had the astounded Jew trussed up. His blotchy face, or what was not hidden by a scraggy beard and whiskers, was purple with rage. He attempted to struggle violently, but his bonds held him powerless.

"You would do better to rest yourself, Borodni," said de Fresnes. "There is a long, long journey awaiting you."

At the squad of a name he had thought long

forgotten by all the world, and only rarely recalled by himself, the colour ebbed from his face, leaving only an ashen whiteness with blotches of greenish-grey. His whole figure seemed to shrink and his eyes to take on a glazed look. In the shock of those first few moments his expression revealed an indescribable terror as his past, with all its murder and lust and violence—equalled only by his cunning—flashed before him.

Fortunate it was that de Fresnes had had his dossier, for Krakowski's mechanical genius had not only saved him from capture a score of times in the old days, but had been his chief means of ensnaring his victims. The discovery of his last lair and its secret mechanism had been largely the reason why he had been forced to leave Europe, that and a bullet wound from an accomplice he had attempted to betray. His dossier was very complete regarding the ingenious devices he had once employed so effectively.

It was only the fear that the record, after so long an interval, might not have allowed for any new invention of his genius that had prompted de Fresnes to refrain from arresting him downstairs. The latter had observed enough on his first visit to convince him that the Jew's den was as well protected as a bank strong room. He guessed when Krakowski opened the drawer of his desk that he had touched a spring which closed a steel door behind the *portière*. He strongly suspected—unless Krakowski

had grown lax over his precautionary measures—that the ceiling and floor were also of an impregnable nature.

The thing that disturbed him now was how to get the papers and Borodni too. If the latter were not lying, then some one was going to bring them here, or he was to meet somebody elsewhere. De Fresnes hated the idea of offering Borodni his freedom in exchange for the documents, yet it seemed the only thing to do. Anyhow, he and Randall and Li must make up their mind quickly because they must not upset Trevelyan's plans by delay, particularly regarding Miss Madison.

He pulled out his watch. "What time do you make it, Randall?"

"Two minutes to zero. Trevelyan should be here at any moment now."

Randall had only just uttered the words when there sounded a quick succession of raps at the door. He opened it and Trevelyan stepped in, accompanied by Geoffrey and Worrall.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed as he caught sight of Krakowski. "All the news later." Then in a whisper he added: "The documents are safe—you shall have them to-night."

"Thank God!" murmured Randall, and de Fresnes in unison, whilst Li muttered something in Chinese that sounded equally expressive.

"We needn't worry about Borodni now," said de Fresnes.

"No," replied Trevelyan, "except for the lady in question." He purposely refrained from mentioning Ruth by name in Geoffrey's presence. Until he was certain of her whereabouts he did not wish to disturb the latter's peace of mind, especially in view of his present highly strung state.

He therefore turned to Geoffrey and asked him to go downstairs and find Inspector Clarke and inform him that they would be ready for him immediately. Then he untied Krakowski's gag.

"Now, then, where is the girl you abducted? Come on, we know all about it. We'll find her, but you can save us a lot of trouble."

"I don't know," replied Krakowski sullenly. "She was here, but Rachel took——" He stopped abruptly.

"Who the devil is Rachel, and where do we find her?" continued Trevelyan savagely.

"I don't know where she's gone," was the defiant answer.

He maintained an obstinate silence to all further questioning, cursing inwardly for having mentioned Rachel's name. It had suddenly dawned on him that she could be of use to him. These pig-headed police would never discover her hiding-place provided she had had time to reach it. As for the girl, he could not tell them where she was without giving Rachel away. Rachel was his last hope. If she loved him she would find a means of helping him to

escape. He wished he had been more generous to her lately.

Trevelyan replaced the gag savagely. "I can't waste any more time over this swine, but God help him if we don't find Ruth Madison."

Going to the door he beckoned to the detectives who stood without. The erstwhile diners from downstairs entered. He pointed to Krakowski.

"Don't worry about reading the charges now. Get him out quickly. I'll let you have another one against him for murder later."

As Krakowski was bundled downstairs he saw men in dinner-jackets or full evening dress, with revolvers drawn, guarding every exit. He then realized why the dining-hall had been so unexpectedly full when he had entered with the accursed Paul and his friends.

Meanwhile de Fresnes had set to work to master the spring controlling the safe door which led through to the adjoining building. Fortunately, a similar one was described in Krakowski's dossier, and within a few minutes he had the steel partition open.

Trevelyan turned to Inspector Clarke who had joined them. "Right, Clarke, your job now, and good luck."

Within a few minutes policemen—some in uniform, some in plain clothes—and the detectives from downstairs began to troop into Krakowski's office and on through the opening. All were armed

with revolvers, but some carried also jemmies and hatchets.

Soon there was a babel as the surprised occupants of the ramshackle tenement made their appearance, only to dart back into their rooms at the sight of the uniforms. The cry, "Police!"—and all the terms synonymous with it in the argot of the underworld, rang out and were echoed from corridor to corridor, down rickety staircases, and repeated in room after room in a dozen languages.

Whenever the slightest delay occurred in response to the command to open the door, hatchets or jemmies effected a speedy entrance.

The smashing in of doors soon became general and added to the rapidly increasing din. At first a few knives were thrown and a shot or two fired by the defenders, but the numbers of the police and their drastic methods soon overawed the denizens of this veritable warren. As the search proceeded they were passed on from patrol to patrol and herded together in the Piccadilly dining-hall. Never before had that rendezvous of Melbourne's upper ten housed such a motley and unkempt collection of humanity.

