

The Adventures of a Man of Science.

By L. T. MEADE AND CLIFFORD HALIFAX, M.D.

We have taken down these stories from time to time as our friend, Paul Gilchrist, has related them to us. He is a man whose life study has been science in its most interesting forms—he is also a keen observer of human nature and a noted traveler. He has an unbounded sympathy for his kind, and it has been his lot to be consulted on many occasions by all sorts and conditions of men.

IV.—THE SLEEPING SICKNESS.

IT was in the summer of 1894 that the following strange events occurred.

“Harry Lidderdale has unexpectedly returned to England and will, I hope, dine with us to-night,” wrote my friend, Charles Holdsworth. “Do not fail to be present if you can possibly manage it.”

I crumpled up the brief note of invitation and rose to my feet.

“So Lidderdale has come back,” I said, speaking aloud in my astonishment. I had good reason for my wonder. Harry was an old friend of mine. All during our early years we had been chums; then suddenly and mysteriously he had disappeared from the country. From the date of his departure he had not written a line to any of his old friends; not a soul who knew him in England could even guess at his whereabouts—to all intents and purposes the man was dead. There was a story which in a measure accounted for this.

Lidderdale in the days of his early manhood had fallen desperately in love with a girl of the name of Alma Ramsay. She was a beautiful girl, and report whispered that she loved him in return; there were no tidings, however, of an absolute engagement, and suddenly the news reached me that Alma was about to marry a certain General Colthurst, and that Lidderdale had left the country. Colthurst turned out a cruel husband—untender, suspicious, jealous. Fortunately for his young wife, he did not survive the union more than a few years. Now he was dead; Mrs. Colthurst was a widow and well off, and Lidderdale had come home.

Charles Holdsworth was a member of Parliament; a quiet, sober, middle-aged gentleman. I often

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dined at his house, and we had often discussed Lidderdale's mysterious disappearance. I hastily replied to his note, saying that I should certainly dine with him that evening, and when the hour arrived put in an appearance in Curzon Street in good time. Several guests were present, but I looked round in vain for my friend. Holdsworth came to my side.

“You will be disappointed,” he said; “but I have no time at present to explain matters. Lidderdale will not dine with us. Ask me more after dinner—and now you will like to see Mrs. Colthurst—she is present.”

“Does she also know of his return?” I asked, in a low voice.

“I have not told her, but there is no reason why you should not mention it. I have arranged that you are to take her down to dinner.”

A few moments later I found myself seated at table beside Mrs. Colthurst, whom I had not met since her widowhood. I noticed as I glanced at her that her beautiful face was thin to emaciation. I was just turning to say something about Lidderdale, when she uttered a little cry of distress.

“Mr. Gilchrist,” she said, “we are thirteen at table—you know of old how horribly



“MR. GILCHRIST,” SHE SAID, “WE ARE THIRTEEN AT TABLE.”

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superstitious I am. I wish I had not come to dinner."

I soothed her, and even laughed a little at her fears.

"The age of superstition is quite over," I said; "you ought not to think of such mediæval follies. Besides, I have something to tell you which will quite turn your attention—our sitting down thirteen to dinner is a mere accident; it is caused by the non-arrival of one of the principal guests."

"And who may that be?" she asked, turning and looking at me.

"No less a person than your old friend and mine, Harry Lidderdale."

Her dark brows were contracted with pain and astonishment.

"Harry Lidderdale? Has he returned to England?" she asked, in an awe-struck voice.

"I believe so—I have not heard many particulars as yet. Holdsworth asked me to meet him here this evening. I am as much astonished as you are," I continued.

I noticed that she played with her food. Suddenly, as if unable to hold them any longer, she put down her knife and fork.

"It is long since I have met or heard from Mr. Lidderdale," she said. "It stirs my heart to hear his name mentioned; sometimes I have feared that he was dead. Will you try to find out from Mr. Holdsworth all you can about his return, and why he is not dining with us?"

"I will do so," I replied. "I shall doubtless have an opportunity when you leave the room after dinner."

"I shall be greatly obliged," she answered, with earnestness—her eyes grew large and bright, her face seemed suddenly to fill out and look youthful, the colour flamed in her cheeks, and her whole manner indicated suppressed excitement.

I was about to say something more, when a pretty girl who was seated a little way further down the table bent forward and said, in a tone of delight:—

"Mrs. Colthurst, I have great news for you. Do you know what Mrs. Holdsworth has succeeded in doing? She has induced Haridas, the celebrated chiromancist, to come here after dinner—we can all have our fortunes told."

"Haridas!" cried Mrs. Colthurst, "is it possible? I have longed to go to him, but have been afraid."

"Do you really believe in chiromancy?" I asked of her, when she turned once more towards me.

"Emphatically," she answered. "I would

give a great deal to show my hand to Haridas—more particularly now." She coloured. "You have heard his name, of course, Mr. Gilchrist?"

"I confess I have not," I replied.

"You surprise me—I thought everyone knew of him. He is a Brahmin of very high caste, and seems to possess almost superhuman powers. I know several people whose fortunes he has told, and in each case his predictions came to pass. Please don't laugh—I know you scientific men care nothing for that sort of thing—but to us——" She broke off abruptly—I noticed that she clasped her hands tightly together under the table. She was too nervous to proceed with her dinner.

"Then you intend to submit your hand to the inspection of this man?" I said.

"Most certainly. I would not miss the opportunity for the world—and what is more, whatever he tells me I shall firmly believe."

After the ladies had withdrawn, I found myself sitting next to Holdsworth.

"Now, what about Lidderdale?" I asked.

Holdsworth looked at me and slowly filled his glass before he replied.

"I have very little to tell," he said. "I saw Lidderdale's card lying on the hall table this morning with the address of the Hotel Métropole scribbled in one corner. There was also some writing on the back saying that he would call later in the day. I was unable to stay in, but left a note inviting him to dine here this evening, and telling him that Alma Colthurst was to be one of the guests. When I returned home, just in time to dress for dinner, my servant informed me that he had not come back, and a few moments later I received a telegram saying that he would call to-morrow, as he had been prevented from doing so to-day. I shall be glad to welcome him back again—he was a very good sort of fellow. I cannot imagine why he gave all his friends the go-by in the extraordinary manner he did."

