

man with a pair of hedge-clippers in his hand was standing watching the people pour into the road. He crossed to this individual, and addressed him.

"Did you see young Mr. Shapland come out of the inn a few minutes ago?"

"I did, zur! An' a dickens of a hurry he wur in, too, by the look of things."

"Which way did he go?"

"That way, zur," replied the rustic with a jerk of his head. "Towards the Manor."

"How far is it to the Manor?"

"Two miles or thereabouts."

"Was Mr. Shapland walking?"

"No, zur! He'd one o' them stinkin' motor-cars, an' he drove away like Jehu, the son of Nimshi, who drove like the devil if Scripture is to be credited."

"Thank you," answered the inspector and turned back to the inn with a slight frown shadowing his face.

CHAPTER XXVI

FLIGHT

COMING out of the door of this inn, Inspector Garforth met the coroner.

"He's gone!" he said shortly. "Have you a car, sir?"

The coroner shook his head.

"A country practice won't run to an extravagance of that sort. I've a horse and trap, and if they will be of any use they are at your disposal."

"Better than nothing, if I can't get a car. If you don't mind ordering them round, I shall be obliged. In the meantime I'll see the landlord,

and find out if there is an available car in the village."

He entered the inn, and a minute or two later returned with a look of disappointment on his face.

"No use," he said, in response to the coroner's look of inquiry. "There are lots of cars owned by the gentry round, but they're spread at all points of the compass and there's none in the village. It is a case of your trap or nothing. Where is the post-office?"

"A little way down the road to the right."

"Then I'll just slip along. I must send a couple of messages. If you've time to spare you might come with me as far as the Manor. I may need to leave the trap behind me, in which case——"

"I'll pick you up at the post-office."

The trap was already waiting for him when he emerged, and talking with the coroner was Sir James Nancarrow, who looked round as he heard his step.

"You're in a hurry, I know, Inspector Garforth, but what about Mr. Rowley. It is absurd that he——"

"I've thought of that, sir, and have just sent a message to the Commissioner. I expect that before an hour has passed Mr. Rowley will be released on his own recognizances. But in any case I must be off. I am late as it is. If only I had a car!"

"Mine will be along shortly. If——"

"I may need it later. Thank you, Sir James. Just now I must use the means at hand."

He climbed into the trap, and the coroner whipped up his horse.

"What do you think of the business, inspector?" asked the coroner as they rove off down the road.

"Shapland is the guilty man. I haven't the shadow of a doubt of it. He came into the court room just as Mrs. Cordery was giving her evidence about the photograph. I saw guilt and fear in his face, and though I only removed my eyes from him for a moment, when I looked round he was gone. That New Guinea business of which I gave you an outline before the opening of the inquiry is at the bottom of the whole affair. Cordery knew that Shapland had killed Mr. Rowley's foster-brother, and came to England to blackmail him. Shapland was a desperate man, and killed him. That's my reading of the affair, and it is supported by a little thing which the local police told me, and which you won't have heard. There was a foot-print near the place where Cordery's body was found. A stone was propped up over it to preserve it. Shapland was told of it, but a few minutes later he blundered right on to the stone, and utterly obliterated the footprint. It may have been an accident, but in view of other things it is highly significant."

The coroner nodded.

"Yes! But what I can't understand is why Shapland should kill Rowley's foster-brother. From what you told me I gather that the two were quite unacquainted."

"Apparently so," agreed the inspector, "and there's something behind all that which hasn't appeared yet. But it's no part of my present inquiry. It is enough that that murder in New Guinea, assuming Shapland's guilt and Cordery's knowledge thereof, afforded ground for Mrs. Cordery's belief that her husband came to England to blackmail John Vernon—otherwise Vernon Shapland."

"Then you are convinced that Shapland killed Rowley's brother?"

“ Sure of it. That miniature I told you of is evidence sufficient to hang him for that affair. It was found on the scene of the murder. It has been traced to his possession, and having seen it since, he endeavoured to mislead Charles Rowley, and averred to both him and Miss Selby that it was not a portrait of Miss Selby. Add to that the fact that he was in New Guinea at the time the crime was committed, somewhere in the same range of hills, and under an assumed name, and no reasonable man can help coming to the conclusion of his guilt. Given all this it is natural to conclude further, as I said, just now, that somehow Cordery knew of Shapland’s guilt, and came here to blackmail him. And that action supplies a motive for the murder, whilst Shapland’s haste to get Mrs. Cordery out of the village, and his endeavour to keep her at his rooms in London, which I mentioned to you, shows that he was afraid of his acquaintance with the murdered man becoming known. Why should he be afraid? An innocent man would have promptly taken the woman to the nearest police-station, but he——”

The inspector looked round on the noble park, the gates of the Manor, and inquired abruptly, “ Is this the place? ”

“ Yes ; it is a fine old property.”