Now and again a batch of recalcitrant prisoners would appear handcuffed together, with bloody faces or blackened eyes, cursing in a medley of tongues; but for the most part the prisoners were sullen, scowling and bearing the debased, brutish

look of the lowest criminal class. Once a group of swell cracksmen, flashily dressed, appeared, protesting vociferously at the unceremonious treatment that was accorded them.

Apparently many tried to escape by the roof, only to be shot down by the machine-guns which the indefatigable Clarke had had posted on top of the adjoining buildings. The thud of falling bodies and the rattle of the guns reverberated through the ramshackle tenement.

"By Jove! Trevelyan," said Randall, "your police here don't mince matters when they're put to it."

"No, they've wanted an excuse like this for years," replied Trevelyan.

As for the other would-be escapers who sought the secret exits leading below, they received short shrift from the police who guarded those avenues of escape. Others who, in desperation, tried to drop from window or balcony were driven back by rifle fire from below.

Amid the sound of crashing glass came intermittently the dull boom of battering-rams upon the doors that resisted jemmy or axe.

Geoffrey was agog with excitement, wishing that he were not a civilian and could join in the raid, watching the quickening stream of motley humanity being rushed through the room, the wounded on stretchers being carried down to the ambulances; while the acrid smell of gunpowder and the

indescribable din raised the latent martial sense within him.

Trevelyan watched keenly as the prisoners came through, recognizing many an old lag, but getting anxious as time went on and no Rachel appeared. At length Inspector Clarke returned, dishevelled and grimy but triumphant, still brandishing an axe in one hand and a revolver in the other, and announced that they had cleaned up the place.

"Good for you, Clarke—best raid in history," Trevelyan congratulated him. "Now it's our turn. There's still one more of Krakowski's gang—Rachel, whoever she is."

"She's a red-headed piece; Krakowski's mistress. By George! I'd forgotten her, Trevelyan. Also, we haven't discovered Miss Madison."

Trevelyan turned like a flash to Geoffrey.

"Miss Madison—Ruth!" gasped the latter. "You don't mean to say she's here."

"All right, Geoff, old man," said Trevelyan reassuringly. "We couldn't tell you before—or rather do any good by telling you. She's in this building somewhere and we'll find her—don't you worry about that. Let's have a couple of men, Clarke, if you've quite finished, will you?"

Inspector Clarke detailed a couple of men, and Trevelyan, accompanied by Geoffrey and Worrall, set out to make their search. A minute later Randall came hurrying after them.

"Wait a minute, I may be able to help you. I've

just thought of the old shed down below. If that's still intact I bet it will reveal something."

He led them through the now deserted corridors, past broken doors, down rickety staircases, whose banisters were smashed and on whose landings the blood was still wet, reaching at last the doorway through which he and de Fresnes and Li had been shown on the memorable occasion when Budge Thompson had been their guide.

"I've asked Clarke to get hold of Fêng Wa," resumed Randall. "He was gatekeeper on Friday night. If there are any secret springs I expect he'll know all about them."

The gate was open and a squad of police was on guard there. The sergeant in charge came forward at the sight of the party, but stepped back as he recognized Trevelyan. The shed, with its stack of timber, showed clearly in the glare of the lights that had been switched on by the police.

"Now," said Randall, "if we shift some of that timber I think we'll find something interesting."

He and Trevelyan tugged at a protruding piece on the left-hand side of the pile and drew out a twelve foot length. Within a few minutes, aided by the two policemen and Worrall and Geoffrey, they had a dozen pieces out. Then, erecting a ladder and commencing on the next layer to the right, they met with the same result. After that the timber resisted all efforts to dislodge it.

"Give me a hatchet, somebody," cried Trevelyan.

He took the one handed to him and with a few smashing blows tried to loosen the next piece of timber. To his surprise it snapped off short as cleanly as though it had been sawn. He proceeded with the experiment, meeting with the same result each time. Then, hammering at the flat surface that now showed, there sounded, not the thud of metal on wood, but metal on metal. It was now evident that this apparently innocent stack of timber very ingeniously camouflaged a steel door.

Presently a very frightened looking Fêng Wa was hustled to the scene by a burly policeman. Li pointed to a door and in the same fluent Mandarin as he had employed on a former occasion, only with a note of ferocity in it now, addressed his cringing fellow-countryman. Whatever he said, certainly proved most effective and belied Fêng Wa's linguistic limitations. The latter made no attempt to deny his ability to understand Kuan Hua this time, but with a gesture of assent set to work immediately to manipulate a lever. The door swung aside, revealing a steel lined corridor and stairs leading down.

It was Geoffrey who reached the bottom first. Wrenching open a door that confronted him, he found himself on the threshold of a room. As he entered there was a scream, and Rachel, her eyes wild, started up from a lounge in the corner. Ignoring her, he took a rapid survey of the room. He

espied another door, the key still in the lock. In a moment he had it open and dashed through.

Ruth Madison, sitting in an arm-chair in a comfortably furnished room, looked up at the sound, and then at the sight of Geoffrey rushed to him.

"Oh, Geoff, my dear," was all she could say as he caught her in his arms; and, abandoning the veneer of flippancy affected by the *jeune fille moderne*, she quite unaffectedly sobbed upon his shoulder.

Geoffrey's vocabulary was no less restricted, being limited to such terms of endearment as come so fervently and spontaneously in the early twenties.

The two policemen in the meantime had taken charge of Rachel, though not without a struggle. When she had quieted down Trevelyan drew from her in a few words the details of the plot for Ruth's abduction, the part Hugh had played in it and his hopes of winning her by a mock-heroic rescue.

If Trevelyan and Worrall had never felt sorry for the disreputable Hugh they did so now as this half-crazy plot of his revealed not so much the knave as the fool.