"I am convinced that he can explain that," I said. "I shall be heartily glad to see him again. Of course, all who knew him well will remember how attached he was to Mrs. Colthurst."

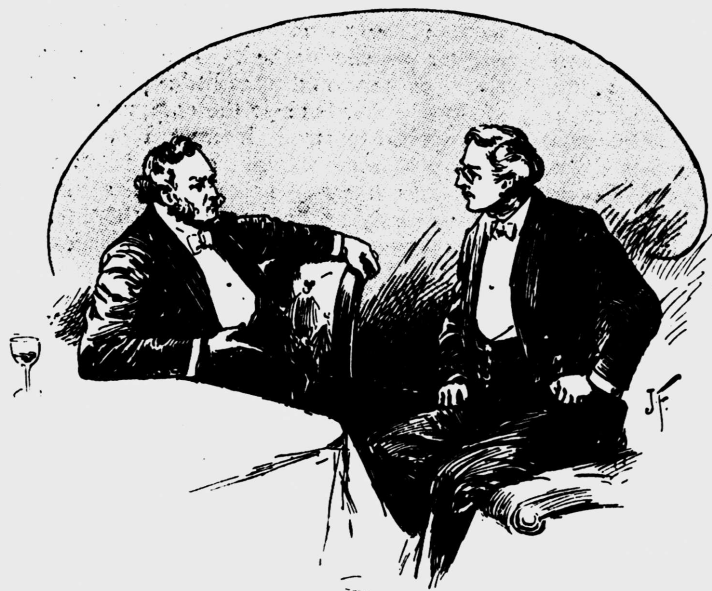
"Ah, yes, poor girl," said Holdsworth, "and she to him. She had a very unhappy marriage, as you know only too well, Gilchrist. Well, she is free now—she is rich, too. Doubtless Lidderdale and she will soon be happily married, and we shall be only too glad to dance at their wedding."

"I have not seen Mrs. Colthurst for some time," I said. "She is much changed—she seems to be in a very nervous condition. Should you consider her in good health?"

"Well, Gilchrist, you are more of a doctor than I am—she has always been rather delicate. I am not aware that there is anything special the matter with her."

"Her nerves are in a shaky condition," I repeated—"she was considerably distressed at our sitting down thirteen to dinner; and when she heard that you are going to have an exhibition of chiromancy in the drawing-room, it caused her to forget her uneasiness with regard to the old superstition. Strange, how easily women are influenced."

"Call it black art or what you will," said Holdsworth, gravely, "I also, to a certain extent, believe in chiromancy."



"'CALL IT BLACK ART OR WHAT YOU WILL,' SAID HOLDSWORTH, GRAVELY."

I looked at him in some astonishment. If ever there was a man endowed with common sense it was Charles Holdsworth.

"I do not profess to understand the principle on which these persons work out their curious prophecies," he continued, "but so many of them have to my certain knowledge come true, that—but what am I thinking of? We ought to be in the drawing-room now." Here he rose from his seat.

"Gentlemen," he called out, "I have the pleasure of telling you all that Haridas, the well-known chiromancist, is coming here this evening to give an exhibition of his powers.

I believe he is due now. I am sure you will none of you like to miss him. Shall we all go upstairs?"

Looks of curiosity, astonishment, and pleasure were seen more or less on every face. We all rose from the table, and a moment or two later entered the drawing-room. Here we found ourselves in the midst of a crowd of visitors, several fresh guests having arrived since dinner. I could not help noticing a hushed and expectant expression on the faces of nearly everyone present. Mrs. Colthurst was standing not far from the door; she made way for me to come to her side.

"Well?" she asked, in an eager whisper, "has Mr. Holdsworth told you anything?"

"Yes, all he knows," I replied. "Lidderdale's card was found on his hall table this morning, with the address of the Hotel Métropole scribbled on it. There was some message on the back to say that he would call again in the evening; and as Holdsworth could not remain in, he left a letter inviting him to dine. But as it happened Lidderdale did not call again, but sent a telegram to say that he was detained, and would come to-morrow."

While I was speaking, Mrs. Colthurst sank down on to the nearest chair; her face was white, her eyes full of trouble.

"What can this mean?" she said, in a whisper.

"I don't understand you," I answered.

"His not coming back," she replied, "and his—his going to see Mr. Holdsworth first of all. Why did he not come to me or—

or to you, who have always been his greatest friend? Perhaps," she added, suddenly, "Haridas can explain."

At this moment there was a slight bustle in the neighbourhood of the door, and we both rose to our feet.

A Brahmin, wearing a white flowing robe, sandals on his feet, a short jacket richly embroidered on his shoulders, and a turban of many colours wound round his picturesque head, entered the room. He was accompanied by a young woman, who was dressed from head to foot in white. She had handsome features and sparkling eyes. Like the

Brahmin, she also wore a turban of many colours, and several strings of shining beads encircled her brown throat. Her arms were bare to the elbow, but were round and beautifully formed. When the pair entered the room they turned, faced the company and salaamed very low. I then heard the young woman say a word or two in English to Mrs. Holdsworth. The Brahmin did not open his lips. He was a strikingly handsome man; his face was thin, his features aquiline. There was a sort of solemn dignity about him which put us Europeans completely into the shade.

As I looked at the pair I could not but confess that I had seldom seen a more picturesque couple.

Mrs. Holdsworth immediately conducted Haridas and the young woman to the top of the room, where they mounted a little platform arranged beforehand to receive them. Having done so, our hostess turned and introduced the chiromancist and the Hindu girl to her guests.

"The name of Haridas," she said, "is, of course, well known to all people interested in the marvellous science of chiromancy. The Brahmin has come here to-night to tell the fortunes of all present who care to submit their hands to his manipulations, but as he cannot speak English, Mungela"—here she laid her hand on the girl's arm—"has accompanied him as interpreter."

