

Mr. Charles Frodsham

In Two Chapters.

by Thomas Waters

CHAPTER I. — GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY

It is perhaps unnecessary to remark that in making these selections from rough leaves scribbled over with memoranda of a busy life, I have been governed—more or less unconsciously—by a desire to appear as well as possible before the public. I am far, however, from wishing to insinuate that I have not sometimes failed lamentably as a detective officer. Those failures have been frequent enough; but I do not like to parade them—choosing, in preference, to set out my successes. A pardonable weakness it seems to me.

I suppose all men have been hit, at least once in their lives, by a shaft from Cupid's quiver. I know, of course, that an immensity of trash is spoken and written upon the eternal topic, and that the blind god's sharpest arrow is fatal only to extremely weak organizations. Still the pangs of despised love are for a time very difficult to bear. At all events, it was so in my case. And when quite five-and-twenty years had passed away, and I had ceased to think of Charlotte Gray—in my waking hours, at all events—an unexpected meeting proved that the impression she had made upon me was, I will not say vivid as ever, but indelible—like, to use a fanciful simile, the characters traced by some sympathetic inks, which, invisible in the light of common day, reappear under certain influences, bright, distinct as when first stamped upon the paper or parchment.

Six months, perhaps more than that, before this narrative opens, a human body, much mutilated, was found in a coppice situate between Winchester and Andover, Hants. The finders were two children—John Perkins and Charles Beach. The eldest, and there was not much difference in their ages, might be about ten years old. The time was late autumn, and the boys were out nutting. The corpse—that of a young man—was much decomposed; and the face had been in some way, and by some means, smashed in, beyond the possibility of recognition. “By a club, or maybe by a stone,” said a constable, who gave evidence before the coroner's jury. The clothing found upon the corpse, though much soiled with blood and dirt, was of the finest quality. On the tail of the shirt the initial letters H. F. G. were worked in yellow silk. The inquest resulted in a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown.

The affair might not have caused much stir, had it not happened that Mr. Sidney Herbert (Lord Herbert—late Secretary of War), reading the report of the inquest in one of the county papers, fancied the corpse was that of one Henry Francis Gordon—a distant relative of his, and a rather wild youth—who had been, he knew, shooting in the locality. Application was made at Scotland yard by the right honourable gentleman for the aid of a detective, and I had the honour of being selected for the service. Had I delayed my journey a few hours only, I should not have gone at all—Mr. Sidney Herbert having ascertained, shortly after he wrote to Sir Richard Mayne, that his young relative had returned to Paris, where the family resided. One circumstance was mentioned in the letter from Mr. Henry Francis Gordon which, when made known to me, set my detective

brain at work. The young gentleman had put up at the Antelope Inn, Salisbury, and he found that he must have left one of his shirts there—which, like the rest, was marked H. F. G., in yellow silk. There could be little, if any, doubt therefore that the shirt found upon the murdered man was his; since although there might be persons whose initials were H. F. G., it was incredible that such person should have his shirts also marked with yellow silk—that being a material seldom or never used for such a purpose. This I was not informed of till some five or six days subsequently—Mr. Herbert not being at Pembroke Castle when I arrived there. He had left for London a few hours previously, and we must have passed each other on the road.

Pembroke Castle is not more than two or three miles from Salisbury, where I took up my quarters at the Plume of Feathers. The next morning I went to see and question the boys who discovered the body. From the lad Perkins I could learn nothing in the slightest degree suggestive; but Charles Beach, an intelligent lad, told me he had several times seen two young gentlemen walking together near the place where the body was found. They were out shooting, and had dogs with them. Once he heard them at high words, quarrelling fiercely—about a young lady it seemed—and they parted in anger. Beach did not know either of the young men; and that he had seen them had passed from his mind till the previous market day at Winchester, when (whilst he himself was standing by the Cross in that city) he saw one of them pass by on horseback, followed by two of the dogs which he (Beach) had seen with the young gentlemen whilst shooting. The boy fancied the rider noted him keenly, curiously; and the memory came back that he had seen the horseman near the place where the dead body had been found, and heard him in fierce altercation with his companion.

“You do not know the young gentleman’s name?”

The lad replied that he did not; but that as the gentleman alighted at the George Hotel, there could be little doubt that he was known there. There was not much in this story, but it took hold of my mind. I would go to Winchester; but first it would be as well to visit the spot where the murder appeared to have been committed. I did so. No signs of struggle were visible. There had been a long continuance of wet weather; the ground was soft, and man had hustled there for life with one or more adversaries. The post-mortem examination established the fact that the deceased person had not been killed by bullet or knife. Might it be that the victim had lain down to rest, and had his skull smashed whilst asleep? Not a very probable conjecture. The likelier one was, that the murder had been committed some distance off, and the body afterwards brought to that spot by the assassin or assassins, for concealment. I examined the place minutely; and picked up, just as I was about to leave, a sugar-loaf-shaped brass waistcoat-button—such as I remembered to have seen worn, some twenty years before, by grooms’ stable-helpers, and the like.

Mr. Sidney Herbert returned to Pembroke Castle on the fifth day after my arrival in Wiltshire, and I had a long conference with him on the morrow. He acquainted me with the remarkable fact of the shirt, found upon the murdered person, having been stolen, as it seemed, from his relative Henry Francis Gordon, whilst that gentleman was staying at the Antelope Inn, Salisbury. I, in my turn, related my conversation with the boy Beach. Mr. Herbert was struck painfully, so I thought, by the description I gave him—after the lad—of the dress and personal appearance of the young

gentleman whom Beach had seen shooting, with another, near the place where the murder was supposedly committed, and afterwards in the High-street, Winchester.

“You describe young Frodsham,” he at last exclaimed, in a very agitated manner. “Young Frodsham, than whom there is not a more estimable youth in all England! And, good heavens!” Mr. Herbert added, with still greater emotion, “Charles Frodsham, I remember now, was staying for a few days at the Antelope Hotel, Salisbury, with Gordon!”

“Indeed! I must see this Mr. Frodsham. The boy once heard him quarrelling fiercely with his companion about a young lady. Can you, sir, guess who that young lady may be?”

“Charles Frodsham is the betrothed lover of Miss Gertrude Annesley. One does not need to guess at that. It is a matter of notoriety.”

“Do you know, sir, if he had a rival in the lady’s favour?”

“I cannot say. I have no acquaintance—that is, no personal acquaintance—with the Annesley family. There is a mystery in this affair which it will be your duty to endeavour to clear up.”

“Certainly, sir. I shall start immediately for Winchester. Will you favour me with Mr. Frodsham’s address?”

“Vale Lodge; about midway between Andover and Winton. Everybody knows the Frodshams.”

The groom who opened the gate to me at Vale Lodge wore a red plush waistcoat, with brass sugar-loaf fashioned buttons, *and one—the lowest of the row—was missing!* “Is Mr. Charles Frodsham within?” I asked.

“No; he is absent in Andover, at an agricultural dinner.”

“I will remain till he returns,” was my reply. “I must see him, particularly after having seen you. You have lost a button off your waistcoat, my man; and, see! I have found it!”

The man stared at the button; said it was for “sartin sure” *his* button, though how I came by it he could not think. There was no guilt in the man’s face. *He* was no accomplice in the murder, *if* murder had really been committed, of which I had begun to entertain vague doubts. Upon reflection, I thought it more advisable to leave a note for Mr. Charles Frodsham, stating bluntly that Henry Clarke, a detective officer, wished to see him without delay, and would wait for that purpose at the George Hotel, Winchester, on the following day, till five P.M.

It was not quite noon when Mr. Charles Frodsham was shown into the room where I sat, and inquired what especial business “Mr. Clarke, a detective officer,” could have with him?

The appearance of the young man excited me strangely. Surely I had seen him before—but where? He was handsome, singularly so; and his aspect, manners, were those of a mild-

mannered, sensitive, somewhat finical, fastidious young gentleman. Surely *he* could be no murderer; and yet—

“Mr. Charles Frodsham, I have a rude and painful duty to perform,” said I. “The high character you bear makes the duty painful. But that you stand so high in general estimation, I tell you candidly that, instead of requesting an interview, I should have taken you into custody upon the charge of wilful murder.”

“Wilful murder! Good God! What can you mean?”

“You know what I mean, Mr. Charles Frodsham, or that face of yours would not so suddenly blanch to the hue of paper, your knees knock together, and you yourself sink down in nerveless prostration upon the sofa. I am very sorry; for you strangely interest me.”

“You mean to accuse me,” said the young man, in a broken, palpitating voice—“you mean to accuse me of—of having caused the death of the— the person found in Burnsley Coppice!”

“The facts accuse you, Mr. Charles Frodsham, not I; at least, they appear to do so. But, perhaps, you may be able to explain some ugly items away. I have no wish, however, to entrap you into making any statement—very far indeed from that; for yours is a face which I can hardly believe to be the index of a volume in which the dreadful crime of murder is written—in one of its earliest pages, too. Take time to consider. I will leave you alone for just one quarter of an hour. Do not attempt to leave. You cannot be allowed to do so. But if, at the end of the fifteen minutes, you decide upon giving me your confidence, I will, should doing so fall within the sphere of my duty, do my best to assist you. A detective officer is as much bound to shield the innocent as to drag the guilty to justice. At the same time, consider well before you speak. And you may read,” said I, with some hesitation, “this anonymous letter, received by me but about an hour ago, through the post.”

This was the letter:—

“Mr. Clarke, Detective police-officer.

“Sir,—You are come from London, as I hear, to inquire about the death of Edmund Musgrave. I, for one, have no doubt whatever that the corpse found in Burnsley Coppice was that of poor Musgrave. Now let me hint what I suspect. Edmund Musgrave and Charles Frodsham were rivals for the hand of Miss Gertrude Annesley. Most people intimate with the parties believed Musgrave to be the favoured suitor. Mr. Frodsham has been heard to say he thought so himself; and yet he bore himself in the presence of others with remarkable politeness towards Musgrave. They were frequently out shooting together; and the very last time Edmund Musgrave was seen, he was in company with Charles Frodsham. They slept in a double-bedded room at the Crown Inn, Andover, and left the house in company. The clothes worn—I, in my own mind, feel quite sure—were Musgrave’s, though there was no garment peculiar or distinguishing, *except the shirt*. Mr. Detective, sift that fact to the bottom, and you will find the hideous truth. Be sure of it.

“Mr. Charles Frodsham and Miss Gertrude Annesley are, it is said, to be married before many weeks have passed. The lady will have a large dowry. But there are often slips ‘twixt cup and lip. ‘Foul deeds *will* rise, though all the earth o’erwhelm them, to men’s eyes.’ This is all which for the present thinks proper to say

“A FRIEND OF MURDERED

“EDMUND MUSGRAVE.”