"Poor devil," murmured Trevelyan, with a pity that had behind it a knowledge as yet unshared by Worrall. He looked at his watch. "Time's getting on, Harry. We'll have to break in upon love's young dream. You'd better do it, I think."

Worrall coughed loudly as he opened the door. Ruth was by this time hastily dabbing her eyes and powdering her nose. Glad to see that any emotional

crisis was over, he made an elaborate bow. She impulsively caught hold of him as he straightened up and kissed him soundly on both cheeks.

"You are dears, both of you—but I thought I'd never get away from this place and that horrid old beast of a woman."

"Well, you're going to now and as soon as you like. Don't forget the time, Geoff."

"No, by Jove!" replied Geoffrey. "I'd forgotten everything except——"

"Yes," said Worrall with a grin. "Quite excusable, what—what!"

They hurried out and found Trevelyan and Randall waiting for them at the top of the stairs. They were introduced to Ruth and then Trevelyan whispered to Randall who immediately took his leave.

A few minutes later Ruth was comfortably ensconced in the Palliser car with her aunt and Anne. The latter leaned out and beckoned to Trevelyan.

"Sir John didn't arrive," she whispered.

"Er—no," Trevelyan answered with a slightly absent air. "He must have decided on a later train," he whispered back. "Better not dismiss Lavington when you get home in case he's wanted again."

Anne nodded in response and signalled to Lavington that they were ready.

"See you all again soon," cried Geoffrey as he waved good-bye.

CHAPTER XX

THE RETURN OF SIR JOHN PALLISER

OLD Jenkins, the butler, with all the dignity of a servant of the old school, opened the front door, and taking up two valises, deferentially followed the pompous figure of Sir John out to his car. He was too much the perfect servant to betray any surprise at his master's decision to go to his office at half-past nine at night, on a holiday too, and after having been away for the week-end. Nevertheless, he did consider it strange, especially as Sir John had hardly been in the house five minutes; only long enough, indeed, to say a word or two to Miss Anne—who had been out when he arrived—and to the two ladies she had brought back with her.

“Don't be later than you can help, John,” Anne called out from the staircase.

Lavington was not, apparently, a servant of the old school and did not seem altogether pleased at being called out again at such an hour—a holiday too, he had reminded himself during the afternoon when he had been informed that the mistress wanted him to drive her and Miss Madison home from the City at nine o'clock.

He had cursed the inconsiderateness of the wealthy when on arriving home after performing this duty he had received instructions to wait in case he should be needed again. He consoled himself, however, with the reflection that he would soon be finished with this accursed being at everybody's beck and call. He'd endured it quite long enough. He wondered who it was he had to drive this time. He assumed it would be the Madisons, though why these people with cars couldn't or didn't drive themselves was beyond him. In his opinion they were a lazy, spendthrift, stuck-up lot of snobs, preying upon a down-trodden working class. He'd show them, he said to himself, with that fine inconsistency of the "have-nots" towards the "haves", when he managed to get hold of some money. He was in this extremely pleasant frame of mind when Jenkins swung back the front door. To his utter amazement he recognized his master's pompous tones. From sheer force of habit he jumped out and held open the door of the car. He could hardly believe his eyes. There was Sir John—the last person in the world that he had expected to see—coming towards him. Scarcely realizing what he was doing, he took the valises from Jenkins and strapped them to the luggage rack, muttering dazedly to himself the while.

"Office, James," was the curt command as he took his seat.

He grunted assent, his bewilderment in no wise

lessened by the order at so late an hour, though his master's strange decisions and erratic working hours during the past few weeks should have accustomed a much less well-trained servant than he to such idiosyncrasies.

He made furtive attempts to catch a glimpse of the magnate on the way in to town. He must have been dreaming. It was Sir John all right—and yet Sir John was dead. Had not he heard old Lethbridge say so? He could not make it out at all.

Arrived at Palliser House, the well-groomed figure of the magnate bestirred himself as though at the sudden recollection of a distasteful duty to be performed. He flung away his half-smoked cigar and, without waiting for Lavington, opened the door of the car and stepped out.

“Bring the valises to my office, James, and then wait here for me. If I am not out by ten o'clock you may go home.”

“Just what he blarsted-well told me on Friday!” muttered the chauffeur to himself as he went round to the luggage rack.

The pompous object of his imprecations hurried to the door and was about to insert his key when, with dramatic and uncanny suddenness, both doors swung violently inwards before him. He started back and then peered within, but could see nobody. With a quick movement he stepped inside and pressed the half switch, but without getting any

response; the only light there was came from the street lamp opposite, which shed a ghostly radiance down the corridor.

He stepped forward and hurried nervously along the passage, shuddering as though with a foreboding of tragedy. "I'd like to know the secret of those damned doors," he muttered. He paused for a moment at the door of the private room and noticed it was slightly ajar and that there was a faint light within. Again he felt a cold fear gripping at his heart.

He stood as though undecided what to do. Then, instead of entering, he passed straight on and out through the back door to the courtyard.

In the middle room de Fresnes, Randall and Li waited, tensely curious, keyed up to a pitch of indefinable expectancy, realizing that the ordeal of the past few days, terrible as it had been, was to yield them their reward to-night. The documents which had evoked so much tragedy six years ago and again more recently were at last to come into their possession.

Yet they realized too, as they waited there, that in the drama of which they had been spectators and players both, the documents had been only incidental, a minor *motif* at the most. The strange, uncanny sense of an impending unknown was upon them. They, too, shuddered, as they heard the violent opening of the doors. Twice before had

they opened thus and twice had death come to pass in the strange room, where the figure of the Buddha sat silent and inscrutable—unless its air of mystery, of faint mockery, might be construed as an expression. Did death still lurk there? Was the strange opening of the doors to-night a portent of further tragedy?