There was a moment's hesitation. Mrs. Holdsworth left the platform—Haridas came slowly to the front and stood with folded arms, not looking at any of the company. His splendid eyes seemed, if I may use the expression, to be full of vision.

After a little more delay, one of the men of the party came forward. He mounted the platform, said a word or two to Mungela, and then held out his hand for Haridas to examine. The chiromancist turned it slowly over, looking first at the palm and then at the upper part of the hand. He then began to speak in rapid Hindustani, which Mungela interpreted in a low voice. What the pair said was unheard by the rest of the party. The gentleman returned to his seat with a smile on his face.

"The whole thing is absolutely wonderful," I heard him say to a neighbour. "The man knows nothing whatever about me, not even my name, and yet he told me a great deal of my past history and prophesied——" Here there was a bustle, someone else was going on the platform, and I could not hear the next word. This time it was a lady. She also underwent

a brief examination of her hand. Haridas spoke in Hindustani and Mungela interpreted. The lady returned to her friends with a flushed face and pleased eyes. Soon many others followed her example, each one coming back into the body of the room, looking mystified, pleased or the reverse, but all more or less impressed.

"Now I am going," said Mrs. Colthurst to me.

I noticed how queer she looked—there was a grey shadow under the eyes, and the lips were slightly blue in tint; the rest of the face was ghastly.

"Whatever you do, pray don't believe that man's nonsense," I said. "Try to regard it as a joke."

"I cannot do that," she answered. "I am glad he has come. After he has spoken to me I shall know the truth."

She left my side and approached the upper part of the room. She seemed almost to stagger as she walked. The next moment she had mounted the little platform and stood with her back to the company.

Impelled by strong interest, I left my seat and approached the end of the room where the platform was. I saw Haridas take her hand exactly as he had done those of the other people. Then I observed a quick and peculiar light flash through his eyes—he glanced at Mungela, and it seemed to me that there was consternation in his gaze. I don't think he once looked at the white face of the woman whose fate he seemed to hold in his grasp, but there was evidently something about the lines of her palm which distressed him. He began to talk in his musical rapid Hindustani, and Mungela listened. At each pause she translated the meaning of his words to Mrs. Colthurst. The whole thing did not occupy two minutes.

When the young widow left the platform the grey look had crept all over her face. She saw me, and came to my side.

"He has told me my past, and accurately," she said. "But what can be the matter—he won't say a word about my future? What do I care about the past? The past is done, but I will know—yes, I will know—what is about to befall me. I believe he is afraid to tell me. I believe he knows something terrible. Go, Mr. Gilchrist, go and ask him for the truth—he will give it to you, I am certain."

Mungela and Haridas were standing close together. When they saw me, they came slowly to the edge of the platform. I spoke to Mungela.



"HE BEGAN TO TALK IN HIS MUSICAL RAPID HINDUSTANI."

"I do not wish to ask Haridas about my fortune," I said.

"Then what is your pleasure, sir?" she asked, fixing her bright eyes on my face.

"I have a word to say with regard to the young lady whose hand Haridas has just examined."

"The lady with the grey face?" interrupted Mungela.

"Yes, the one who has just left the platform—she is greatly distressed. Haridas has not told her the whole—he has spoken of her past, but has said nothing of her future; she is very much alarmed. Perhaps he will tell me in confidence what he has thought well to hide from her."

It was impossible for the swarthy features of the Hindu woman to turn pale, but there was consternation in her eyes. She turned to Haridas and spoke. He said something in Hindustani—she looked at me.

"Haridas is sorry," said Mungela, "he cannot tell the future of the pretty lady."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because there is none—everything is finished. There is nothing to say."

Her words were so startling and unexpected, and I was so much afraid that Mrs. Colthurst might hear them, that I hastily showed my own hand to the chiromancist, who began to mutter over it, but I interrupted him.

"Mungela," I said, "ask Haridas why there is no future for Mrs. Colthurst."

She repeated the question.

"He only says the same thing," she replied. "There is none—there is nothing to say—it is all done."

The next moment I returned to Mrs. Colthurst's side.

"Well," she said, trying to smile, "have they told you? What terrible fate hangs over me?"

"I have found out nothing," I answered, laughing as I spoke. "Haridas evidently has a limit to his powers: he cannot foretell your future."

"He will not—oh, that I could make him!" she replied.

Her face looked haggard and dreadfully worn. Soon afterwards she bade her hostess good-night, held out her hand to me, and left the room.

I had just risen on the following morning, and was about to sit down to breakfast, when to my astonishment my servant ushered in Charles Holdsworth. His hair was rumpled up, his eyes looked full of excitement.

"Gilchrist," he cried, "what awful thing do you think has happened?"

"What?" I asked.

"Alma Colthurst is dead."

"Impossible!" I cried.

"She is dead, murdered. She was found in her drawing-room early this morning, having evidently been stabbed, as there was a deep wound in the left side, which must have penetrated to the heart. Her servant rushed over to inform me. The police are on the scent. Gilchrist, they suspect Lidderdale."

"Nonsense, Holdsworth, you must be mistaken," I answered.

"They do; it is a fact."

"Well, tell me everything," I said, after a pause.

"I have very little to tell. The servant's story is as follows: Alma returned home between eleven and twelve last night. She found a card from Lidderdale lying on the hall table, with a line in pencil that he would call to see her about midnight. She told the servant that he was to be admitted, and went up to her drawing-room to wait for him. He arrived almost to the minute, and was shown upstairs. The footman waited up, lingering about the hall and staircase for something over half an hour. About half-past twelve Lidderdale came calmly downstairs, bade the footman good-night, and left the house. At Alma's special request her maid had already

gone to bed. When Lidderdale went away, the footman extinguished the lights in the rest of the house, but did not return to the drawing-room, as Alma never cared to be disturbed, and as a rule put out the lights there herself. On entering the room at an early hour this morning, he found his mistress stretched on the floor, quite dead. A doctor was summoned, and the unfortunate girl was discovered to have been dead for many hours. A brief examination showed that she had been stabbed through the heart.