“Well, Mr. Clarke, my mind is fully made up I will be very frank and explicit with you. My mother, who is sorely distressed by the dark rumours floating about, enjoined me, immediately she had read your note, to confide unreservedly in you.”

“The lady does me honour; but first distinctly understand, Mr. Frodsham, that every word you utter may be, will be, if the necessity arise, used against yourself. You have positively nothing to gain by taking me into your confidence, except that your statement,—supposing, as I will suppose it to be, *bona fide*,—*may* indicate to me some mode, some chance of relieving you of the frightful suspicion by which you are now pursued. That suspicion, if I am rightly informed, has caused, not perhaps the rupture of your engagement with Miss Annesley, but the indefinite postponement of the marriage!”

“That is true, Mr. Clarke; though the anonymous letter-writer does not seem to be aware of the fact.”

“I am not so sure of that. The anonymous letter-writer may not wish it to be known, or suspected, that he is intimately acquainted with your affairs. The letter does not, I readily admit, impress me favourably as regards the writer. But of this presently, if need be. Does your resolution hold to confide in me?”

“Yes: it is the best course I can adopt, as it seems to me. I am in the toils,—the victim, as I believe, of a foul conspiracy.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Frodsham. Never mind about what you believe. Tell me, if it please you to do so, what you *know*.”

“As you will. To begin then. Edmund Musgrave and I have known each other since childhood. A purer soul, as I believe, than his was never breathed into mortal mould. He was an orphan at an early age. I think he was but six years old when he lost his father. The mother died in giving Edmund birth. An uncle took charge of him, who died insolvent, as we now hear, about six months since. I frequently met Edmund Musgrave at the Annesleys’; and, finally, discovered that he entertained a warm attachment for Miss Gertrude Annesley. He never, I think, told his love. It would have been absurd to do so. This he knew very well. He and I remained friends to the last—at least, I can answer for myself; but he grew shy, reserved, after being informed by Mrs. Annesley that I and Gertrude were affianced lovers. The anonymous letter-writer is correct in stating that we slept in the same room at the Crown, Andover, the last time I was in his company. The day before he had sent me a note, requesting the loan of two hundred pounds, and

appointing to meet me at Andover. It was a pressing necessity, he said, which compelled him to solicit such a favour; and he could not undertake to repay me in less than six months. My mother gave me a cheque for the amount, which I handed to him at the Crown Inn. He obtained cash in gold, the next day, for the cheque, at the Andover Bank.”

“Do you know what persons, if any, besides the bankers, knew him to be in possession of such a sum in gold?”

“I do not. We parted in the High-street; and I never saw him again. And now, with respect to the shirt, marked with the initial letters H. F. G. I had been staying at the Antelope, Salisbury, with young Mr. Gordon, a relative of Mr. Sidney Herbert. We were very intimate. He left in a hurry one day for France, and, in the bustle of packing up, his linen and mine must have got intermixed. At all events, I found in my valise at Andover, or rather my servant George Gibbs did, two shirts belonging to Mr. Gordon. I must tell you that it was not more than two or three hours after Gordon left that I received the note from Musgrave, requesting the loan of two hundred pounds. I started at once in my dog-cart for Andover, calling on my mother by the way. Musgrave was not at the Crown when I arrived there. He was out shooting. Before he returned, it came on to rain heavily. Musgrave was wetted to the skin, and had not sufficient change of linen with him. I bade Gibbs supply him from my valise. He did so, giving him, by accident or chance, one of Mr. Gordon’s shirts. This is all which, in that respect, I can state.”

“Are you confidently of opinion that the body found in Burnsley Coppice was that of your friend Musgrave?”

“My firm conviction is that the body was *not* Musgrave’s. But that will avail nothing. And now, Mr. Clarke, I come to the core, as it were, of this black business. Mr. Frazer, a gentlemanly man, but a comparative stranger in these parts, who, as he now says, kept purposely out of the way when the inquest was holden, requested the day before yesterday a private interview with me. He was accompanied by a person, whom I have since ascertained to be a highly respectable corn-dealer of Basingstoke. ‘Do you recollect this gentleman?’ said Frazer, rudely indicating me with his hand.

“‘I think I do,’ replied Mr. Crouch. ‘Nay, I am sure I do. I saw him in the afternoon—near into evening, in fact, for it was growing dusk—of Andover fair-day. He, followed by a servant man, wearing a red plush waistcoat, was hurrying along the road towards Winchester, and they at the time were at no great distance from Burnsley Coppice.’”

“Andover fair-day was the day, was it not, when Mr. Musgrave obtained gold for the cheque at the Andover Bank?”

“Yes; I have also to say that—”

A tap at the door interrupted him. A waiter announced that Mr. Frazer, Mr. Crouch, and a constable wanted to see Mr. Frodsham immediately. “Mrs. Frodsham,” added the man, in a kindly, respectful tone, addressing Mr. Charles Frodsham, “has sent a message by Squire Lethbridge’s groom that she will soon be here.”

The young man looked at me. He was pale as paper, and his ashen lips quivered with agitation. "You had better say you will see these visitors, Mr. Frodsham." The waiter left, and I had just time, stepping behind a screen as I did so, to add, "*Mum*. I wish to hear what Mr. Frazer has to say."

"There is your prisoner," said Mr. Frazer. "I have evidence to prove that he is the murderer of Edmund Musgrave."

"Liar! villain!" shouted Charles Frodsham. "What evidence except your own evil suspicions can you produce against me?"

"Evidence to hang you, Charles Frodsham, Esquire," coolly returned Frazer. "But of that hereafter. The constable has a warrant for your arrest. For the arrest of Charles Frodsham, who before the inquest deposed upon oath that he did not leave Andover till two days after the departure of Edmund Musgrave; and, for all that, was seen by Mr. Crouch hastening along the road from Burnsley Coppice on the evening of the day when Musgrave left you at the Crown. Constable, your duty."

"And pray, Mr. Frazer," said I, suddenly emerging from my place of concealment; "and pray, Mr. Frazer, what motive induces you to put yourself forward in this matter so prominently? You need not stare or frown. That sort of pantomime will be quite thrown away upon me. Here is my card. You will see that the name is not that of a man to be easily bullied or bamboozled."

"What the mischief do you mean, Mr. Detective Clarke?"

"Simply to detect, if I can, all criminals, shroud themselves in whatever guise they may. And I will candidly tell you, Mr. Frazer, that my present impression is that Mr. Edmund Musgrave is alive and well."

"Musgrave alive and well!" interrupted Frazer, flashing upon me with contemptuous triumph. "So much for the boasted penetration of London detectives. Of one brought down 'special' too, I hear, to enlighten the yokels."

"I have, perhaps, started the wrong hare. Be it so. I will merely add, supposing the corpse to have been that of Mr. Musgrave, of which you appear to have no doubt, having reasons of your own possibly for arriving at that conviction—"

"What the devil do you mean, sir?" fiercely broke in Frazer. "Well, yes, I have," he added, checking himself. "Well, yes, I have reasons of my own for believing that the murdered man was Edmund Musgrave."

"I thought so, and I will further take the liberty of saying that I feel a strong persuasion Mr. Frodsham will prove to be as innocent of the crime, supposing one to have been committed, as—as you yourself, for example."

The man blushed redly. Had the slight shaft sped at a venture found a joint in the armour of conscious guilt? I had known quite as shadowy possibilities harden very quickly into stern facts. Now, I could not for the life of me have given the slightest reason for the suspicious antipathy with which Frazer inspired me. The man's aspect was not that of one capable of a capital crime, of braving the gallows in pursuit of some coveted prize. Slyness, cunning, greed were stamped upon it plainly enough; but not more strongly than irresolution, infirmity of purpose. That antipathy was not, however, the less real because I could have assigned no tangible motive for it. The prepossession I had as instantly felt for Charles Frodsham, though as unintelligible to myself for the moment as my bitter dislike of Frazer, was soon to be found referable to quite natural causes. But of this presently.

"I do not understand you," presently replied Frazer. "Nor do I greatly care to do so. Mr. Charles Frodsham has, I dare say, told you, as he has told many others, that the last time he saw Mr. Musgrave in life was in the High-street, Andover. Nay, the young gentleman, Mr. Detective, positively swore before the inquest that he did not see the deceased afterwards. To say nothing of other more strictly legal evidence that Charles Frodsham committed deliberate perjury in so swearing—which will in due time be forthcoming—Miss Annesley knows, will tell you that she knows, the two rivals met each other in the coppice, hours after they parted in the High-street, Andover."

My eye was fixed upon Frodsham whilst Frazer spoke, and to my great dismay I saw that he cowered, shuddered in presence of the accusation; replying not a word, and trembling in every limb. When Frazer ceased speaking for a moment, Mr. Charles Frodsham could only faintly ejaculate in a shaky voice, while his dilated glance seemed chained to Frazer's malignant aspect, "Miss Annesley! What of Miss Annesley?"

"I must explain. It is plain to me," continued Frazer, "that I am to a certain extent put upon my defence; that the officer here must have been listening to slanderous—worse than slanderous—imputations respecting some large monetary transactions between me and the deceased Edmund Musgrave."

"It is false!" interrupted Frodsham, eagerly;—I as promptly breaking in upon him.

"It is true!" exclaimed I, with excusable equivocation, it being highly desirable that Frazer should talk on to his heart's content—"it is true that Mr. Frodsham has told me a great deal that I should much like to hear explained. Go on, Mr. Frazer; I am all attention."

"I had wished," said Frazer, "ardently wished,—almost inexcusable in a moral point of view as that wish, that intention, may be considered—to have held aloof from the investigation, still, I have for some days past known, going on with respect to the death of Musgrave. I did not attend—purposely avoided attending—the coroner's inquest. The prisoner here," continued the accuser, with gathering fierceness, "has well repaid my forbearance. His motive is obvious enough. He, too has known for some days that the London detective police has been put in motion; and knowing that my evidence would jeopardise his neck—"

“Audacious, lying villain!” again interrupted Frodsham, but still pale, trembling, aghast. “Audacious, lying villain! How dare you insinuate that I could have had any hand in the death of Musgrave, my intimate friend?”

“I insinuate nothing, Charles Frodsham. When the proper time arrives I will prove—*as I only can prove*—beyond all reasonable doubt that the blood of Edmund Musgrave is on your head!”

A scream of indignant rage burst from Frodsham as he sprang furiously at his denouncer. The local police officer and I interposed in time to prevent an actual assault.

“No violence, Mr. Frodsham,” said Mr. Lynch, [“]or it will be my duty to handcuff you. I do not see,” continued the officer, “the need of this conference; this bandying to and fro of charges which must be investigated elsewhere. Indeed, I question its propriety. I hold a warrant for the apprehension of Mr. Charles Frodsham upon a charge of wilful murder. My duty is simple as painful, and I must not delay its performance.”