In the courtyard, and gathered together at Sir John's window, were Trevelyan, Worrall and Geoffrey. The latter stood a little apart with coat drawn closely around him, shivering, though the night was only moderately cold.

Trevelyan had raised the window and he and Worrall were gazing intently into the dimly lit room. Trevelyan had replaced the ceiling lamp by a high-powered globe, covering it with a thick shade through which only a subdued light radiated. To the shade a fine wire was attached, its further end lying outside the window within easy reach of him.

There was a knock at the door. "Can I come in, sir?" they heard Lavington ask. Receiving no reply the chauffeur pushed open the door and they saw him enter, carrying a valise in either hand.

"Now then, Harry," said Trevelyan, and Worrall slipped quietly in at the back door.

Lavington seemed mystified for a moment at the dimness of the light and the absence of Sir John. Then his gaze turned instinctively to the floor near the window. The valises dropped from his nerveless hands and he stared horror-struck at the figure

huddled on the floor, and at the ominous dark stain that glowed red in the light of the radiator; his gaze took in, too, the overturned table, the reading lamp and the clock near.

He was speechless. He tried to cry out, to turn and rush through the door, but he seemed frozen with an unnamable terror. He felt that terrible icy-cold grip upon the scalp that moves up from the spine with the suddenness and speed of lightning. Then he commenced to tremble, quietly at first, then in spasms that set every nerve twitching, his teeth chattering, and that presently shook every limb, yet held him rooted there, staring with the eyes of a madman at the apparition upon the floor. The dark patch looked as if it were moving; it appeared to be coming nearer and nearer to him, it seemed to have eyes that were fixed upon him.

In his agony strange noises came from his throat; great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead; his face grew whiter than that of him who lay upon the floor. . . .

And strange thoughts like hallucinations raced backwards and forwards and round and round in his mind, thoughts that fought with each other, clamouring now with mad incoherence, now with a flash of reason. He was in a silent, empty, terrifying universe, upon the brink of a mighty precipice, alone except for a dim figure at his feet and something dark that glowed and crept nearer and nearer to him. . . .

Then as reason battled with hallucination he felt he had looked upon such a scene before—the figure, the overturned table, the clock, the dark something that moved. . . .

Suddenly the shade that covered the light was swept aside and the spell was broken. He put his hands to his tortured eyes, almost blinded by the glare that now lit the room. Gradually his trembling ceased as reason returned. Yet he dared not take his hands from his eyes. The figure on the floor—who was it? He had killed Sir John. No, that could not be right. Had not Sir John spoken to him less than a quarter of an hour ago? . . . Was he dreaming? Was he going mad? Where was Sir John? Where was he himself? Was he at home in his bed and all this a nightmare? . . . If only he dared take his hands away and open his eyes. If only . . . He began to tremble again as he thought of the dark something on the floor, creeping nearer and nearer to him. . . .

He must get out of it if he really was in that terrible room. Away from it he might be able to think clearly. Keeping one hand still over his eyes, he groped with the other and found the door handle. He turned it, but the door remained fast. Then he tugged and tugged with growing frenzy. It resisted all his efforts. Something seemed to snap in his brain. He sank to the floor and his trembling recommenced. . . .

Then, out of the silence came a voice

whose every accent and intonation he knew so well.

"Why did you kill me, Silas Mitchell?"

A convulsive movement shook him anew, and he crouched lower as though in an effort to hide himself, his head buried in his hands. Why did Sir John torture him so?

"Shall I tell you?" he heard the familiar voice continue. "You found the front doors open on Friday night at a quarter to ten and you thought I had left them so for you. You came to my door and heard me tell your son, Hugh, over the telephone that I would cut him out of my will. To hear the rest of the conversation better you came round to the window. Seeing my revolver on the table and noticing that the pane which was cracked some time ago had been replaced by the painters and that the putty therefore would be soft, you cut it out and seized the revolver.

"As I sat at the table with my head in my hands you shot me—to prevent the alteration to my will and thus to ensure getting a share of my money through your son. Then you took the clock, and breaking the glass, altered the time to three minutes to twelve, bending the little hand so that if it did start again it must stop at midnight. You were known to have been in your room from half-past ten until next morning, so that it gave you an almost perfect alibi.

"But you went further than that, Silas Mitchell.

You left nothing undone that would give to my death a convincing appearance of suicide. Having thrown the clock and the revolver on to the floor, you overturned the table upon which my head and arms still lay, in order that my body would fall to the floor—away from the window. There remained only to replace the pane and to get green paint from the cupboard. You ran little risk of detection because the sound of your shot was lost in the din that was going on in the alley. Moreover, you were out in the car again by ten o'clock."

The voice ceased. Lavington knew now that Sir John was dead. Only the dead could have known those things. So he had seen Sir John's ghost as well as heard him. And yet had not Jenkins seen him—and Miss Palliser too? "Don't be longer than you can help, John," she had said. He remembered now. . . .

"Silas Mitchell, look upon your son, upon him whose mother you forsook in her hour of travail, the woman you ruined and who killed herself because of you." The voice of John Palliser had begun again, beating insistently at Lavington's very brain. He wanted to put his hands over his ears—but again the terrifying thought of seeing the figure lying there set him trembling.

"Look at him, Silas Mitchell. He is with you now. You have nothing to fear from me. I am dead and my ashes are scattered to the four winds. Look at him. Look. LOOK."