"How awful!" I cried.
"Holdsworth, I shall



"HE FOUND HIS MISTRESS STRETCHED ON THE FLOOR, QUITE DEAD."

begin to believe in chiromancy. That man last night would not tell her future, and when I questioned him, said that she had none. His prediction turned out strangely correct."

Holdsworth swept back the hair from his forehead.

"I am so stunned, I scarcely know what I am doing," he said—"and sorry as I am for her, poor soul, it is Lidderdale that I think most of at the present moment. Gilchrist, it is quite impossible that he could have done it."

"I agree with you," I answered. "Lidderdale is a man of strong passions, but he would never, under any circumstances, stoop to murder."

"But think of the circumstantial evidence—the man was the very last in her presence. He will, of course, be arrested on suspicion. Let us go straight to the Métropole and find out what has happened."

We left my flat, hailed the first hansom we came across, and drove to the large hotel. On our arrival, we sent in our cards and inquired for Lidderdale. There was a slight delay, and then, rather to our surprise, the manager came forward and said that no gentleman of that name was staying at the hotel.

"There have been inquiries for him already this morning," he said, in a somewhat pointed way, "but we have no Mr. Lidderdale here."

"Are you certain?" asked Holdsworth. "I have his visiting-card in my pocket—he left it at my house yesterday, with the name of your hotel scribbled in the corner."

The manager looked at it and shook his head.

"There has been no gentleman of that name staying here," he said. "The name of the hotel was doubtless used as a blind—such things have happened before."

"But not in the case of men like Lidderdale," I interrupted. "I think," I added, turning to Holdsworth, "that we ought to take the hotel manager into our confidence."

"Certainly," he answered.

"Very well, gentlemen," replied the manager, "will you both come this way?"

He led us at once into his private room. There Holdsworth gave him a brief account of the terrible event which had transpired in Melville Street.

"I fully believe in Mr. Lidderdale's innocence," he continued, "but I know that circumstantial evidence is strong against him."

"The police have been here already inquiring for him," said the manager. "It is all very unpleasant," he added.

"There is just a chance," I interrupted, "that he may be staying here under another name. If so, I should recognise him immediately. Can you put me in a position to see your visitors as they leave the hotel this morning?"

"I certainly can and will," answered the

manager. "You have only to stay in the hall, sir, and you will notice everyone who passes."

I said a few words to Holdsworth, who soon afterwards left the hotel—the manager then took me into the big entrance-hall where I spent the remainder of the morning.

Lidderdale, when I had last seen him, was a tall, slender, dark-complexioned man— young-looking for his age, with straight features and a good carriage—his hair grew somewhat low on his forehead, and was black and straight. He kept it cut very short, and had somewhat the appearance of a military man. In repose his face was rather wanting in animation, but when he spoke it lit up with extreme brilliancy—I felt certain that I should recognise him through any disguise.

The hotel happened to be very full, and many dark-eyed, slender men passed and re-passed in the course of the long morning. But no one in the least resembling Lidderdale put in an appearance, and soon after noon I went away.

The police were now actively on the scent, and both Holdsworth and I were visited and eagerly catechized. We could neither of us give the least information. One of Lidderdale's cards had been found lying on Holdsworth's table; the writing in the corner was easily identified with some of his letters which I possessed—a similar card had been found at Mrs. Colthurst's, with writing also in Lidderdale's hand in the corner. A man, in all respects answering to my description of Lidderdale, had called on Mrs. Colthurst at midnight on the evening of the 21st. In the morning she was found dead, stabbed to the heart.

The newspapers became full of sensational paragraphs, but there were no tidings whatever of the man himself. I could scarcely conceal my great anxiety. Where was the murderer? Where was the man who had undoubtedly left Lidderdale's card at two houses?

A week from the death of the unfortunate widow passed away, and still the police had not got the faintest trace of the missing man.

I had spent a long day in the country, and was returning home somewhat fagged when my servant, who knew all about the mysterious murder, greeted me with a peculiar expression on his face.

"Well, Silva," I said, "have you any news for me?"

"I have, sir," he replied. "Mr. Lidderdale has been found."

"Found? Where?" I asked, in excitement. "Have the police got him?"

"No, sir, he is waiting for you in your laboratory—he has been there for over half an hour."

"Lidderdale in my laboratory!" I cried. "Impossible!"

"It is true, sir. He called about six o'clock, and said that he would wait for you for a short time."

"The mystery truly deepens," I muttered to myself. I hurried across the hall, opened the door of my laboratory, and went in.

Lidderdale, looking very like what he was when I last saw him, sprang from the depths of an easy chair and came quickly to meet me.

"How do you do, Gilchrist?" he said. "This is a pleasure. I have not been two hours in London, and you naturally are the first person I wanted to see. Why, what is the matter?" he continued, observing the expression on my face.

"For Heaven's sake, sit down!" I said. "You tell me you have been only two hours in London? Impossible. Don't you know what has happened? But you must know."

"I assure you that I only arrived in London by the Dover Express this morning, having travelled overland from Marseilles. I went to an hotel, changed my clothes, and then strolled over to see you. When I heard you were out, I said I would wait for you. Well, it is good to see an old friend again."

I looked Lidderdale over from head to foot. The old description still answered with regard to his face and appearance. He looked scarcely any older than when he left England four years ago. He was still tall, still slender, his features were straight and his carriage good; his grave and very beautiful dark-grey eyes still retained their old trick of lighting up with the least word. His teeth gleamed white and wholesome in his mouth. It was impossible to connect murder with a man like him.

"For some reason or other you look dazed, Gilchrist," he said. "You seem more astonished than pleased at seeing me."

"I am amazed at seeing you," I replied. "I thought -- the fact is, you will forgive me, Lidderdale, but I must speak plainly—I thought you were hiding from the police."

"I?—hiding from the police! I can scarcely take that, even from you, old friend. What do you mean?"