I interposed. “You are aware, Mr. Lynch, that I am entrusted with the investigation of this mysterious affair, by order of the Home Secretary himself. I must, therefore, request you to allow Mr. Frazer to finish his explanation, his voluntary explanation, in your prisoner’s presence.”

The officer acquiesced, and Frazer proceeded:—

“Of course, the prisoner’s motive in slandering me was to anticipatively damage the value of my evidence.”

“Curse your evidence,” exclaimed Frodsham, with bitter passion; “I care nothing for what you can say, now or hereafter. But Miss Annesley’s name was polluted by your lips. How dare you speak of that lady?”

“There is nothing, Mr. Clarke, an honest man dare not do, if it may be done lawfully,” speaking directly to me instead of replying to Mr. Frodsham, in the affectation of a virtuous abhorrence of the alleged criminal, which I was quite sure he did not feel.

“No, no, Mr. Frazer,” said I, mentally. “No, no; it isn’t that, my man. With all your studied hardihood of demeanour, you cannot steadily face the prisoner. The ends by which this knot can be untied have not, or I greatly err, been yet grasped.”

“There is nothing, Mr. Clarke, which an honest man dare not do, if it may be lawfully done. I *did* speak of Miss Annesley. That young lady, with her mother, left for London on the very day after the disappearance of poor Musgrave. They returned yesterday afternoon—a day or two earlier, I have been told, than they were expected. Mr. Sidney Herbert, who takes a strong interest in this case, chanced to call at Holme-place, with the Reverend Mr. Pullen, justice of the peace for the county. The local papers were on a table, unopened. I mean that they had not been read by either of the ladies. Mr. Herbert, as I understand, called Mrs. Annesley’s attention to the report of the proceedings before the coroner. Miss Annesley, who, one would suppose, could not have heard even a rumour of what had occurred, was painfully agitated, and it was with difficulty she could

comply with her mother's request to read the report aloud. She did so, however, till she came to the prisoner's evidence, and especially to his declaration upon oath that he had not seen or spoken with the deceased since he had parted with him in the High-street, Andover. 'That is false!' exclaimed the young lady, with—my reverend informant said— hysterical excitement. Charles Frodsham met that unfortunate Musgrave in Burnsley Coppice, by appointment, on the very day before mamma and I left for London. O God!' the young lady suddenly exclaimed, perceiving the impression of her words upon the countenances of the two magistrates present— 'O God: What have I said—done—' and fainted. But for the involuntary declaration of Miss Annesley's, it is probable the warrant for Mr. Frodsham's arrest would not have issued; at least, not immediately."

We were all silent for a few moments. My increasing faith in Charles Frodsham's innocence was sadly shaken by Frazer's statement. Yet, heaven and earth! what possible motive could he have had for committing such a crime, and in so brutal a manner? Rivalry in love—jealousy? But Musgrave was a rejected suitor, and about to leave England, probably forever.

"Miss Annesley," said Charles Frodsham, whom Frazer's words seemed to have relieved, "Miss Annesley spoke truly, according to her belief. The lady is mistaken, as I can easily prove. Come, sir," he added, rising; "you and I had better be gone. The jail is not far off; but I shall prefer riding even that short distance in a closed fly. I suppose that favour is permissible, Mr. Lynch?"

"Certainly, sir. I will order one to be immediately brought to the back entrance."

"One moment," said I, "if you please. Just one. What was the nature of the money-transactions between Mr. Frazer and the deceased Musgrave, with respect to which you, Mr. Frodsham, have, it is alleged, spoken slanderously of Mr. Frazer?"

"Mr. Frazer has exhibited a number of stamped and unstamped pieces of paper, purporting to be acknowledgments of moneys—large sums—lent by him to Musgrave. I *have* said—and am not afraid or ashamed to admit I have said—that the relative characters borne by Edmund Musgrave and John Frazer, though certainly not much is known of Mr. Frazer's, he being, as I have said, a stranger in the county,—would have justified a very rigorous investigation of the claim had Mr. Musgrave left property which might have been attached for it. I am bound, however, to admit," said Mr. Frodsham, with bitter sarcasm, "that in the three or four specimens I have seen, the signature of Edmund Musgrave is very well done indeed!"

Frazer's furious reply to this taunt was arrested by a waiter's announcement that the fly was in waiting.

"You will presently see my mother," said Mr. Charles Frodsham, extending me his hand. "She has met you before, where or when I know not. Bid her be of good heart. I have no fear—not the slightest. *Magna est veritas et prevalebit!* I have firm faith in that ancient saw. Good-bye! for a short time only—be quite sure of it!"

"Yes; and I, after long and varied experience of detective life, have a firm faith that truth will in the end prevail, however cunningly the forces of fraud may be arrayed against it, in nine hundred

and ninety-nine out of a thousand instances. And you Mr. Frazer—spite of that spasmodical grin (a miserable failure I might tell you, but I wont)—believe that truth will prevail; but then, like the devils, you *may* believe *and tremble!*”

“I wish to hold no further converse with you, Mr. Frazer,” said I, interrupting him, when we were alone. (The worthy burgess of Basingstoke—I had omitted, no very serious oversight, to mention—had slid out of the room, after, I think, being in it a few minutes only. I neither knew exactly when he went, nor why he came.) “I wish to hold no further converse with you, Mr. Frazer. Pursue your own course. That course is not mine. We may hunt counter, but certainly not in couple. Good day.”

A very, very queer business this, on hand. Yet so far as I collated the few indisputable facts connected therewith, they did not appear to be decisive.

The ugliest, as regarded Mr. Frodsham, was Miss Annesley’s declaration that he *had* seen Musgrave—and by appointment too—after parting with him in Andover; the appointment, moreover, being in the very wood or coppice where the body was found—he having deliberately sworn before the coroner that he had *not* seen the murdered man after so parting with him. To be sure, Mr. Frodsham said the lady was mistaken; yet how could that well be? Frazer, too, promised disclosures confirmatory of Miss Annesley’s statement, and something more. But again—a hundred times again—*why* should Frodsham have murdered Musgrave? The manner of death, as discoverable by the state of the corpse, suggested that the assassin must have—striking first, probably, from behind—beaten in the victim’s skull with a club or stake. Could that, under any conceivable circumstances, have been the act of a gentleman? And, again, would Mr. Frodsham have taken a servant with him if he ever so remotely contemplated such a deed? Might it, perchance, be that the servant—the button of whose red waistcoat I had found at the place of murder—might, with or without his master’s direction, have been the actual assassin? No money was found upon the corpse. Musgrave had been robbed as well as murdered—it being certain that he must have had all, or nearly all, the two hundred pounds lent him by Frodsham in his pockets; no trace of it, or of his having paid any portion away, having been discovered. The man *looked* like an honest, blithe, free-hearted fellow; but I required not the authority of Shakespere to know that men are not always what they seem to be. Mr. Frodsham had been seen *with* the servant near the coppice. Two inferences would seem to naturally flow from that circumstance, *supposing* Mr. Frodsham had any concernment in Musgrave’s death. One, that Mr. Frodsham employed the groom to murder the unfortunate gentleman for no conceivable object: the other, that the groom having perpetrated the crime on his own account, for the sake of the booty to be obtained let us say, his master had connived at it—made himself an accomplice after the fact with the assassin. Both inferences equally untenable, absurd!

Then as to Mr. Frodsham’s counter-charge, so to speak, against Frazer, with reference to that person having lent the deceased large sums upon unguaranteed promissory notes and IOU’s, as I understood; that, upon the face of it, seemed utterly ridiculous. Musgrave had left no estate, no property of any kind; what motive, therefore, could Frazer have in setting up a fraudulent claim, which there were no assets to meet, even if it could be legally established? I could make neither head nor tail of the perplexing business, when the waiter announced that a lady was below and wished to see Mr. Clarke, the detective-officer, immediately.

What a consummate, ridiculous fool the lady—supposing, that under the crushing load of anguish which weighed upon her spirit, any sense of the ludicrous could have existed—must have thought the iron-grey haired man to be, who at sight of her staggered back as if suddenly struck by a dagger; breathless, fainting—a thousand lights dancing in his eyes. Just fancy a detective police-officer, hardened, cynicized by the wear and tear of five-and-twenty years' experience in the most thoroughly disenchanting walk of life in which man can crawl to his goal, the grave, being so affected. Yet so it was. Mrs. Frodsham was the Charlotte Gray of my young life; of whom I once dreamed delicious dreams, and, in imagination, stole immortal blessings from her lips. A glance at that silly little romance wont detain us long, and is besides necessary to the development of this detective narrative. I had gone, being then about twenty years of age, to Clifton for a holiday, and to benefit my health, which was not just then first-rate. One day, when passing over the river from Clifton to the Leigh woods, the boat, by the boisterous foolery of two half-drunken scamps in the dress of gentlemen, capsized. There was not much danger, as abundant help was close at hand—for a swimmer absolutely none; but a young lady, Miss Charlotte Gray, whom I shall not attempt to describe, but whose beauty and grace gave me the only genuine heartquake I have ever felt, was for a few moments in real danger, from which I rescued her with but slight effort, and no risk whatever to myself. Yet was I prouder of that tiny exploit than of any achievement of my life. Her father, the Reverend Mr. Gray, and two sisters were waiting for her at the landing-place. The natural terror excited by seeing a beloved daughter and sister struggling, screaming, sinking in the swift river, immensely exaggerated the merit of a very simple act; and the family were profuse of thanks to the young lady's *brave* deliverer. I slept that night at the reverend gentleman's house; and he finding I was fond fishing, gave me an invitation to sport at any and all times in a splendid trout-stream at no great distance, rented by Mr. Gray for himself and sons, fine-hearted young men and first-rate anglers. I was there every day; the young ladies often joined us for an hour or two, and more than once listened with apparent interest—Miss Charlotte Gray especially—to my youthful adventures as a detective in the bud. In short, I became awfully spooney about the divine damsel, and it was quite as much an accident as a mercy that I did not commit the unutterable absurdity of tendering Miss Charlotte Gray the homage and the hand of an embryo policeman, in enjoyment of a salary to the large extent, deducting allowance for clothes, of eighteen shillings and sixpence per week. The accident was my chancing to overhear a jocular remark of one of the lady's brothers, to the effect that he hoped Clarke, a very decent fellow in his way, was not going to make an egregious donkey of himself about Charlotte.

I did not hear the rejoinder; but the good-humoured guffaw contributed to by the three young men might have been heard a mile off. Thank Heaven, I got away unseen, packed up my traps forthwith, and left for town by one of the evening trains, posting on my way to the station a brief note expressive of my grateful sense of the Reverend Mr. Gray's courtesies, and bidding himself and family a respectful farewell, an unexpected summons from the chief officer at Bow-street obliging me to leave Clifton at almost literally an hour's notice. There ended in a vital sense the romance of my life. That is to say, the volume was closed; but when opened again after, as I have said, the lapse of a quarter of a century, the characters graven on those early leaves were found to be still bright, vivid, unchanged. The heat and dust of life had hidden, not dimmed them.