As though acting under the impulse of hypnosis Lavington slowly removed his hands and opened his eyes. For a moment the glare blinded him; then he saw the figure huddled on the floor. It was Hugh Palliser, his son, through whom during the six years he had played the part of chauffeur he had secretly hoped to benefit. And now here he was lying before him just as the voice of the dead Sir John had said.

Then all he had done had been for naught. He crawled nearer to the dead figure. A terrifying thought came to him. He picked up the clock—it showed three minutes to twelve. Had he killed his son in mistake for Sir John? No, else how could he have heard the threat of disinheritance? Had he dreamed it and all the other strange things—that he had killed Sir John, that he had driven him in to-night, that he had heard him speaking from the dead? Was he only dreaming that his son was lying there? . . .

He was vaguely aware of a hand that was laid upon his shoulder. Unheard, Trevelyan had entered. As Lavington looked round, his eyes fixed and staring, his face bloodless, his nerves twitching, he never felt the handcuffs that were slipped on his wrists nor heard the words of Inspector Clarke who had followed Trevelyan in.

“Silas Mitchell, I arrest you on a charge of the wilful murder of Sir John Palliser on the night of the 13th day of August, and I warn you that you

need not say anything unless you wish, but anything you do say may be used in evidence."

Lavington made not the slightest sign that he had heard, but suffered himself to be led away, his eyes staring fixedly, his tortured nerves still twitching spasmodically.

Trevelyan heaved a sigh of relief as Inspector Clarke handed Lavington over to the two detectives who were waiting in the corridor, and saw them depart.

"Splendid job, old man," said Clarke warmly. "I'd give ten years of my life to be able to pull off a case like that."

"Thanks, Clarke," replied Trevelyan, and the inspector detected a note of weariness in his voice, "but I wouldn't care to take on another case like it. The last four days have been hard enough, but to-night's ordeal. . . . Good God! If you could only have watched that man's expression as he stood there for what must have seemed an eternity to him. He looked like some unnatural being . . . like a corpse in which an evil spirit was writhing in revolt. Never have I seen a man so nerve wracked, so utterly unable to cry out, so powerless to move. It had to be done, I suppose—but, my God! I shall never forget it.

"And as for that poor lad, Geoffrey, he's been a perfect brick. As you know, he got badly knocked about last night, yet he played his part without once losing his nerve. I only learnt by chance that

he'd often imitated his father's pompous voice and manner by way of joke. But it was only his determination to have the stigma of suicide removed that induced him to do it this time. Fortunately, he didn't know that Hugh was lying dead within a few feet of him. He didn't even know that Lavington was the murderer. All he knew was that he had to recite his words through the open window to the person who was to enter the room. The last bit about the son lying dead, which he read out, he thought was only a bit of acting by some one pretending to be dead. As soon as it was over Worrall took him inside. I hope he is all right, but I'd better go and see him, poor lad."

He and Clarke went to the middle room and saw Geoffrey lying back in a chair, his face drawn and white and his eyes closed. He was still wearing the grey vandyke beard so exactly like his father's. Indeed, with his powdered hair and Sir John's clothes, he had looked so like the dead magnate that even Randall and de Fresnes had been amazed, scarcely believing their eyes, when he had entered the room.

Worrall held up a warning finger. "He'll be all right in a few minutes," he whispered, "as soon as I can get a bit more brandy down his throat."

Trevelyan beckoned to Randall, de Fresnes and Li. They followed him silently out of the room. "Better for him to be quiet for a little while," said Trevelyan. "We can, in the meantime, get the documents and relieve your anxiety."

He led the way into Sir John's room, from which Hugh's body had just been removed. "I don't pretend to claim any credit for their discovery," he continued. "On the contrary, I'm largely to blame for any delay, but I've had my hands so full with this affair that I couldn't do otherwise."

He went over to the Buddha and pressed the right eye. Then, exerting all his strength, he gradually twisted the figure round and round as Sir John had done before his tragic death. His three companions looked on in astonishment. Withdrawing the leather wallet from the recess, he handed over to Randall the documents in code and to Li those written in Chinese.

"My dear Trevelyan," said Randall, "it's impossible to thank you adequately in words. You've done a tremendous service. It's only fair that you should accept the money offered by our governments."

"Most decidedly," added de Fresnes.

"And I, too, thank you more than I can say," said Li, "and hope you'll accept the ten thousand pounds which I have already offered for the recovery of my father's letter."

"Thanks very much," returned Trevelyan, "but I shouldn't feel justified in accepting the money. The secret of the Buddha doesn't belong to me but to Sir John's son." He took from his pocket the long envelope addressed to Geoffrey, bearing the inscription: "Not to be opened until my decease." "The directions for operating the spring are in here.

Sir John must have kept it in his study at home. Having more urgent matters to attend to, I had it locked up until I could spare the time to search it thoroughly.

“By some lucky chance or perhaps as a last resource, Hugh broke in there, hoping, I suppose, to find the documents. Instead he must have discovered this and raced back here. Worrall had had him under observation all the afternoon and followed him. I discovered later that he had an appointment here with Krakowski for 7.30.

“I was waiting for Krakowski myself shortly before that—in fact there were nearly fifty plain-clothes men keeping an eye on his place in case he might have got wind of the raid—and when he left by the Piccadilly entrance I followed him. He came round here and made straight for Sir John’s window. I think he must have knocked because it was opened a few moments later. Hugh, however, refused to let him in, so I was able to overhear practically the whole conversation. It appears that the boy had been threatened by Krakowski that very morning with the threat of exposure as the murderer of Sir John if he did not succeed in producing those documents by half-past seven. You see, he’d foolishly disclosed the fact that he’d been on the premises that night. Indeed, it was he who was to have left the back door ajar for Budge. Probably he did so, but the strange opening of the front doors a little later must have created a draught and slammed it

to. Also, Krakowski held over him the threat that he would not disclose the whereabouts of Miss Madison until the documents were handed over."