"Well, you left England four years ago in a precious hurry, and since you came back—"

"I tell you I have not been back many hours."

"Then," I continued, "what did the visiting-cards mean?"

"The visiting-cards?—you are talking in your sleep, Gilchrist. Wake up! What can you be driving at?"

I stared fixedly at him, then I sprang to my feet.

"God knows I am not dreaming," I said; "and yet to see you here, looking for all the world as if nothing had happened!"

"Nothing has happened, as far as I am concerned."

"Then why did you leave England as you did, and—and cut us all, and then come back——?"

"One question at a time, old man. I am prepared to account for my somewhat mysterious absence. The fact is, I was really mad at that time. You know what my feeling was for Alma Ramsay. When she definitely made up her mind to throw me over and marry that old *roué*, General Colthurst, I became seized with a frenzy which I could neither control nor subdue. In fact, a very demon got possession of me. You know I come of a good old family. Most of the men of my house have both wealth and position. I am the younger son of a younger son, and a few years ago was as poor as they make 'em. Alma refused me, I was convinced at the time, on the score of my poverty. I resolved to leave the country, to cut my connection with all my old belongings, and to make for South Africa. There I was joined by a man of the name of Colville. He and I had been chums together at college—he also knew Alma, and the first thing which drew us together was his mention of her name. He had a little money, and we agreed to purchase a share in a good diamond mine. We did well, better than well—in fact, I soon became very rich. Colville took fever and very nearly died. I nursed him, and on his supposed death-bed he made a confession. He also loved Alma Ramsay, and in order to win her for himself had gone to see her and told her lies about me—cursed lies, without a breath of truth in them—that I was secretly engaged to another, that I was false, and the rest—the poor girl believed him. He had no knowledge at the time that pressure was being brought to bear upon her to marry General Colthurst. When he discovered that his nefarious scheme had come to naught, and that he could not win her for himself, he resolved to join me in Africa. His object, he said, was to watch me in order to prevent my having the least communication with Alma, feeling sure that if he

only bided his time he would win her yet, as she was certain to survive old General Colthurst. He expressed penitence for what he had done on his supposed death-bed, and to my surprise, and his own, recovered. When he was well again I told him that it was absolutely necessary that he and I should dissolve partnership. He was furious at first, for he knew that by slow degrees I had come to possess far and away the larger share of the business. I was firm, however. I paid him a sum of money; he left me, telling me that his intention was to travel through Matabeleland, and cross the Zambesi into Congo Free State. I have not heard from him now for several months. I am a rich man; I heard suddenly that Alma was a widow—I have hurried back to England, and—why, what is the matter, Gilchrist? You look graver and graver. Do you believe that I am inventing this story?"

"I do not," I answered, "I believe you from my soul—but what has possessed you to come back to England *now*? Do you know that you have been wanted for the last week?"

"Wanted? By whom? By you, old friend?"

"No, not by me—I would rather you were buried in the depths of the sea. You don't know what awful thing has occurred—I can scarcely bear to tell you."

"Look here, Gilchrist," said Lidderdale, springing abruptly to his feet, "I have had a pretty rough life of it, all things considered. I am over thirty years of age, and can stand most things, but suspense I never could brook. You have evidently bad news for me—what is it?—out with it."

I stood silent for a minute. His grey eyes were fixed upon me with an intensity which drove out of my head all other thought beyond the terrible knowledge that he still loved that poor murdered woman with his whole soul and strength.

"I don't think anything you can say will greatly upset me," he said, "provided Alma is well. I am certain now that I had her affections from the first, and if she will promise to be mine I can give her every comfort. What of her, Gilchrist?"

"You can do nothing for her," I said—"she is dead."

"Dead—I might have guessed it—like my luck," he muttered.

He turned away in great agitation, and walked to the nearest window. He stood with his back to me for a minute or two. I saw him take out his handkerchief

and wipe the drops from his forehead. After a very short time he came back and seated himself near me.

"No wonder you were shy of telling me," he said. "That wretch, General Colthurst, no doubt shortened her days."

"Nay, do not blame him," I said. "General Colthurst may have been bad, but she survived him. She—Lidderdale, you must bear up, old man. I believe there is a solution of this terrible mystery—but mystery it is."

"Well, tell me, tell me. Surely there can be nothing worse. With her life mine practically ends—I have nothing more to live for. What did she die of?"

"Something too horrible almost to contemplate has happened," I said. "Yes, I will tell you everything. Mrs. Colthurst has died—you have not asked how."

"How?" he asked. "Tell me. The fact of her death alone is sufficient for me. I shall never see her more. That is the crown of all misery to me."

"She has died by the hand of another," I continued; "and Lidderdale, God help you, you are suspected of her murder."

Lidderdale's reply to this was a loud, half-crazy laugh.

"You must be mad, old fellow," he said—but then he checked himself and looked at me.

"There is method in your madness," he continued; "you have more to say."

"If you can listen to me calmly I will tell you the entire story," I replied.

I then proceeded to give him a brief account of what had taken place. I told him of the visiting-cards with the handwriting on each which had already been identified with his. I told him of his supposed visit to Mrs. Colthurst on the night of the murder. He listened to me with outward calmness. When I had finished, he looked me steadily in the face.

"And now," he said, "in spite of this terrible circumstantial evidence against me; do you or do you not believe me guilty?"

I gave him a keen glance—then my heart

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gave a leap in my breast. I replied with fervour:—

"As there is a God above I believe that you are as innocent of this crime as I am," I said.

He held out his hand, which I silently pressed.

"All the same," he said, "I can see at a glance that I am in a deuce of a mess. The fact is—I cannot help it—I suspect Colville."

"Colville?" I interrupted.

"Yes—the man who slandered me to her years ago—the man who loved her with a ferocity equal to the purity of my passion. You never happened to see him, did you, Gilchrist?"

"No."

"He is like me in appearance, remarkably so—about my height and complexion. Even to the colour of his eyes, we are as like as two peas. At Cambridge we used to be spoken of as the twins."