The lady—how gently time had dealt with her!—came towards me, and, with the sweetest, saddest smile, extended her hand to be clasped in mine. The power which watches over

policemen and puppies of all ages could alone have saved me from plumping down, and—Well, we'll skip that. The vertigo passed away. I could hear and comprehend, as in the haziness of a dream, that the lady before me said, "You do not, perhaps, remember me." (Great God! did I not? The old time, in all its flood of fulness, was back upon me, and she perceived nothing of the kind.) "You do not perhaps remember me—remember that you once saved my life! I am her you knew as Charlotte Gray." (She had never, then, mentioned that trifling incident to her son, for he said his mother had met with me, but he knew not when or where. This bitter thought curdled through my veins as she spoke. I had been in her thought merely as a Newfoundland dog, to be patted on the back for a service rendered, and forgotten till his aid should, upon an emergency, be again required.)

"I am her you knew as Charlotte Gray, whose life you saved. I have read of your exploits as a detective officer with much interest; and I have thought that by your aid a life dearer to me than my own—that of my son—may be saved; above all, his character vindicated, cleared of foul reproach, suspicion; which not done, mere existence would be a burden, not a blessing."

"Speak on, madam; speak on!" I gasped, like the spasmodic, stupid gaby that I must have been. "All that you require of me shall be done, if man may do it."

"I was sure," said the silvery voice I had heard so often in my dreams, "I felt sure you would help us to the best of your ability in the unmasking of villainy, however skilfully contrived."

"You have judged rightly, madam. I felt interested for your son the very moment I saw him. Now I know why. He is a masculine resemblance of the beauteous being—" I stopped abruptly; curbed sharply up, not alone by the rein of what common sense was for the moment left me, but by the "beauteous being's" haughty stare of surprise. "I beg pardon, madam," I went on, concealing my confusion as well as might be,— "I beg pardon, madam. We must not waste precious moments. To fight this battle with success—with any chance of success—I must know exactly with what, with whom, I may have to contend."

Mrs. Frodsham said she was there to place me in possession of all the facts of the case, so far as they were known to her. Precious facts they were truly! Her son had never felt the slightest enmity towards poor Musgrave. Why should he have done so? And Charles had never met the unfortunate young man after parting with him in Andover. She was positive of that, for Charles had told her so himself, &c. &c. Bless the "beauteous being's" five wits! Valuable "facts" those truly! One startling one was at last elicited, by my remarking that Miss Annesley seemed confident that Mr. Charles Frodsham *had* met Musgrave in Burnsley Coppice, and by appointment.

"So I have heard," said the lady-mother, "and I have been to Holme-place to ask for an explanation. Miss Annesley is, however, too ill to be spoken with. It is true," continued Mrs. Frodsham, with some hesitation, "that my son received a note by post from Musgrave, requesting to see him at that place, and giving as a reason for selecting such a rendezvous, that he was at hide-and-seek with bailiffs. Charles did go with his servant to meet Mr. Musgrave, but did not find him there."

“Why, madam, was that most important fact not stated before the coroner? Its concealment may have a sinister bearing upon the case.”

“The reason was,” said Mrs. Frodsham, with increasing agitation, “that there was an offensive allusion to Miss Annesley in the note. He feared, should he mention the circumstance, that he might be obliged to produce the note, which would, of course, be read in open court, and published in the newspapers.”

“I understand. Still, it is unfortunate. Probably,” I added, “your son may have mentioned to Miss Annesley that he had received such a letter and intended keeping the appointment? That would account for, and, to a very considerable extent, take the sting out of the statement she was surprised into making.”

“It is very, very probable he did so.”

“Have you the note, addressed by Musgrave to your son?”

“No; but it may, no doubt, be found amongst my son’s papers.”

“You are sure it was written by Musgrave?”

“Oh, yes. The handwriting—a peculiar one—was undoubtedly Mr. Musgrave’s; but that he should have penned such a note was almost beyond belief. I mean the allusion to Miss Annesley.”

“I am sorry, very sorry, the fact of your son having gone to Burnsley Coppice for the express purpose of meeting with Musgrave was not openly avowed. And Miss Annesley will be obliged to admit that Mr. Charles Frodsham was much and justly irritated with Musgrave when he set out to meet him in the coppice, where the body was found. It is very unfortunate. At the same time, madam, let me assure you that the sort of instinctive confidence I feel in your son’s innocence is not weakened—not sensibly weakened. But not thinking it right to attempt lulling even a mother into a false security, I must candidly say, that if Frazer should be as good, or more correctly, as bad as his word, we shall have a formidable case to meet.”

“Frazer is a low, despicable villain,” exclaimed Mrs. Frodsham.

“Your words echo my own thoughts. At all events, depend on my zeal, madam; you may do so confidently.”

“I do—I do, Mr. Clarke; and I feel assured that with your guidance we shall emerge safely, swiftly, from this valley of the Shadow of Death. I shall, of course, see you shortly again. Goodbye.” Again the ungloved hand was extended to me; and the lips—the eyes which sorrow gemmed with a yet diviner radiance, again entranced me [with] that sweet, sad smile. Heaven and earth! could I not, at that moment, have—*Tut!* we have had already overmuch of such silly stuff.

By half-past ten on the following morning I, by the permission of the governor, had a brief interview with Mr. Charles Frodsham in Winchester Jail. He *had* shown Musgrave's note, appointing to meet him at Burnsley Coppice, to Miss Annesley. He himself was punctual to the time appointed, and waited about an hour; but Musgrave not appearing, he went away. I asked him to give me a note to his mother, requesting her to show me the note from Musgrave making the assignation. The answer was, to my dismay, that he had destroyed it. A surmise had crossed my mind that Frazer, who, according to Charles Frodsham, was skilful in the imitation of Musgrave's writing, might have sent the note. A wild guess, no doubt; but detective officers are accustomed, like drowning men, to catch at straws—which straws are not infrequently found to be adjuncts to more reliable, firmer facts.

As we were talking, Mr. Frodsham's groom was ushered into the room—not the cell—the accused being a person of too much consequence in the county to herd with the common file of suspected felons. He brought a valise and a letter from Mrs. Frodsham. I again closely scrutinized the man's aspect, and could discern no trace, no sign, no shadow of guilt. He wore the plush waistcoat, and the missing button had been replaced by one of a slightly different pattern. I determined to subject him to a test which no murderer or abettor of a murderer could, I was quite certain, endure without wincing. I bade Mr. Frodsham an abrupt adieu, and left. The groom soon followed, and was crossing the yard towards the outer gate, when I suddenly pounced on him, and seizing his arm, said, showing the button:—"This is the right button for your waistcoat! I found it on the spot where Mr. Musgrave was murdered! Was it torn off in the struggle?"

"D—n the button!" angrily replied the young man. "What do I know about it; and why do you squeeze my arm as if it was in a vice? Let go, will you, Mr. Detective?"

My previous strong opinion that the groom was innocent of the crime was now conviction. I withdrew my grasp of his arm, and said in a very much milder tone:—"Have you ever lent the waistcoat you have on to anybody?"

"Not I. Why, it was only the day before he went away that I bought it of Tom Sawkins. I fancied it like, and young master gave me leave to wear it."

"And who is Tom Sawkins?"

"Tom Sawkins *was* Mr. Musgrave's servant; and meant, so he at one time said, to leave the country with him."

"Mr. Musgrave's servant! And when did you buy the waistcoat of him?"

"Well, I bought it of him, and paid for it, if you must know, more than a month ago; but I only got it, and that after a bit of bustle—hearing, as I did, that he was going away at last for good and all—the very day before Mr. Musgrave's body was found."

"But you were seen wearing a red waistcoat before then?"

“I have always worn a red waistcoat; but this is a bran new fancy one, which, as I said, young master humoured me to have. I pointed out,” added the man, “that one button was missing; but Tom Sawkins said I could easily match it for twopence or threepence.”

“Sawkins has left the country, you say. How do you know that?”

“I know he has left these parts. He said he was off to the West Indies.”

“The West Indies! A very unlikely destination. That, however, you have nothing to do with. I am quite satisfied so far as you are concerned. Good day!”

Here was a new light thrown upon the dark tragedy of Burnsley Coppice! Might it not have been that Mr. Musgrave, with his servant, had reached the place of appointment too late to meet Mr. Frodsham; and that his own servant, Sawkins, knowing his master had a large sum in gold, and tempted by opportunity, had slain and robbed him? The suspicion had great likelihood. One would certainly suppose, that having committed such a crime and bagged the booty, he would at once have fled the country. There might, however, have been some reason or reasons necessitating his stay for a time. One, that remaining, even but a short time after his master’s disappearance, he would divert suspicion from himself. At any rate, Mr. Sawkins would have to be sought after without delay. As to his having gone to the West Indies, that was fudge—America, had he really left the country, would be his refuge.

I returned to the George, and was taking lunch when Mr. Lynch, the county constable, came in. “I merely called to say that a warrant has been issued for the apprehension of Mr. Frodsham’s groom, John Major, and that I have just lodged him in jail.”

“The deuce! With what crime is he charged?”

“Wilful murder only; nothing more serious than that.”

“Do you know upon whose deposition the warrant is based?”

“Upon Mr. Frazer’s, I was told at the office of the county clerk. I have another piece of news,” added Lynch, with a kind of distorted, twisted grin;—the bridge of his nose had been broken, and he had a hare lip. “I have another piece of news. Mr. Musgrave, had he lived, would now be a rich man. A bachelor uncle, seized with sudden, fatal illness at some place in Italy about a month since, has left him all he died possessed of; between thirty and forty thousand pounds in cash, it is reported. The I O U’s and promissory notes held by Mr. Frazer are worth twenty shillings in the pound now. A lucky gentleman; and as I happen to know, luck was wanted.”

“This is news indeed, Mr. Lynch. An uncle who died a month ago in Italy left, you say, between thirty and forty thousand pounds to his nephew, Edmund Musgrave. You also say that to your knowledge this great slice of luck was greatly needed by Mr. Frazer?”

“Yes. Two writs for large amounts I know are out against him. He has gained a little time under the plea that he had suffered such a tremendous loss by the deceased Mr. Musgrave, that if time—and he did not ask for a long day—were not given, he would be compelled to knock up.”

“And it is upon an affidavit of this Frazer that Mr. Frodsham’s groom has been consigned to prison as a principal or aider and abettor in the murder of Musgrave, thereby effectually preventing him appearing as a witness on Mr. Frodsham’s behalf. Upon my word, Mr. Lynch, it strikes me that someone—we need not mention names—is playing a desperately bold game.” Mr. Lynch said he thought so too, and we presently parted.