"That's the part that puzzles us," said Randall. "How the dickens did you manage to get them?"

"Well," replied Trevelyan, "it certainly wasn't due to any skill on my part—it was sheer luck. When I followed Krakowski into the courtyard, to my amazement, there was Hugh standing at the window, holding the documents in one hand and a revolver in the other. He refused to give them up until the girl was released. Their voices soon rose to such a pitch that they could almost have been heard in the alley, let alone from my position under the plane tree. Then Krakowski, who no doubt was getting anxious about his appointment with you, suddenly produced his revolver and shot the boy. Hugh hung on to the grille a moment before falling, still clutching the papers and the leather folder. Krakowski reached through and grabbed them and made for the postern gate. It was there that we got him, much the same as you got Budge. He'll not forget for a long time the drubbing we gave him. In order to disguise the fact that we were after the documents, we relieved him of everything."

"Then that explains why he was so certain of recovering them," said de Fresnes. "From what he told us he must have thought it was a case of ordinary robbery and that his influence in the underworld would effect a speedy recovery."

"I rushed back here with the wallet," continued Trevelyan. "I didn't want to carry it round with me in case of accidents during the raid—also, of course, I was anxious to see Hugh. He was dead, however, when I reached him. I discovered the Buddha raised as it is now, with the papers describing the secret mechanism on the small desk. I realized then where the documents had been all the time and decided that they'd be as safe there as anywhere.

"Then, as I considered the question of the removal of Hugh's body, the idea came to me that it would serve to play the part of the dead figure of Sir John far more realistically than Worrall, who was to have done so. I hurriedly scribbled down a few lines which Geoffrey read out at the appropriate moment—he had no time to learn them off by heart—and I think they proved to be the last straw to Lavington. The actual stage setting I left until after the raid—the clock, the overturned table and so on."

"It certainly must have been realistic," said Randall. "We were listening at the door after Lavington entered and heard it all. The voice seemed to be Sir John's and we were utterly mystified by it, knowing nothing of the plan you had arranged. It is a great triumph for you; but all this must have been a terrific strain."

"Yes, it has been, rather, and I'm thankful it's over," admitted Trevelyan.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SECRET OF THE OPENING DOORS

Geoffrey was sitting up in his chair, his disguise removed, and looking less white and strained when Trevelyan and the others returned from Sir John's room. He grinned cheerfully as he caught sight of them.

"Just listen to the music next door," he cried. "Eight pages extra to-morrow morning and an additional 100,000 copies! Worrall's just waiting now for the last spasm. Look at him."

Worrall was writing as though for his life to the accompaniment of the faint hum and staccato rumble of the printing presses, which were turning out the greatest scoop he had ever made. He looked up as Geoffrey spoke.

"Yes, Gordon, I must have the grand secret to-night. How did you know it was Lavington?"

"Yes, come on," cried Geoffrey. "You've got us guessing. I'd never have picked him up as the murderer."

"All right," Trevelyan assented, "but there's not much in it. It was sheer luck, like finding the documents. I thought first of all that Lethbridge

was the instigator, and had employed some one of Budge Thompson's type to commit the actual crime. Later, the evidence pointed strongly to Hugh, if not as the murderer, at least as an accessory.

"It was principally with the idea of getting further information about Hugh's movements that I approached Lavington. Although I knew the chauffeur had been outside Palliser House for a little while on the night of the murder there was nothing that I could see to implicate him, even remotely. In order to get into conversation with him I made out I had a couple of punctures and got him to come round to my car and have a look at them. As I followed him from the garage I noticed a bit of green paint at the back of his right cuff. Then, by a ruse, I got him to lend me his knife. Last, but not least, he left a perfectly good set of finger-prints on the radiator which Inspector Hart photographed and identified for me as those of Silas Mitchell, an old lag of twenty years before.

"However, I was still without a motive for the crime. I turned my attention again to Hugh and on learning of his adoption, proceeded to get all the information there was on the subject of his parentage, little dreaming he would prove to be Lavington's son. The rest was comparatively simple.

"Lavington made several big mistakes. He shot Sir John at a range close enough to make it look like suicide, but he overlooked the irregularity of

the scorch marks which resulted from the way his victim had his hands to his head, and which proved conclusively that Sir John did not shoot himself. Furthermore, Lavington allowed the head to rest on the table while he attended to the clock, and caused more blood to flow on to it than would have occurred had Sir John tipped the table over—as he most likely would have done had he shot himself. But the greatest blunder of all was his carelessness in breaking the clock glass. He let a small piece fall outside. To me that was the final and most convincing evidence that murder had been done. Without that, I doubt if I should have gone on with the case.

“ Even his blunder in not cleaning his cuff more carefully matters little compared with that tiny fragment of glass and the scorch marks. As for his gloves, he probably cleaned them when he got back to the car—most likely flooded the carburettor over them. Carter, the constable on duty, noticed him with the bonnet up, bending over the engine, but of course had no more idea of the real import of such a trivial action than I had when I heard of it.

“ However, in my opinion, the most important thing is that I’ve been able to keep my identity secret, and that has only been possible as a result of your co-operation. Just imagine what would have happened if I or the police had gone openly to Lavington, interrogating him not as a suspect, but

merely for information. He would probably not have removed his overalls or left any finger-prints, and certainly taken no risks about his knife, on which, by the way, I saw traces of green paint. Now, what about a whisky, some one? I'm dry after all that."