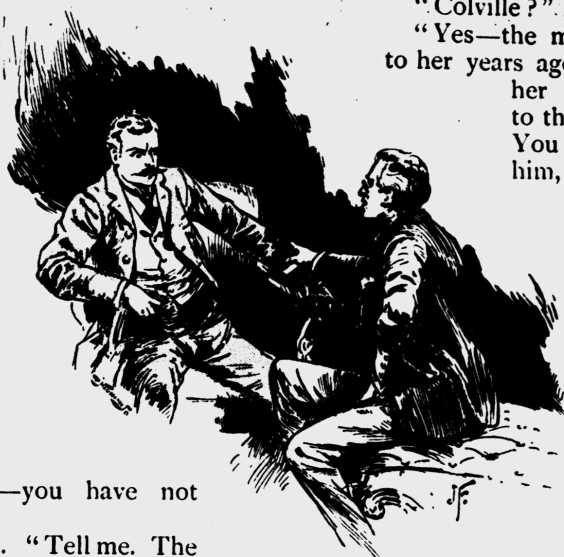
"But granted even that he did try to see her, what motive could he have in committing

such an awful crime?" I interrupted.

"Jealousy," replied Lidderdale, without hesitation. "The fact is, Alma would never look at him—he confessed as much as that on his supposed death-bed. When he spoke against me, she scorned him and showed him the door. She professed not to believe a word he said—but all the same, I suppose, a little of that mud stuck. He was like me, and he doubtless used my name in order to get an interview with her. I have watched him, and knew him well. He was capable in moments of frenzy of any deed of violence. Alma was the kind of woman to drive a man to distraction."

"The question now is," I continued, "how are we to prove your story? But that, of course, must be easy. You can be identified as one of the passengers on board the vessel which brought you from Africa to Marseilles?"

"There is a difficulty about that," replied Lidderdale, with a grim smile. "The fact is, I seem to have made a mess of things all round. Since I left the country I have



"I BELIEVE YOU ARE AS INNOCENT OF THE CRIME AS I AM."

always lived under another name. I did not want my old friends to write to me, nor my people to know anything about my whereabouts, and when I left England for Africa I took the name of John Ross. I wished to bury my old identity, and to hide myself from the face of the world. My shares in the diamond mines are in the name of John Ross. All legal documents are also made out in that name. I have a large sum of money waiting for me in the Bank of England, but I can only draw it in the name of John Ross. In short, fool that I am, I have surrounded myself with complications at every step."

I sat in a state of bewilderment for a moment, then I spoke.

"At least this much could be proved," I said. "You sailed on a certain date in a certain vessel from the coast of Africa to Marseilles—you were entered in the ship's books under the name of John Ross, the captain and passengers would know you again?"

"They might if they could be found, but the vessel was a small one and most of the passengers foreigners—it may take several weeks to get hold of the captain of the small trader in which I sailed."

"Then matters certainly look bad," I said. "What possessed you not to return to England in one of the ordinary liners?"

"The Evil One has been in this business from first to last," replied Lidderdale; "but the fact is, I am so stunned to-night that nothing whatever seems to matter. I must sleep over this, and let you know in the morning what steps I propose to take."

"You shall have a bed here; you had better not go back to your hotel."

He consented to this, and after a little more conversation we parted for the night.

In the morning Lidderdale met me with a brave face.

"I have put the thing straight, as far as my own action is concerned," he said. "Now that she has gone, I am more or less indifferent to life. Under any circumstances I cannot live under a cloud. I have made up my mind to go through the thing, and, whether I come out on the right side or wrong, at least to get it through. Gilchrist, will you come with me now to see the Superintendent of Police, in order that I may give him a faithful version of my story?"

This, after a little further conversation, we decided to do. We took a cab to Scotland Yard, saw the Superintendent, who, after a long conversation with Lidderdale, told him that it was his painful duty to arrest him on

the charge of the murder. My friend went off to await his examination before the magistrate with an air of outward quiet.

"I do not want to hang for it," he said to me, "for I am as innocent as you are; but short of that, now that she has gone, life is of no value to me."

I wrung his hand and hurried off, stricken to the heart.

For some reasons which I cannot now recall, Lidderdale's examination before the magistrate would not take place until the following morning, and in the meantime I felt that there was much to be done. More and more as the moments flew by did I feel convinced that he was right in his conjecture, and that Colville must be the guilty person. How he had managed his whole ingenious scheme was more than I could explain. After thinking matters over, I resolved to pay a visit to the house in Melville Street where the murder had been committed. I had been often there during the past week, and the servants knew me well. I had an interview with the footman, Carson, who happened to be the first to have seen his dead mistress. I said nothing to him about Lidderdale's appearance on the scene, but asked to be taken up to the drawing-room. The man immediately complied. He ran up before me, and the next moment we had entered the beautiful room.

The blinds were down, and there was a close smell caused by unopened windows. I saw at a glance that the room had been left almost undisturbed since the inquest. Carson went to draw up one of the blinds. When he did so, I saw a dark stain of blood on the carpet where the unhappy girl had fallen after she had received her death wound. Carson began talking eagerly. I scarcely listened to his story, which was stale by this time. In one corner of the room, put away on a table, I saw a couple of decanters—they were both half full, and contained either wine or cognac.

"What are those bottles doing there?" I asked.

Carson crossed the room to look at them.

"I never knew until this minute that they were left there," he replied. "I suppose one of the housemaids put them out of sight. They contain the brandy and sherry which were taken into the room the night the murder was committed. When Mrs. Colthurst saw Mr. Lidderdale's card on her return home she desired me to bring refreshments to the drawing-room, and I put the brandy and sherry and biscuits on a tray."

I lifted one of the decanters. It contained cognac—as I was putting it back again in its place I noticed, lying by its side, a broken wine-glass. Nearly half of the upper portion of the glass had been smashed away, but enough remained to allow a dark stain to show plainly in the bottom.

"What is this?" I said, lifting it up as I spoke.

Carson came and watched me with anxious eyes.