There are few persons that have lived long in the world, who have not observed how slight a thing will often turn awry, entirely change the course of human affairs. A few minutes after Mr. Lynch left, I had made up my mind that it was desirable I should see Mrs. Frodsham without delay, and I directed a saddle-horse to be brought round to the front door. A fancy, however, seizing me to first step over the way, and have a quiet game of billiards with the marker, I gave orders not to saddle the horse till I returned, which would be in about an hour. I was not absent three minutes. Stepping briskly along the pavement near the market cross, I trod upon a piece of orange-peel, slipped, lost my balance, fell heavily with my left foot twisted under me, and unable to rise of myself, was carried over to the George, put to bed, and informed by Dr. Lyford, who was quickly in attendance, that I had as bad a sprained ankle as he had ever been called upon to prescribe for. A very pleasant announcement that; and the surgeon moreover, as it proved, had not in the slightest degree exaggerated the gravity of the hurt. It was quite three weeks before I could leave my chamber, and then but limpingly. Meanwhile, the Frodsham-Musgrave-Frazer business had been, looked at from my stand-point, bedevilled in most woful fashion. But for the foolish fancy to play a game of billiards, all might have been well; as it was, all was wrong—abominably, wretchedly wrong.

Mrs. Frodsham could neither consult with me personally, nor even by letter, though written counsel would hardly have availed much. Fretful impatience, the torture of the sprain, anxiety of mind—not altogether, nor perhaps chiefly, respecting Mr. Charles Frodsham’s case, for I had just then worries that touched me, or ought to have touched me more nearly, would have done so but for the mother—brought on fever of a mild type, but sufficiently severe to induce Dr. Lyford to order that I should not see anyone or be disturbed with any kind of business for a time. That time did not exceed ten days, when the fever, such as it was, had left me, and the sprain alone chained me to my room. So short a period had sufficed to do all the mischief.

Disturbed by some vague rumours in which the names of Mrs. and Mr. Frodsham and Mr. Frazer were mixed up, reported to me by Dr. Lyford, I dispatched a note to the lady-mother, begging her to favour me with an interview at her earliest convenience. She had, I knew, called the second day after the accident, and expressed regret at not being able to see me. In due course of post I received a reply: Mrs. Frodsham was too unwell to see Mr. Clarke, or even to leave her house. Mr. B—, her solicitor, would, however, confer with him on her behalf, and she hoped Mr. Clarke would be able to be present at the next examination of her son before the magistrates, the first having been one of form only, on account of the absence of Mr. Frazer. It was fixed for that day week. Mrs. Frodsham was happy to inform Mr. Clarke that her solicitor felt confident her son would be then discharged out of custody by the bench, and exonerated from all suspicion.

“The deuce he will! I should much like to be acquainted with the basis of the solicitor’s confident opinion,” was the mental comment I made upon Mrs. Frodsham’s missive; and, as a chance of obtaining some inkling of it, I sent a message to the officer, Lynch, requesting to see him. He was soon with me; and from what he told me, I guessed at once how matters really stood.

Frazer had gone off suddenly, no one knew whither; and a warrant had been issued which, could he be found, would compel his appearance before the magistrates, to give evidence in Mr. Frodsham’s case. He was known to have been twice or thrice at Mrs. Frodsham’s, that lady’s lawyer being present each time. A few hours only after his last interview with her, he left per mail for London, and had not since been heard of.

It had since oozed out that a gentleman named Hanbury, who, it was believed, would be Mrs. Frodsham’s second husband, had purchased, at their full nominal value (over six thousand pounds), the whole of the promissory notes, I O U’s, of the late Mr. Musgrave, held by Frazer. Mr. Hanbury, supposing the authenticity of these securities should be established, would, no doubt, receive his money; but, for all that, it was the generally received opinion that the bargain was a corrupt one, and entered into by advice of Mrs. Frodsham’s lawyer—“the greatest noodle as to criminal practice in the county”—for the purpose of getting and keeping Frazer out of the way. Mrs. Frodsham, it was also generally suspected, had bribed the fellow heavily, independently of the so-called “commercial transaction,” to which there could be little doubt she was virtually a party.

“Mrs. Frodsham’s attorney ought to be struck off the roll for giving his client such advice. Charles Frodsham’s character will be blasted forever; he will bear the brand of a murderer to the last day of his life. Struck off the roll!” added I, with passion, for I was sorely dismayed, knowing, as I did, how bitterly the mother would reproach herself when the dire consequence of what she had done became apparent to her—”Struck off the roll, did I say? The blundering idiot ought to be hanged himself. No effort, no cost should be spared to apprehend Frazer, and compel his attendance before the magistrates. It is Mr. Frodsham’s only chance.”

Lynch quite agreed with me; but thought it very unlikely such a wily gentleman would allow himself to be caught, especially if a rumour, widely circulated, should prove correct—

“That the promissory notes, I O U’s, are forgeries,” I interrupted, with vivacity. “I have not the slightest doubt they are—no more than I have that Frazer’s evidence would, under cross examination, have been blown to the devil; whilst now—”

“Mr. B—, the solicitor, wishes to speak with Mr. Clarke,” announced a waiter.

I desired Mr. B— to be shown in; and, promising to look in again on the morrow, Mr. Lynch left.

I could have spat at the pompous prig of an attorney, who came bustling in, bedressed as if just stepped out of a Madame Tussaud show-box. With a pinchbeck sort of “Chesterfield” condescending civility, Mr. B— said, after favouring me with a gracious nod or bob:—

“My lady-client, Mrs. Frodsham, has thought it might be as well that I should see you relative to the unfortunate affair with which the name of her eosn and of one Edmund Musgrave—supposed to have been slain by violence—are disagreeably mixed up. If you know of any circumstance, Mr. Detective Clarke, in connection therewith to communicate, I shall be most happy to hear it, and give you my opinion of its legal value and bearing.”

“I have no wish to be favoured with your legal opinion, Mr. B—, upon any subject whatever. I wrote to your lady-client, asking to see her here, as I could not wait upon her at the Elms. My purpose was to caution, to advise her. The only counsel I can now give is, that she, for her son’s sake, spare no cost to secure the appearance of Mr. Frazer before the bench of magistrates.”

“What do you say, Clarke?” exclaimed the round-bellied, bag-cheeked, powdered-hair humbug. “What do you say, Clarke? Surely, as a friend—a humble friend, of course—to the Frodsham family, you must, in your heart, though it might not be decorous to say so, rejoice that so formidable an adverse witness as Frazer has taken himself off in the very nick of time?”

“The very worst, the most calamitous circumstance for the Frodsham family that could have happened. If Frazer be *not* found, Mr. Charles Frodsham, for any worth that life will be to him, may as well perform the office of hangman for himself.”

“Why, good God, Clarke, how wildly you talk!” rejoined the solicitor, with put-on pretentiousness, though really, one could see with half an eye he was a good deal flustered. “You cannot have seen Frazer’s affidavit. I have a copy with me. Please to read it.”

“Hem! ha! The deponent maketh oath and saith he saw Charles Frodsham and Edmund Musgrave, himself unobserved by either, together in Burnsley Coppice, on the afternoon of the 10th of October last past. That they were furiously quarreling about a lady, and walking to and fro with violent gesticulation. Mr. Charles Frodsham had a very stout knobbed stick in his hand; an ash stick the deponent believes. That, fearing to be seen listening to a private conversation between two gentlemen, both of them acquaintances and friends of his, deponent went away; and when at a distance of three or four hundred yards paused to consider whether, after all, he ought not to go back and endeavour to appease their quarrel. He was about to do so, when Charles Frodsham came out of the wood with his servant, John Major, whom the deponent had not before noticed; and after looking about, as if to ascertain no one was in sight, walk hurriedly away—the man in close and apparently familiar conversation with his master, which a good deal surprised deponent at the time. Seeing there was no longer any reason for his interference, and not desiring just then to see Edmund Musgrave, with whom two or three days before he himself had had high words about money matters, deponent went home, and thought no more of the matter till the dead body of Musgrave was found.”

“That, stripped of surplusage, is about the sum and substance of Frazer’s affidavit, Mr. B—; and the devil’s own concoction it will be found to be, if we can only contrive to get deponent into the witness-box. But that we shall not do, depend upon it, if Frazer can anyhow help it. Is it true that the securities purporting to be signed by Edmund Musgrave,” I added, sharply, “have been found to be so many forgeries? And that another of your *fortunate* clients, a Mr. Hanbury, has been consequently swindled to the tune of between seven and eight thousand pounds?”

“Mr. Clarke,” said the nettled attorney, swelling like a turkey-cock, “your tone is offensive. Please to remember the social difference betwixt yourself and me.”

“Social stuff and nonsense! We are speaking of something much too serious for our talk to be buttered over with compliments. I am plain of speech, and tell you, Mr. B—, that if by your advice—I do not ask your confidence, would not accept it—that if by your advice Frazer has been bribed, directly or indirectly, to leave the country, you have morally destroyed your clients. Mr. Charles Frodsham, had the magistrates committed him for trial, would have been triumphantly acquitted, have left the court without a taint of suspicion attaching to him, had the perjured forger Frazer appeared against him, whereas—”

“Who says Mr. Frazer is a forger?” interrupted the lawyer; “I was not before aware that London detectives accepted as gospel truth every silly rumour which malignity and spite may set afloat?”

“Nor do they; but I am not for that the less positive that your client Hanbury’s ‘securities’ are not worth the ink they were written with. I begin to see through this millstone, Mr. B—, and shall strongly advise Mr. Charles Frodsham to himself ask the Bench to again and again remand the case, till the witness who made the lying deposition I just now glanced through shall be found.”

“Mr. Frodsham to remain in prison the while? Upon my word, that is sagacious advice.”

“Sound advice, Mr. B—, depend upon it. But as our opinions differ quite as much as our relative social positions, it is useless to continue this conversation. I must, therefore, wish you good-day.”

CHAPTER II.

MY SECOND TRIP ACROSS THE ATLANTIC.

MR. CHARLES FRODSHAM had no occasion to solicit a remand on behalf of himself and John Major. That course was at once taken by the magistrates, as soon as they were informed that Frazer had not made his appearance. The adjournment was for a fortnight, before the expiration of which I had practically the management of the case, the merely legal formalities being entrusted to Mr. B—’s clerk, a shrewd fellow, who did his duty honestly, though entirely convinced in his own mind of both prisoners’ guilt. In truth, there was scarcely another opinion in the county. Mr. Sidney Herbert did not go with the ruck of general belief, and *his* judgment was worth that of a thousand ordinary men. It was by his earnest recommendation that the conduct of the defence was left to my guidance: the highest compliment I was ever paid in my life. I must not omit to state that Miss Annesley had explained to him, as she did to me, that her assertion that Charles Frodsham *had* met Musgrave by appointment in Burnsley Coppice, the day before she and Mrs. Annesley left for London, had no other foundation than that Mr. Frodsham told her he was going to meet him there, and indeed shown her the note he had received, making the appointment.