"You're a good lad, Gordon," said Worrall with a chuckle as he poured out the drinks, "but there's one thing you haven't explained. How did Lavington get in, or rather, how came the front doors to be open?"

Trevelyan grinned at the sally. "Lord! I'd quite forgotten them. Anyhow, the explanation of their devilish uncanny behaviour—and it certainly was that last night—is such a simple one that I wonder one of us didn't hit on it earlier. However, it didn't dawn on me until this morning. Do you remember me asking you, Harry, what time your printing presses——?"

"Hurrah!" shouted Worrall, without giving him a chance to finish. "I've got it. Listen." He held up his hand for silence. All that could be heard was the noise of the printing presses. "Now come into the hall," he added.

Trevelyan replaced the globe he had removed earlier in the evening and switched on the light. Worrall pointed to the top bolt which was placed perpendicularly on the left-hand door. It was a big one of the old-fashioned type, strong enough, but loose fitting. Trevelyan grinned as Worrall, after

taking a good look at the bolt, put the tips of his fingers to the doors and then placed his ear against them.

"You've hit it, Harry," said Trevelyan. "Your blessed machinery is vibrating every particle in these doors. The vibration apparently causes the top bolt to swing round gradually and to drop, and the worn slope on the step doesn't allow sufficient grip to the bottom one. Also the doors must be out of plumb, otherwise they wouldn't fall inwards with such force. This being an old building it is easily affected by the vibration."

"It's also obvious now why they've never opened prior to Friday night," explained Worrall. "Our machinery wasn't ready for running until then. And the fact that there was no paper on Sunday explains why they didn't open on Saturday night. Apparently it takes about four hours for the bolt to work round. The presses started early on Friday—at six, and finished at three. They'll be going to-night for about the same length of time, which means that the blinkin' doors will open again somewhere in the region of two o'clock."

"What a wash-out!" growled Geoffrey. "And to think I got the shock of my life over them to-night. All the same it was damned uncanny. I nearly forgot my part. They opened just as I was going to fit the key into the lock."

"They scared fourteen fits out of me too," said Worrall. "Trevelyan and I were waiting at the

back door for you—feeling nervy enough without that happening.”

“Quite simple when you know how it’s done,” added Trevelyan. “Anyhow, let’s get home or we won’t be fit to read Worrall’s effort in the ‘Wail’ to-morrow.”

“There’s no hope of my getting away for another hour or two,” replied the latter, “but I’ll have a nightcap with you at your place later on, if you like, Gordon.”

“Right, old man,” returned Trevelyan. “And now, Geoff, I’m going to drive you home, otherwise you’ll be too late to catch Miss Madison.”

He looked at his watch. “Half-past ten,” he said to himself. And then there came back to him the scene in his study—Anne’s steady grey eyes, her faintly flushed cheeks, and the murmur of her voice saying, “Ever after ten”. And like a flash came the realization that she was more, infinitely more than likeable to him.

THE END

RECENT FICTION

7s. 6d. net each.

ANCESTOR JORICO

By WILLIAM J. LOCKE

"What a good story-teller Mr. Locke is! Here he is spinning as exciting a yarn as he has ever told . . . the story is most cunningly contrived; tragedy as well as comedy intrudes, romance is very far from being absent, and nothing happens in the way you might have expected. . . . This is Mr. Locke in his most joyous manner."—*Sunday Times*.

SHINJU

By H. B. DRAKE

Author of "The Children Reap," "The Schooner California," etc.

A novel of Japan, not the Japan of the musical comedy world, but Japan of strange conventions, of religious mysticism, of sombre tragedy. Mr. Drake's portrayal of the Japanese girl, Fumi Ko San, is a remarkable achievement.

THE INFALLIBLE SYSTEM A Monte Carlo Mystery

By CHARLES KINGSTON

Author of "The Highgate Mystery," etc.

"Mr. Kingston adds the excitements of gambling at Monte Carlo to those of crime and detection . . . an extremely exciting story."—*Daily News*.

COIN OF LIFE

By Mrs. FRED REYNOLDS

A charming love story set in a typical Victorian background in which the figure of Helena, with the limitations and aspirations of her period, stands supreme.

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD., VIGO STREET, W.1.

THE CROW'S INN TRAGEDY

7s. 6d. net.

"What could be better to whet the appetite of the mystery-loving reader? A capital piece of work . . . exactly the sort of mystery story that everyone is asking for and will eagerly devour."—*Sketch.*

THE HOUSE IN CHARLTON
CRESCENT

7s. 6d. net.

"Miss HAYNES' new book shows all the merits of its predecessors. Careful plot, a villain concealed, natural setting, observation of character—for all these it scores points."—*Morning Post.*

THE BUNGALOW MYSTERY

7s. 6d. net and 2s. net.

"Contrived and worked out with considerable craftsmanship—drawn with sympathy and power."—*Sunday Times.*

THE BLUE DIAMOND

7s. 6d. net.

"A mystery story which is sure to enjoy a wide popularity."—*Truth.*

THE MAN WITH THE DARK
BEARD

7s. 6d. net.

Second Impression.

"Miss HAYNES, I think, improves steadily—this is the best detective story she has yet written."—*Time and Tide.*

THE SECRET OF GREYLANDS

Second Edition.

7s. 6d. net.

"Not only a crime story of merit, but also a novel which will interest readers to whom mystery for its own sake has little appeal."—*Nation*.

THE WITNESS, ON THE ROOF

7s. 6d. net and 3s. 6d. net.

"Miss ANNIE HAYNES has already to her credit several effective mystery stories, but this is the best she has given us. The mystery is well devised and the secret is well kept. Miss HAYNES has a sense of character; her people are vivid and not the usual puppets of detective fiction."—*New Statesman*.