"I don't know, sir," he answered.

"It is a stain of blood," I said.

"There has been a deal of blood on many things in the room, sir," answered the man.



"WHAT IS THIS?" I SAID.

I did not reply to him. In my own mind I was going rapidly through a chain of reasoning. From the appearance of the broken glass I did not think for a moment that the dark stain on this occasion was caused by the victim. In all probability the man who had committed the murder had rushed, after the horrible deed was done, to fortify himself with a glass of brandy. In his agitation he had doubtless broken the top of the glass, and perhaps cut himself in so doing—the blood had poured down inside, and now lay in a little pool in the bottom of the glass.

"I should like to take this broken glass away with me," I said to Carson.

"I never saw it before, sir," he said, "but I don't know—I am very sorry, I don't believe I ought to give you leave. All the contents of this room are under the care of the Superintendent of Police."

"Never mind," I replied, quickly—I suddenly remembered that I had some microscopical slides and a cover glass in my pocket. I took out the case, slipped a slide away from its fellows, and taking a smear from the stain in the bottom of the broken glass, put it on the slide. As soon as it had dried, which it did almost immediately, I put the slide back into the cover glass, and left the house. I went straight back to my flat, and immediately submitted the slide to the microscopical and chemical tests necessary for the thorough examination of the smear of blood. I had no sooner done so than an exclamation of astonishment and relief rose from my lips. This blood, dry as it was, contained a quantity of the remarkable parasite, *filaria perstans*. As this parasite has never been contracted anywhere except on the West Coast of Africa, this fact proved at a glance that it was not the blood of Mrs. Colthurst. It must therefore follow, as a natural consequence, that it could only come from a person who had been in West Africa.

As I eagerly studied the dark smear, I remembered a remark Lidderdale had made yesterday. He told me quite incidentally that, when Colville and he parted company, Colville had started to travel through Matabeleland, across the Zambesi, into the Congo Free State. It was, therefore, quite within the range of possibility that, on his way down the Congo while living among the natives, he might have contracted, unknown to himself, of course, the parasite, *filaria perstans*.

I had studied Eastern diseases with care, and was well acquainted with the peculiar nature of this strange parasite. Was it possible that I now held in my hand the means of clearing my friend?

After a few moments of careful reflection, I went straight to the house of a Harley Street doctor who was celebrated for his treatment of Eastern diseases. Dr. Materick and I had before now done good work together, and we were fast friends. He happened to be in, and could see me at once. I gave him a brief outline of my strange story, and showed him the stain on the microscopical slide. He looked at it carefully himself, and immediately corroborated the discovery I had made.

"There is not the least doubt," he said, "that only a person coming from the West Coast of Africa could contract this special parasite, as it is found nowhere else in the world."

"Then, of course," I cried in excitement, "this is of great importance to Lidderdale, who has never, to my knowledge, been in West Africa."

"Unquestionably," answered Materick, "the fact of the parasite being found in this stain of blood supports his story. Your friend has come, you tell me, straight from *South Africa*?"

"Yes, from South Africa."

"We can soon discover if he has the *filaria perstans* in his own blood; if not, the natural conclusion is that he could not be the man who committed the murder; but now, before we come to that, I have a somewhat remarkable thing to tell you. There is a patient at the present moment in my hospital suffering from a disease called the Sleeping Sickness, which is caused by *filaria perstans*, and which, therefore, can only be contracted in West Africa, although this particular symptom may not show itself until years after the person has been there. Still, the disease is a sufficiently peculiar one for a European to have. Would you like to come with me to see the patient?"

"I certainly should," I replied. "You know I am much interested in Eastern diseases."

"Well, I will call for you this afternoon, and drive you straight to my hospital."

This arrangement was carried out, and at four o'clock that day I found myself standing by the bedside of the patient who was suffering from the Sleeping Sickness.

"He will not recover," said Materick, in a low voice to me, as he looked at him. "The symptoms are all of an aggravated description. As a rule the disease lasts from three months to as many years, and is characterized by slowly increasing somnambulism and lethargy. These symptoms gradually deepen until the patient is almost continually asleep. I have known cases where the sick person becomes so lethargic that he cannot remain awake long enough to feed himself, but sometimes falls asleep in the act of carrying his food to his mouth. Now, the blood of this man simply swarms with the parasite, *filaria perstans*. I will remove a few drops of blood from one of the fingers, and you can test it when you go home."

While the doctor was speaking rapidly to

me in a low voice I was watching the patient. He was a slender, dark man, his face was bathed in perspiration, his black hair was pushed back from his forehead. Where had I seen those features before, that somewhat peculiar length of jaw, the shape of the low forehead? Suddenly I felt my heart beat hard.

"Look here, Materick," I cried, with excitement, "I believe Providence has brought me to this bedside. The man lying there has a look of Lidderdale. Good heavens! suppose he happens to be the person we are seeking for! Did you notice the colour of his eyes?"

"I cannot say that I did."

"In an ordinary case," I continued, "the eyes of such a man would be brown or black. If they should happen to be grey, I am convinced that your patient must be Colville, the man we are seeking for."

"Scarcely likely," said Materick, with a smile—he knew me of old, and had often spoken of my impetuosity in taking up clues which I supposed might help my friends out of difficulties.

"The more I look at him, the more my suspicion strengthens," I continued. "The life of one of my greatest friends hangs in the balance. I should like to become acquainted with the circumstances under which this man came to the hospital, and also with the permission of the hospital authorities, to watch the case."

"I believe both your wishes can be gratified," replied Materick. "Let us go to the Lady Superintendent: she may know something of the man's previous history."

We left the ward and went immediately into a small room off the main wing, where Sister Sophia came to interview us. When we mentioned the patient who was suffering from Sleeping Sickness, she told us immediately the little she knew. He had been found about a week ago in the street, to all appearance in a state of intoxication; had been taken by the police and removed to the nearest lock-up. There, a very brief examination showed that the man was not suffering from intoxication, but was seriously ill—he was conveyed to the hospital, and had scarcely opened his lips since. When taken up he was in evening dress. No one knew his name: he spent his entire time sleeping, although for the last day or so he had been suffering from tremor and spasms sometimes almost amounting to convulsions.