“A proof, at all events, that Mr. Frodsham did not *intend* to commit homicidal violence upon poor Musgrave. I agree with you, however,” added the right honourable gentleman, “that

Frodsham committed a grave error in not frankly stating before the inquest that he did go, by appointment, to Burnley Coppice, in the expectation of seeing Musgrave.”

The Court was thronged immediately the doors were opened on the day appointed for the adjourned examination of the prisoners. We had retained counsel, Mr. Richard Missing, of much and deserved local celebrity, rather to watch the proceedings than enter upon any substantive defence. It was expected, no Frazer being forthcoming, that the prisoners would be again remanded. The magistrates, however, resolved to proceed with the case as it stood. A weaker one, leaving out of consideration Frazer’s sworn deposition, I had seldom heard,—no clear proof even that the dead body found in Burnley Coppice was Edmund Musgrave’s could be adduced; the Bench nevertheless decided upon sending the case to trial, and Charles Frodsham with John Major were committed to the next March Assize (it was full five months till then), for the wilful murder of Edmund Musgrave. The county magistrates could not have bailed the prisoners, in such a case, had they been inclined to do so, which assuredly they were not. An application was made to Mr. Baron Platt at chambers, in London, before whom the prisoners were taken by *habeas corpus*; but he refused bail, though tendered to any amount.

The rending, convulsive grief, the passionate agony of Mrs. Frodsham, was very painful to witness. I positively, for a time, feared for her life; and many days passed before she could be brought to listen with patience to suggestions of consolation—of hope. I even now feel pleasure in the remembrance that it was to me she first turned, as the person in whose judgment, exertions, she could place reliance.

I had not meantime been idle. One of the earliest visits I paid was to the lodgings last occupied by Tom Sawkins, formerly servant to Mr. Musgrave. It was a mean garret, in a mean house, just out of Andover, tenanted by an aged pensioner and his wife. Old Tomlinson had been in the service many years as a marine, and was present, he told me, at Trafalgar, in the *Téméraire*, Captain Harvey. He was a loquacious old fellow—readily accepted my offer of a “pipe and pot” at the Horse Shoes inn; and, whilst enjoying himself there, freely told me all he knew about Tom Sawkins.

“Not much account wasn’t Tom Sawkins,” he said; “never since he was sixpenn’orth of halfpence high. A sort of a hulking, poaching, lie-about fellow. He was a good shot, and that was perhaps why Mr. Musgrave kept him in his service for five or six months, not more than that, and he never stopped anywhere else half so long.”

“Was Tom flush of money before he left?”

Well, the veteran could not say the fellow was very flush, but he *did* see him pull out of a leather purse, when he came home drunk one night, and Tomlinson helped him upstairs to bed, five or six gold sovereigns!

“Sovereigns! When was that?”

“Well, the very night before he left. And I never seed him with more than as many shillings afore! Curious enough, he wanted to persuade me next day, when I joked about the fortune he

had come into, that the sovereigns I seed were flash sovereigns. ‘Walker!’ says I. ‘Well,’ says he, ‘if you must know, them yellow-boys is all I got left out of ten which my young master Musgrave gave me for wages, and a trifle for extra work, before he left; but,’ says Tom, ‘don’t you let out that I have got the money, as I owes some trifles which I should be tore to pieces about if they know’d I had a few pounds.’ ‘Well,’ says I, ‘Tom, what you got or what you owes is no bread and cheese of mine. You don’t owe me no rent; as I’ll take blessed care you don’t.’ About an hour afterwards, when I looked into his crib, to ask if he wanted anything fetched, as I was goin’ to the chandler’s, I seed that he had hooked it, and took what few traps he had with him. The old woman says I frightened him away,—he thinking I should tell people he was in debt to, what a lot of tin he’d got. I’m thinking myself that that must have been about the size of it.”

“I *don’t* think so. Did anyone in particular call upon him after his master was thought to have left the country?”

“No; no one in particular. There was Jack Major, who is in trouble about the murder (but which I’m not going to believe he had any hand in), called to fetch a dandy red waistcoat which he had bought and paid for; and a precious shindy there was before he got it.”

“Mr. Frazer, for example, did not call upon him?”

“Mr. Frazer! No, he did *not* call; but, between you and me and the bed-post, I seed Muster Frazer a-talking secretly with Tom, two or three times, mayhap four times, in the dusk of the evening, down Blind Man’s-lane—an out-of-the-way place, as you perhaps may know. But I have my own reasons for daundering about there lateish of an evening sometimes. Tom, who is a bit of a scholard, you must know,” added the garrulous old man, “and can read writing very well, received several letters by post whilst he was stopping with us. They was directed in a scrawly sort of hand, and the spelling bad, my wife said—and she can read writing as well as Tom, if not better.”

“Have another pint and a fresh pipe.” Tomlinson had not the slightest objection to that; and when, after he had taken the lining, or nearly so, out of both pint and pipe, I asked if I might see Tom Sawkins’ “crib” more closely—search it, in short—the ancient marine offered no objection.

“It’s all in a litter,” he added; “just as Tom left it; for my wife has been laid up with the rheumatics ever since, and it aint likely—no lodger calling to ask about it—that I should put myself out of the way to tidy it up.”

“Certainly not. Absurd to think of such a thing! Let us go then at once. I am pressed for time, having several letters to despatch by post; and I cannot walk so fast as before I got this obstinate strain.”

There was a rough deal table in the room, an iron fender, poker, and candlestick—the latter having a remnant of candle sticking in it—and a mean pallet-bed of flock, out of which it seemed that someone had recently tumbled. Nothing more, except a heap of ashes under the rusty grate,

and dirt everywhere. Not a scrap of paper was to be seen. I had gained nothing by my visit and outlay at the Horseshoes.

“Rather bare, aint it ?” said Tomlinson. “But what can you expect for ninepence a week? Nothing much to be learned here, I reckon,” added he.

As he was speaking, my eye fell upon the iron candlestick, and I noticed that round the end of the remnant of candle a piece of writing-paper was rolled, to keep, of course, the candle tight in the socket. It might be as well to look at that. So reaching down the rusted stick, I drew the end of candle out, and possessed myself of the piece of paper. Tomlinson was looking out of the window at the moment, and did not observe me. I put the fragment of paper in my pocket, bade Tomlinson good-bye, and went away.

That scrap of paper, so oddly obtained, proved to be invaluable in a moral sense—in a pecuniary one, worth thousands of pounds. It was the torn fragment of a letter, and bore these words (I copy exactly):—“Crown Inn, Copperas Hill, Liverpool.—Wait till I join you. Take the name of Smith; and say you expect your employer—Mr. Brice, of London. Steamers for America sail at least once a week. Don’t be stupid about my giving you the slip; it isn’t my game, you boo—” This was all; and the writing was unmistakably that of Frazer. I didn’t lose a moment in communicating with the Liverpool police, and quickly ascertained that the two persons described by me, and passing respectively in the names of Smith and Brice, had embarked for New Orleans, in the steamship *Mississippi*, James Austinmaster, just three days after Mr. Frazer left Hampshire.

The trail was effectually struck; but how to make the discovery available for the vindication of Mr. Charles Frodsham’s character, for his restoration to society, for the binding up of his mother’s bruised spirit, was still the unsolved problem. The treaty of extradition between England and the then United States did not include refractory or unwilling witnesses. The warrant issued by the Hampshire magistrates could not be executed in America—Frazer and Sawkins, if traced to and seized there, would be at once set at liberty by the State authorities. One chance only offered itself. Could it be proved that one or more of the “securities” sold to Mr. Hanbury were forgeries, a warrant to arrest Frazer for that crime, and bring him back to England, would be enforced in any part of America. I forthwith waited upon Mr. Hanbury, explained the motives of my visit, and asked to see the said securities. That gentleman’s feelings were so deeply interested for Mrs. Frodsham and her son, that he did not care one straw if every one was proved to be fictitious—valueless—if the establishment of that fact would help to redeem them from the gulf of despair in which they were plunged. He freely gave them all up to me; and I left to examine them at my leisure. Several undoubtedly genuine letters of Mr. Musgrave’s were given me by Mrs. Frodsham; and the conclusion I came to, after a long and careful comparison of the writing, was that the “securities” were forged, but that the imitation was first-rate—done by a practised master-hand. Yes; but my conviction upon the point might not be that of others, and would certainly not suffice to obtain a warrant for the apprehension of Frazer upon so serious a charge.

Carefully considering the matter in all its bearings, I foresaw clearly, from my own stand-point, that those forgeries could only have been committed after Musgrave’s death; and it had by some

means come to the knowledge of the forger that a rich legacy had been devised to the murdered man. That, I say, from my stand-point, was clear as day. Money had not been obtained upon one of them; nobody had heard that such documents existed whilst Musgrave lived; yet the latest dated of the papers purported to have *been written full three months previous to Mr. Musgrave's disappearance!* That fact alone would have convinced me that they were all fabrications. As a legal proof, however, I well knew it was not worth a straw.

But the stamps of the promissory notes! Might not some of them have been issued since the date of those notes? Very lately it might be—since Musgrave's death. That fact (if one) was, I knew, easily ascertainable; the stamps issued having always some, to ordinary observers, undistinguishable mark which fixes the date of their manufacture and issue.

It was a chance worth trying, at all events; and I forthwith started for London, taking with me the promissory notes; the I O U's, not being stamped, I returned to Mr. Hanbury.

As I hoped, yet hardly dared to hope, four of the promissory notes were written upon stamped paper which had not been issued till several days *after* Musgrave's death!

The proof of forgery could not be more complete. The necessary formalities were gone through with, I had in my hand a warrant for the apprehension of Frazer, and official directions to the consular authorities of Great Britain to aid me in claiming the custody of his person, under the Extradition Act. Tom Sawkins, if found, I should have to deal with after another fashion.

Mrs. Frodsham had been purposely kept ignorant of what was going on—in fact, my sole confidant was Mr. Hanbury himself—till our preparations were complete, and I was ready to start for the States. The surprise to her was great, the resuscitation of hope for a time overpowering. Her thanks to, her confidence in me found tearful, broken expression; and when—emboldened by her matronly smile, in which were, however, some sparkles of the light of girlish archness, I fancied, to be seen—I ventured to raise her fingers to my lips, I felt quite as determined to do my devoir to the death as ever did mailed knight who entered the lists in the old horse-prancing, lance-in-rest, much-betrumpeted days of chivalry, so-called. Ay, and the peril I should have to confront in hunting up a couple of desperadoes in the land of six-shooters and bowie-knives was, I quite well knew, a hundred times greater than was dared by any preux chevalier that ever set lance in rest.