THE ABBEY COURT MURDER

7s. 6d. net.

"It is a first-rate story of its kind; the characters are much truer to life than is the case in many sensational stories, and the plot thickens with every page, leading us on to the final climax in a state of unfluctuating interest."—*Bookman*.

THE MASTER OF THE PRIORY

7s. 6d. net.

"The story is written so brightly that almost it reads itself."—*Eve*.

"A mystery story of deep interest."—*Ladies' Field*.

THE CRIME AT TATTENHAM CORNER

7s. 6d. net.

"As we follow the disentangling of the mystery, we not only encounter thrilling surprises but are introduced to many admirably life-like characters. Miss HAYNES is here at her best. Excellent as a detective tale, the book is also a charming novel."—*Spectator*.

THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT
STYLES

3s. 6d. net and 2s. net.

"A wonderful triumph. It is with congratulations to Mrs. CHRISTIE and to the large contingent of admirers of the detective novel that I make the announcement that in this writer there is a distinguished addition to the list of writers in this genus."—*Evening News*.

"The most ingenious and absorbingly interesting tale of sensations and mystery we have read for a long time."—*Bookman*.

THE SECRET OF CHIMNEYS

3s. 6d. net.

"This is indeed as good a mystery as Mrs. CHRISTIE has written, and for any connoisseur that assurance will be enough. Her final surprise is one of the most ingeniously managed and unforeseeable that has ever been worked upon the astute and suspicious public for whom well-made detective stories are written."—*Daily Telegraph*.

THE
MAN IN THE BROWN SUIT

3s. 6d. net.

"A capital tale—mystery piled on mystery, incident on incident."—*Referee*.

"A most entertaining story, excellently conceived and executed."—*Morning Post*.

BOOKS BY AGATHA CHRISTIE

THE SECRET ADVERSARY

3s. 6d. net and 2s. net.

"It's an excellent yarn, and the reader will find it as impossible as we did to put it aside until the mystery has been fathomed."—*Daily Chronicle*.

"We promise our readers an exciting story of adventure, full of hairbreadth escapes, and many disappointments, if they try to guess the riddle before the author is ready to give them the clue. An excellent story."—*Saturday Review*.

THE MURDER ON THE LINKS

3s. 6d. net and 2s. net.

"One of the best mystery stories I have read."—S. P. B. MAIS in the *Daily Express*.

"Mrs. CHRISTIE has a surprising gift of keeping the reader's tension unslacked, of heaping excitement on excitement, and of always having a surprise up her sleeve."—*Daily Mail*.

POIROT INVESTIGATES

3s. 6d. net and 2s. net.

"This is quite the real thing. All the stories are ingenious, some of them extraordinarily so, and Poirot himself is a delightful character."—*Referee*.

"With this volume (to say nothing of the others) Mrs. CHRISTIE must be reckoned in the first rank of the detective story writers."—*Observer*.

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD., VIGO STREET, W.I.

THE
MAN IN THE DARK

Third Edition.

7s. 6d. net.

"This is one of the very best detective yarns of recent years. It is credibly planned and its construction is little short of perfect. What a joy it is to encounter a 'thriller' by a man who can write!"—*John o' London's Weekly.*

"A novel I started late in the evening and lost my night's sleep over, because I did not know it was time to get up till I had finished. That is the sort of book this is, and, unless you are for something soporific, I advise you to get it."—*Bookman.*

"An uncommonly well-told murder tale. Mr. FERGUSON has all the devices of discreet sensationalism at his fingertips; but he also has the infinitely more interesting capacity of bringing us face to face with human beings who refuse to fade out of the memory the moment they have ceased to be useful as cogs in a complicated mechanism."—*Daily Telegraph.*

THE MURDER ON THE MARSH

7s. 6d. net.

A new mystery story introducing Francis McNab and Godfrey Chance, the same characters that figure in "The Man in the Dark." Set in the background of Romney Marsh, this is one of the most ingenious stories Mr. FERGUSON has ever written.

THE SECRET ROAD

7s. 6d. net.

"A first-class yarn."—*Times Literary Supplement*.

"Capital sensation and unusually good writing."—*Morning Post*.

"An ingenious sensational romance of mystery and adventure in India. His hand has lost none of its cunning."—*Bookman*.

STEALTHY TERROR

Eighth Edition. 7s. net and 3s. 6d. net.

"It speaks volumes for the author's ingenuity and resourcefulness that there is no putting down the book until the last page is reached, and even then one puts it down reluctantly, envying the next reader."—*Bookman*.

"One of the best thrillers we have read for a long time—a super-thriller."—*Daily Graphic*.

THE DARK GERALDINE

7s. 6d. net.

"Here is enough mystery, danger and excitement to satisfy anyone. Mr. FERGUSON's literary style is excellent, and he contrives to develop character. This is a first-rate yarn."—*Punch*.

"A most exciting mystery story."—*Spectator*.

LANE'S 3/6 NOVELS

Some New Volumes

STORIES NEAR AND FAR

THE OLD BRIDGE

SEPTIMUS

JAFFERY

By WILLIAM J. LOCKE

THE HURCOTTS

By MURIEL HINE

THE LAWS OF CHANCE

THE GREAT UNREST

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST

THE PACE OF THE OX

By F. E. MILLS YOUNG

WINSOME WINNIE

By STEPHEN LEACOCK

A PRINCE OF DREAMERS

MISTRESS OF MEN

By FLORA ANNIE STEEL

SIXPENNY PIECES

By A. NEIL LYONS

JOHN LANE THE BOWLEY HEAD LTD., VICO STREET, W.I.