I asked the date of the man's reception

into the hospital: he had been brought there on the morning of the 22nd of June.

I looked at Materick.

"The murder took place on the night of the 21st," I said.

The doctor said a few more words to the Lady Superintendent, who immediately agreed to my request to be allowed to sit by the patient's bedside. I took up my place there.

"I will return to see you this evening, or if you leave the hospital you might call on me," said Materick. "Of course, if we can get this man to confess that his name is Colville, your friend ought to see him."

The doctor left the hospital, and I found myself practically alone with the patient.

The case was a bad one, likely to terminate fatally within a few hours at farthest. At my desire one of the nurses brought a screen to put round the sick man's bed. He lay muttering to himself, tossing from side to side. He could scarcely be aroused to take either food or medicine. Once he opened his eyes. He stared at me when he did so, and I saw their colour distinctly. They were grey, and very like my friend's in expression.

"Colville," I said, involuntarily, "do you know that Lidderdale has returned to England? He has just been arrested for the murder of Mrs. Colthurst. Now, you alone can explain that crime. Do not go to your Maker with that unconfessed sin upon your soul."

The sick man shivered when I spoke, and stared fixedly at me. With each word I uttered, his eyes grew more and more full of an incomprehensible expression—a mixture of terror and defiance.

"Why do you call me Colville?" he asked, at last.

"Because that is your name," I answered, firmly. "I am a friend of Lidderdale's. You have been guilty of a dastardly trick on your friend, and you have also committed——"

"Don't," he cried, giving way to an excess of terror. "As there is a God above, don't say the word."

"You cannot deny that your name is Colville?"

"Don't speak so loud—I am too ill to talk to you." He turned over, trembled violently, and the next moment was convulsed by spasm.

The nurse came to his assistance. When the fit had passed he sank into a deeper sleep than ever.

"I fear he will never speak again," she said, "but I have not had a case exactly like his before."

"How long is he likely to live?" I asked.

"He may lie in that condition for hours."

"Have I time to be absent for an hour or two?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"I will risk it," I replied. "The life of another hangs on that wretch's last moments of existence."

I left the hospital and drove to the police-court in Marlborough Street. There I had an interview with the Superintendent, and gave him a brief sketch of what had occurred.

"It is all-important," I said, "that Lidderdale should see this man. Will you bring him at once to Materick's Hospital?"

The Superintendent considered for a moment, and then resolved to comply.

"It is out of the routine," he said; "but I think I am justified."

He left me, returning in a moment with Lidderdale and another policeman. We all drove to the hospital, and were conducted to the ward—the screen was still round the dying man's bed. Lidderdale passed behind the screen, and we three stood without. I heard Lidderdale utter an exclamation—it



"DRINK THIS, AND THEN TELL ME THE TRUTH."

was enough—I knew that he had found his man.

“Rouse yourself, I am here,” he said, in a voice hoarse with emotion. The man started and muttered in his sleep. “Open your eyes,” continued Lidderdale. “Do you remember when you were ill last—do you remember what you confessed? Wake, Colville, wake up.”

The well-known tones burst through the terrible lethargy which was carrying the man to his grave—he opened his eyes. The police officers and I stepped a little nearer. The Superintendent took a notebook from his pocket and prepared to take down any confession which might be made.

“Am I dying?” asked the sick man.

“Yes.”

“Strange—so the inevitable has come at last,” he muttered. “I only feel dead with sleep, sleep which seems never inclined to terminate, sleep and a sort of tremor which comes over me.” He began to shake from head to foot.

The nurse came forward with a restorative; Lidderdale held it to the man’s lips.

“Drink this,” he said, “and then tell me the truth. Colville, why did you take her life?”

Colville looked at Lidderdale, and a strange smile flickered round his lips. His grey eyes, so like those of my friend, began to glitter.

“In a fit of frenzy,” he replied, after a pause. “She refused to have anything to do with me. Yes, I borrowed your name. Months ago I meant to do something of the kind, and I also managed, while with you in Africa, to secrete some of your visiting-cards. I had made careful copies of your handwriting, and knew I could imitate it sufficiently well to deceive anyone who was not a great expert. I knew she would see me if she thought I was you. She did so—but when she discovered the trick I had played on her, her scorn and rage were greater than I can describe. Then the Evil One entered into me, and I made up my mind that at

least you should not enjoy the prize which I could not obtain. I had a clasp-knife in my pocket; I opened it and, in a fit of fury, stabbed her to the heart. The moment I did the deed I repented. I ran to a decanter which contained brandy and poured out a glass—I was ill at the time—I had been queer for days and weeks. One of those awful tremors assailed me—the glass fell from my trembling hands and I cut myself. I filled up another and drained off the contents. The stimulant gave me strength to leave the house as quietly as if nothing had happened. Well, she has gone to her Maker.”

“Where you are following her—may God forgive you,” said the other man.

Making a tremendous effort, Colville suddenly sat up in bed.

“Is it true that I am dying?” he cried; his eyes grew full of terror. The two police officers pushed aside the screen and entered.

“Get him to sign this paper,” said the Superintendent, handing the one on which he had been hastily writing to Lidderdale.

“Put your name here, Colville,” said Lidderdale.

The man looked wildly around him—then took the pen in his hand.

“Sign your confession at once,” said the Superintendent.

Colville gave an awful laugh.

“Your law cannot have me now,” he said, looking at the Superintendent; “you are too late for that—so I don’t mind signing.” He scribbled his name feebly at the bottom of the sheet of paper. “She is lost to us both, Lidderdale,” he continued, “that is my only comfort.”

This was his final remark. He sank back on his pillows in another fit, in which he died.

Of course, the case against Lidderdale fell through. He left England almost immediately afterwards.

“I have nothing to live for,” he said to me on the day that I saw him off.

But he is young, and Time, the healer, may cause him to think differently yet.