“ Looks like it. This Vernon Shapland is the heir, isn’t he? ”

“ Yes.”

The inspector looked round on the noble park, and whistled softly.

“ It must have been a very powerful motive that made a man risk all this as well as hanging. I wonder what it was.”

The trap swept round a turn in the drive, and the house came into view.

"Do you think we shall find him?" asked the coroner.

"I don't know. I haven't much hope. A man of Shapland's type doesn't wait to be hanged as a rule. Either he bolts whilst he has time, or he saves his country the executioner's fee. I shall be surprised if I find him."

He was not destined to be thus surprised. As they drove up to the door a man-servant made his appearance, and the inspector asked quickly, "Is Mr. Vernon Shapland at home?"

"No, sir," answered the man. "He left in his car twenty minutes ago."

"Bolted! Told you so," said the inspector, addressing the coroner. Then he descended from the trap, and producing a card, gave it to the servant. "Read it!"

The man read it, his face betraying his astonishment, and when he looked up the officer said: "Now you will please answer all my questions. Mr. Shapland returned here something less than half an hour ago. He was in a great hurry, wasn't he?"

"Terrible sir. He shouted for George, the chauffeur, sir, and told him to fill the tank and to put some tins of petrol in the car, and to be quick about the business. Then he rushed indoors and came out in less than five minutes with a suit-case which Wilkins, his valet, says he packed himself. He left his room in a terrible mess, clothes thrown about everywhere, and Wilkins is tidying them up yet."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"Yes, sir. He told me that he was going to London, and that he was hurrying because he wanted to catch the boat-train, Sir Charles having sent for him to go to the Riviera."

"Did you believe him?"

"Well, sir, I thought it was a bit queer, as there were no letters this morning, and no telegram has come to the house, but if I may say so, Mr. Vernon didn't seem quite himself. He swore at George for not being quick enough with the petrol, and all the time he was looking down the drive as if he was expecting some one coming, and when he went off he drove round the house, and out of the west gate, which would make it a good three times further to London."

"Thank you!" answered the detective. "Now I want you to take me to the rooms which Mr. Vernon had for his private use."

"Yes, sir."

The inspector looked at the coroner and asked:
"Can you wait?"

The coroner nodded, and Garforth followed the man-servant into the Manor. Twenty minutes later he emerged with a look of satisfaction on his face. The coroner looked at him inquiringly as he climbed into the trap.

"Did you find anything?"

"Yes," answered the officer, as they drove off. "I found this. It's only a little thing, but it is absolutely conclusive."

He held something in his hand. It was a leather sheath plainly made for a hunting-knife, and on it was stamped a name—"James Douglas, Port Moresby."

"That is the same name as that on the knife," said the coroner quickly.

"Yes. All we have to do now is to find Shapland. One thing is quite certain. He hasn't gone to London, or he wouldn't have taken on such a load of petrol. He's making for one of the ports

or I'm a Dutchman. Please stop at the telegraph office again. I must send off more telegrams. I've got a description of the car, and the number, though as like as not he'll change that somewhere, if he thinks of it."

"Do you think he will get away?"

"No," answered the inspector slowly. "It is true he has a fast car, but he hasn't a sufficient start to get ahead of the telegraph. We shall hear of him before the day is out."

CHAPTER XXVII

A CONFESSION

INSPECTOR GARFORTH'S anticipations as regards Charles Rowley were fulfilled in a little over the time he had estimated. Within two hours of the adjourning of the inquest he was set free, and Sir James Nancarrow, at his wife's instigation rode over to the Selbys to inform them of the fact. As he turned his horse into the drive a telegraph messenger on a bicycle swept past him, and Sir James wondered idly what his message might be. Before he reached the house he met the messenger returning, and as he rode up to the door Mrs. Selby hurried out, with consternation on every line of her features.

"There is a message from Vernon," she cried. "He wants Janet to go to him."

"Wants Janet to go to him!" The baronet stared at her as if he could not believe his ears.

"Yes, there has been an accident, and his car is smashed up. According to the message he is