The Crescent City, as New Orleans is sometimes called, is a fair average specimen of the great cities which dot the Atlantic seaboard of America—with the exception of reckless ruffianism, in which characteristic its rowdy population certainly bears away the palm.

It was among the haunts of the most reckless of those ruffians, gamblers (or sportsmen, as they are named) swillers of gin-sling, cocktail, &c.—ever ready to avenge a loss, or what in their normal mood of drunken savagery they may deem an insult, by shooting the offender down with a revolver, or stabbing him under the fifth rib with a bowie-knife, with almost certain impunity, or, at the worst, the incurrance of a very slight punishment—that I knew, from reliable sources of information, I should find Frazer, if anywhere. The scoundrel's real name, by-the-bye, was Jones; but I may as well continue to speak of him as Frazer. To be sure, I should be entitled to

the assistance of the New Orleans police in effecting his capture; but although, judging from my own experience, the superior authorities loyally endeavoured to carry out the provisions of the Extradition Treaty, the men upon whose active co-operation an English police-officer must depend in such cases were very lukewarm in aiding a Britisher to seize and carry off the vilest villain who had sought refuge beneath the star-spangled banner, or the Palmetto flag now, I suppose, as the case may be.

Very strangely, it happened, immediately after I disembarked at one of the levees of New Orleans, I, entering a crowded bar for a nip of brandy—my stomach not having quite regained its constancy after the long sea voyage—caught sight of my gentleman, amongst a knot of sinister-looking rowdies, fiercely quarrelling with each other about some card winnings or losings.

I had no proper authority to seize him—not, of course, having been able to communicate with the authorities—and, without the assistance of the New Orleans police, to have attempted to do so would have been sheer madness. It was, however, satisfactory to have so early struck upon one of the fellow's haunts. It was, at the same time, especially desirable that he should not be aware I had done so, and I drew back out of sight—*his* sight—immediately, and left with all speed.

The British consul was fortunately at home when I called the first time; and, with his assistance, I quickly obtained the necessary legal authorization to arrest Frazer, lodge him in jail, and, if it were found, after proper investigation, that he came within the provisions of the Extradition Treaty, he would be given over into my custody, and we should leave for England together.

Half-a-dozen of the New Orleans police accompanied me forthwith to the liquor-store where I had seen Frazer about three hours previously. The bird had flown! and no one there—though several of the men were those with whom I had seen him furiously quarrelling—recollected, knew anything about such a person as we described. The barkeeper did not think he had ever seen such a man; and many stoutly swore there had been no row in the place that day about card-playing, or anything else. It must have been some other liquor-store the British detective had gone into, *etcetera*.

No doubt we had stumbled stupidly upon the very threshold of our enterprise. That, however, was not my fault. The moment I saw Frazer had left, I earnestly whispered the chief of the American police to say nothing of our errand there. The supercilious Southerner replied that he did not require to be taught his business by me, and immediately began making loud and affectedly fierce inquiry after an Englishman we were in quest of, accused of having committed forgery in the old country. His name was Frazer, but he now went, it was believed, by that of Brice. If this had not been, as I had afterwards excellent reason to believe, malignant spitefulness, it would have been the sheerest stupidity. The officer did more, he thought, to thwart the Britisher he was directed to aid, by causing a paragraph to be inserted in next day's *Picayune* newspaper, which told the New Orleans world that "Clarke, an English detective officer, had arrived with a warrant to arrest another Englishman, one Frazer or Brice, accused of forgery, and take him back to England under the provisions of the Extradition Treaty, a measure which the United States Senate ought never to have sanctioned."

This was superfluous spite on the part of my worthy American comrade. Frazer would have known all about my arrival and errand at New Orleans from his friends at the liquor store long before the *Picayune* was published. My chances of conveying Frazer back to Hampshire were wofully diminished by the officer's conduct, and my heart sank within me as the consequences of my failure to Mrs. Frodsham, her son, ay, and that blithe-looking groom, reappeared before my mind's eye in all their original horror. But I would persevere to the last with the persistent patience, if not the unerring scent of a sleuth hound, till all hope of success had utterly vanished. The idea of appearing before Mrs. Frodsham with her death-warrant in my hand, which I felt sure the intelligence that I was unable to save her son from shame would be, distressed, tortured me beyond belief. Of course, the feeling of personal pride, to be intensely mortified if I failed, as greatly gratified if I succeeded, contributed its full share to that emotion. By the way, I have omitted to mention in its proper place that Mrs. Frodsham admitted to me, that in accordance with the suggestion of booby-brained B—, her attorney, she had not only induced Mr. Hanbury to purchase the fictitious securities of Frazer, but had herself given him a bribe of one thousand pounds to go and keep out of the way. And this would be the serpent-sting—that by so acting, though with tenderest solicitude of intention, and in compliance with counsel which she had a right to believe was sound, she would, if I did not succeed in capturing Frazer, have herself been instrumental in rendering her son's vindication, his return to society impossible.

The *Picayune* paragraph had quite an opposite effect to that it was intended to produce. It brought me a very important visitor, who would not else have heard I was in New Orleans.

This visitor was my mother's brother; he who, as related in the first chapter of this book, would have robbed her by violence of her stern husband's marital gift but for the interposition of Watson whom I afterwards assisted in escaping to America. He was waiting for me at the Saint Louis Hotel when I returned there in the evening of the day following that on which the paragraph appeared, weary, fretful with fatigue and disappointment. Smith, as I named him in that paper, though aged, his scant hair white as snow, and his face blotchy with intemperance, seemed to be in possession of strong health. Originally he must have possessed an iron constitution. "I saw your name in the paper," said he, "and thought you would not object to shake hands with your mother's brother. No; I am not much changed for the better since I left the cursed old country—not at all, I think. The chains of evil habit are seldom effectually broken, especially when the devil has so strongly forged them as he did mine. But I am not going to whine or drivel. I am doing tolerably well here—middling, I mean; and should do much better if I could raise a thousand dollars within about a fortnight. I keep a liquor-store, and with what I should be able to sell that for and a thousand dollars could purchase a first-rate one. I thought perhaps you might loan me such a sum," added he, with his old brazen impudence of tone and look.

"A foolish thought, Mr. Smith. I have no thousand dollars to lend."

"For all that, I reckon to have them out of you, if what I hear about the man you are come after is correct. He has got an awful lot of plunder I am told."

"Do you know him then?"

“No, not particularly. He has only been once or twice at my store. It aint grand enough for such swells as he. But I know them that *do* know him, though he’s now hid away for fear of you, who could find out within twenty-four hours—it must be done quickly, or it wont be done at all—where he is to be nabbed. One of my acquaintance was at the liquor store where you first saw Frazer *alias* Brice, as you and the newspaper call him. He goes by another name here. But I shouldn’t have known that the detective sent after him was my nephew Clarke—I’ve heard of you many times since I left England—had not the *Picayune* told me.”

“You are quite serious that you can enable me to effect his capture?”

“Serious! I should think so. That is, if a thousand dollars for myself can be made square.”

“In the event of success, of course?”

“To be sure; no cure no pay is fair trading. Another thing: my ‘acquaintance’ wont expect to work for nothing; but his figure shall be a very moderate one, I’ll take care.”

“I close with your terms at once. Frazer once safely lodged in jail, the thousand dollars shall be immediately handed over to you; and I shall not object to any reasonable sum in addition for your ‘acquaintance.’”

“It is all settled then, *upon honour*. Now then I will tell you what has been done already. I called yesterday twice to see you; once before today. You were out, and I did not choose to leave my name; I should be sure to happen with you very soon. So I, feeling sure we should come to terms—for without me you would no more carry off James Rouse to England than the Crescent City itself—”

“James Rouse!”

“Yes; that is his New Orleans *alias*. Feeling sure, I say, we should come to terms, I set to work at once; and the fact is, Rouse must be taken this very night, if at all!

“Taken this very night! He starts with about a dozen ‘sportsmen,’ at about four o’clock in the morning, westwards. They go in cars—to what place in particular is not, I think, exactly decided. One thing is, in my opinion, pretty clear—that Rouse himself wont go very far. The sporting gentlemen know he carries an enormous lot of dollars with him, which they mean to have—by ‘sport’ on the road, if it can be done that way; if not, by a six-shooter. A grave can be easily found in the swamps, which no one could ever spy into. He, in his fright and hurry to get away from you and the police here, is going to jump out of the fryingpan into the fire with a vengeance.”

“So it should seem. Well, what is the plan of action? Must we take a sufficient force to seize him, spite of the desperate resistance which his sportsmen escort are sure to offer?”

“No occasion for that, I hope. He sleeps tonight, for the last time, at a house of ill-fame in the French quarter of the city. More correctly speaking, his constant companion, Miles—”

“His constant companion, Miles! Is *he* a sportsman?”

“No; he is an Englishman—of almost the lowest class, I should say, by his manners and conversation. He came over in the same vessel with Rouse—or Frazer.”

“Tom Sawkins, possibly; but he I do not think was with Frazer when I saw him at the liquor store on the Levée. Frazer was, I could be almost sworn, the only Englishman present.”

“Perhaps so. A man may be the close companion of another without being precisely his shadow. Returning to the plan of action. Mr. Frazer will pass the night at a house of ill-fame in the French quarter of the town. By which I mean, he will remain up playing cards till it is time to be off. A rich pigeon just caught is to be plucked. The play will be very high—the players Mr. James Rouse, the pigeon, a young and very green Virginian, and two ‘sportsmen.’ These last will be there as much to keep guard over Rouse—to prevent him from giving *them* the slip, as they intend he shall you,—as to participate in the anticipated plunder. In fact, it was for the purpose of not losing sight of Rouse that it was arranged the play should take place at the house of ill-fame—Rouse’s lodging. One moment! Well thought of. Should Miles be the man you thought he might be, does he know you?”

“He never saw me in his life!”

“That is well, because he will be on the look-out to give instant warning of your approach, or that of any other suspicious person; and one minute’s notice would quite suffice, so peculiarly fitted for affording such facility are the houses in one of which our little game must be played out tonight. It is essential, too, that but you, I, and ‘my acquaintance’ should be the only players in that game, on our side; one reason being the great risk there would be that if a New Orleans police officer were to present himself within a hundred yards of the house, the birds would be flown before you could say Jack Robinson: another, that one or more friends of the ‘sportsmen’ would be sure to hear, if the police were requested to act with you, that something was in the wind. Hawks, they say in the old country, wont pick out hawks’ eyes; and I am quite sure a genuine son of Columbia will never willingly help to seize and deliver up to a Britisher anyone, though born in Britain, who claims the almighty protection of Uncle Sam. Of course, you have obtained legal authorization to yourself arrest Rouse or Frazer, if you happen to meet with him?”

“Certainly; the condition being that I immediately, or as quickly as may be, deliver him over to the American authorities—that is to say, lodge him in jail.”

“Just so. Well, we shall be three to three, perhaps three to four; as Miles will probably be in the room before it may be prudent to act.”

“Three to four desperate ruffians: those four well armed, no doubt. You too, Mr. Smith, though the island blood appears to flame as fiercely as ever in your veins—”

“D—n the island blood. I am a naturalized citizen of this great Republic.”

“As you please. I was about to remark that you are not so young, nor, I should suppose, quite so vigorous and active as you once were. Still, I am quite willing to run the hazard. I have faced greater odds, and in cases which comparatively very little interested me.”

“The *surprise*, as I shall manage it, will help us much. The pigeon, of course, counts on neither side. Well, I am certainly older than I was twenty years ago, but I could spar a bit once upon a time; and, with help of these pretty knuckle-dusters, shall be able, I have no doubt, to give at least one of the gentlemen-sportsmen a floorer, before he quite knows whether it is the roof of the house or his own skull that has suddenly cracked in. We must go singly to the house. You can follow me at a distance. There is a billiard-room, where you can lounge till the signal strikes, as I don’t suppose you will much affect the lady- society you may meet with. I will look in again about ten o’clock. Good-bye till then. I think I ought to have stipulated for fifteen hundred dollars at least! But a bargain is a bargain all the world over. Once more, good-bye, for a couple of hours.”

The house was full of gay company of both sexes; but nothing absolutely indecorous was observable. Music, singing, riotous laughter rang through the place *fortissimo* when one or more doors were occasionally opened. The billiard-room, in which I sat, sipping lemonade, and seemingly very attentive to the game, was pretty full; and I, wrapped in my cloak, with the collar up—it was winter, and bitterly cold—was unnoticed, save by my uncle, who glided from time to time in and out.

“All is going well,” he more than once whispered. “The pigeon, my acquaintance reports, is being unmercifully plucked, and the confederates are in high good humour.”

Gradually, after midnight, the house grew quiet. The billiard-room thinned; the gas was here and there extinguished; chamber-doors were locked and bolted; and I knew the time for decisive action was close at hand.

I had a loaded revolver in my breast-pocket; but the only weapon I intended to use, unless driven to extremity, was a life-preserver: a more effective arm, wielded by skilful hands, in a close encounter, does not exist. Besides, it was of the last importance that as little noise as possible should be made in securing and carrying off Frazer.

It was just upon the stroke of two, and I was getting feverishly impatient, when my uncle, whom I had not seen for an hour previously, came softly into the then empty, though still lighted, billiard-room, accompanied by his “acquaintance,” a resolute-looking youngish man, whose name was never confided to me. This was a condition insisted on by himself. Why, would have been a mystery to me but that I concluded he was not personally known to the two sportsmen or the pigeon. He was “the friend” of Frazer, and had the *entrée* of the room where the plucking was going so bravely on.

“It is time,” said he. “Are you quite ready, Mr. Detective?”

“Quite ready; lead on.”

“Miles is in the room, and restless, watchful, uneasy; I know not why. How is the assault, which must be sudden as lightning, to be made? Any considerable uproar, the discharge of a pistol, would probably bring overpowering odds against us. But that I have a wrong of my own to revenge upon that cowardly Rouse, I certainly should not have engaged in such a business. Still, being in, I shall go on. How is the assault to be made? Whom do you propose to assail, Mr. Britisher?”

“Helped by the surprise, I can manage the two Englishmen. Frazer, for all his bounce, is, I believe, a cowardly caitiff, I undertake for those two.”

“I for one sportsman,” said my uncle, “the one nearest the door; you for the other, being nimbler than I.”

“Agreed. Now then!”

“Have you almost done, gentlemen?” said the acquaintance, partially opening the door, after softly tapping in a peculiar manner; “*I am off home.*”

“Not quite; about half an hour, perhaps,” replied, or was replying, Frazer, when the door was flung wide, and we were upon them.

Miles was upon his feet, and might have offered resistance but for a blow of the life-preserver, which floored him as a butcher fells an ox.

“Frazer,” said I, seizing the astounded wretch by the throat, “no noise, no foolish resistance. The game is up.”

My friends had been equally successful. Uncle’s knuckle-duster settled one; the uplifted bowie-knife of his acquaintance the other.

The pigeon looked on in silent astonishment and consternation.

Miles, who I felt sure in my own mind was Tom Sawkins, was sufficiently revived by a good dousing of cold water to stand upon his legs, though somewhat giddily; the same with the knuckle-dusted gentleman.

“A mere matter of precaution, gentlemen,” said I, fastening their wrists with iron cuffs in as courteous a manner as possible: “a mere matter of precaution, gentlemen-sportsmen. As soon as we are at a sufficient distance from this house, you, not being our game, will be set free. But no noise. Mind that! You, sir,” I added, speaking to the green Virginian, “had better call tomorrow at the St. Louis Hotel, and ask for Mr. Clarke. It may be possible to restore to you some of the plunder of which you have been robbed tonight.”

“The reckoning is all paid,” said my gleeful uncle; “and everything, as you see, snugly packed up. We may leave the two large portmanteaus till daylight tomorrow. But I recommend you,” he added, aside to me, “to take possession at once of this small, well-secured valise. I can carry it.”

I nodded assent; and forth we silently sallied. Cloaks concealed the handcuffs from the observation of the negro door-porter, who had, moreover, been warned that the gentlemen in No. 37 would leave during the night. The game had been so far successfully played; and I felt quite sure of winning not only the odd trick, but scoring all the honours.

At the jail I took a receipt for Frazer *alias* Brice *alias* Rouse; and, after searching him, the official there handed me a memorandum of the moneys and papers found on his person.

“Is this man to be detained?” asked the officer, pointing to Miles.

“Yes; his real name is Sawkins—Tom Sawkins.”

“That is right, I reckon,” said the officer, laughing.

Miles—who had been fast regaining composure and confidence from the telegraphic looks of Frazer—sprung round upon me, as if I had suddenly pricked him with a red-hot iron, and his phiz turning in an instant to a cadaverous tint.

“What is he charged with?”

“Wilful murder.”

“Wilful murder!” screamed the fellow, again turning towards and questioning Frazer with his eyes. “Why, good God!—”

Frazer’s finger, instantly placed upon his lip—the handcuffs had been taken off—checked Sawkins’s tongue. He was silent, and stared round bewilderedly; not at all, it was plain, relishing the position in which he found himself. I had taken the precaution to obtain (through the British consul) legal authority to arrest Thomas Sawkins, suspected of wilful murder; *pro tem*. I being, of course, answerable for any wrong done to the supposed culprit. That contingency did not trouble me much when I was satisfied that I had got the right man in the right place.

Smith, my uncle, was waiting for me and his thousand dollars at the hotel. I handed them over to him, and after having plentifully liquored, he went away in high feather. I then took the liberty of examining the valise brought away by Smith. It contained a very large sum of money in readily negotiable securities; but nothing bearing on the charge against him—nothing criminatory. On the contrary, three letters, dated not long before Mr. Musgrave’s disappearance, showed that that gentleman was on very intimate terms indeed with Frazer. Still, the silent evidence of the stamps was irresistible; would be so esteemed, at all events, by an English court; but would the American judge, before whom Frazer must appear before being deported, hold such evidence sufficient? It would be urged, no doubt, that English stamp-manufacturers were not infallible; and that, at all events, *viva voce* evidence of the makers and issuers of the stamps should be produced, not merely cut-and-dried affidavits which could not be cross-examined, before the prisoner was shipped off to England!

With such thoughts ringing through my head, I could not but be extremely pleased at a message which reached me the next day from Sawkins. He was desirous of making a statement. I hastened to the jail, found him in a state of great trepidation, which I certainly did nothing to allay, and he then made an astounding declaration, of which the material substance was, that neither Mr. Musgrave nor anyone else had been murdered! That the whole thing was concocted by Frazer, to obtain money—he being in desperate circumstances. He had led Sawkins on, by little and little, to help him. Sawkins had received the two shirts, borrowed by his master at the Crown Inn, Andover, to return them to Mr. Frodsham’s servant; and that, he being present at the time, first put the idea into Frazer’s head—so, at least, Sawkins thought. The body of a young man, recently buried in a near village churchyard, which it was thought would well answer the purpose, was exhumed during a dark night, carted off to Burnsley Coppice. The face and skull having been smashed in, the corpse was re clothed in habiliments that had been worn by Mr. Musgrave and given to Sawkins; but as these were of ordinary colour and fashion, greater reliance was placed upon the shirt to satisfy the coroner that the body was that of Mr. Musgrave—“who, at this blessed moment, is alive and well, or was not very long ago, at Montreal, Canada,” said Sawkins; adding, “Neither I nor Mr. [Frazer] is so bad—though bad enough, God knows—as you may think we are. There would have been a letter sent off to England in good time to prevent Mr. Frodsham and poor Major from being convicted; stating that Mr. Musgrave was alive, and where he was to be found. Frazer said Mr. Musgrave would see all about the affair in the English papers, and go over himself to England; but I didn’t mean to trust to that.”

This declaration was carefully committed to paper, and sworn to before the proper authority by the deponent Sawkins. Armed with it, I no longer feared that the New Orleans authorities would liberate Frazer. He himself, after hearing that Sawkins had made a clean breast of it, thought so too; and sullenly resigned himself to his fate. We—myself, Frazer, and Sawkins—sailed for England in the *General Jackson* steamer, bound for Liverpool—I having previously written to Montreal, forwarding newspapers by same post, acquainting Mr. Musgrave with the exact state of affairs, and urging the expediency of his immediate embarkation for England.

He reached Hampshire just two days after I did, accompanied by Sawkins. Frazer died during the passage home (I believe by poison); but there was no *post-mortem* examination—a hurricane was raging at the time, and the body was hurriedly consigned to the deep. I need not dwell upon the sudden restoration from death to life, as it were, of Mrs. Frodsham—of her son; the general joy which the astounding intelligence, running through the county like wild-fire, occasioned; whilst as to my wonderful self—I was a heaven-born detective, and no mistake.

Charles Frodsham and John Major, again taken by *habeas corpus* before a judge in London, were admitted at once to merely nominal bail. Of course, no bill was preferred against either at the assizes; and the verdict of the coroner’s inquisition upon the supposed dead body of Edmund Musgrave was formally quashed by the Court of Queen’s Bench. This complicated drama—which made but little noise, comparatively speaking, even in Hampshire; there appearing to be a reluctance, out of respect to the family implicated, to indulge in much comment—fitly concluded with the marriage, on the same day, of Mr. Charles Frodsham and Miss Annesley, Mr. Hanbury and Mrs. Frodsham, which I did *not* remain to witness.

Waters, Thomas. [Pseud.] [Attib. William Russell.] *Autobiography of a London Detective*. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1864