

UNIFORM WITH SECRET SERVICE

The FEMALE DETECTIVE



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THE
FEMALE DETECTIVE

EDITED BY
ANDREW FORRESTER JUN.,
AUTHOR OF
"THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE," "SECRET SERVICE," ETC. ETC.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED

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Introduction

Who am I?

It can matter little who I am.

It may be that I took to the trade, sufficiently comprehended in the title of this work without a word of it being read, because I had no other means of making a living; or it may be that for the work of detection I had a longing which I could not overcome.

It may be that I am a widow working for my children—or I may be an unmarried woman, whose only care is herself.

But whether I work willingly or unwillingly, for myself or for others—whether I am married or single, old or young, I would have my readers at once accept my declaration that whatever may be the results of the practice of my profession in others, in me that profession has not led me towards hardheartedness.

For what reason do I write this book?

I have a chief reason, and as I can have no desire to hide it from the reader, for if I were secretly inclined I should not be compiling these memoirs, I may as well at once say I write in order to show, in a small way, that the profession to which I belong is so useful that it should not be despised.

I know well that my trade is despised. I have all along known this fact so well that I have hidden my trade from those about me. Whether these are relations or friends, or merely acquaintances, I have no need here to tell.

My friends suppose I am a dressmaker, who goes out by the day or week—my enemies, what I have, are in a great measure convinced that my life is a very questionable one.

In my heart of hearts I am at a loss to decide at which side I laugh most—at my friends, who suppose me so very innocent, or at my enemies, who believe me to be not far removed from guilty.

My trade is a necessary one, but the world holds aloof my order. Nor do I blame the world over much for its determination. I am quite aware that there is something peculiarly objectionable in the spy, but nevertheless it will be admitted that the spy is as peculiarly necessary as he or she is peculiarly objectionable.

The world would very soon discover the loss of the detective system, and yet if such a loss were to take place, if the certain bad results which would be sure to follow its abolition were made most evident, the world would still avoid the detective as a social companion, from the next moment he or she resumed office.

I have said I do not complain of this treatment, for as I have remarked, I am quite aware that society looks upon the companionship of a spy as repulsive; but, nevertheless, we detectives are necessary, as scavengers are called for, and I therefore write this book to help to show, by my experience, that the detective has some demand upon the gratitude of society.

I am aware that the female detective may be regarded with even more aversion than her brother in profession. But still it cannot be disproved that if there is a demand for men detectives there must also be one for female detective police spies. Criminals are both masculine and feminine—indeed, my experience tells me that when a woman becomes a criminal she is far worse than the average of her male companions, and therefore it follows that the necessary detectives should be of both sexes.

Let it suffice, once for all, that I know my trade is a despised one, but that being a necessary calling I am not ashamed of it. I know I have done good during my career, I have yet to learn that I have achieved much harm, and I therefore think that the balance of the work of my life is in my favour.

In putting the following narratives on paper, I shall take great care to avoid mentioning myself as much as possible. I determine upon this rule, not from any personal modesty, though I would remark in passing that your detective can be a modest man or woman, but simply to avoid the use of the great I, which, to my thinking, disfigures so many books. To gain this end, the avoidance of the use of this letter, I shall, as much as possible, tell the tales in what I believe is called the third person, and in what I will call the plainest fashion.

I may also point out, while engaged upon these opening lines, that in a very great many cases women detectives are those who can only be used to arrive at certain discoveries. The nature of these discoveries I need here only hint at, many of them being of too marked a character to admit of their being referred to in detail in a work of this character, and in a book published in the present age. But without going into particulars, the reader will comprehend that the woman detective has far greater

opportunities than a man of intimate watching, and of keeping her eyes upon matters near which a man could not conveniently play the eavesdropper.

I am aware that the idea of family spies must be an unpleasant subject for contemplation; that to reflect that a female detective may be in one's own family is a disagreeable operation. But, on the other hand, it may be urged that only the man who has secrets to hide need fear a watcher, the inference standing that he who fears may justifiably be watched.

Be all this as it may, it is certain that man and woman detectives are necessities of daily English life, that I am a female detective, and that I think fit to make some of my experiences known to the world. What will their value be?

I cannot guess—I will not say—I do not care to learn. But I hope these narratives of mine will show that granted much crime passes undetected, much of the most obscure and well-planned evil-doing is brought to the light, and easily, by the operation of the detective. Furthermore, I hope it will be ascertained that there is much of good to be found, even amongst criminals, and that it does not follow because a man breaks the law that he is therefore heartless.

Now—to my work.

Tenant For Life

It often happens to us detectives—and when I say us detectives, of course, I mean both men and women operatives—that we are the first movers in matters of great ultimate importance to individuals in particular, and the public at large.*

*It is perhaps as well here to remark that the MS. of this work has been revised by an ordinary literary editor. It does not appear as actually written by the compiler. This supervision may be injurious to the *vraisemblance* of the work, but by its exercise some clearness of style has been attained.

For instance, a case in point only came under my notice a few weeks since.

A lady of somewhat solitary and reserved life, residing alone, but for a housekeeper, died suddenly. Strangely enough, her son arrived at the house two hours before the lady breathed her last. The house in which the death took place being far from a town, and it being necessary that the son should almost immediately return to London, the house was left for some time in the care, or it were more consistent to say under the control, of the housekeeper already mentioned—a woman who bore a far from spotless character in the neighbourhood of her late mistress's dwelling.

To curtail that portion of this instance of the but poorly comprehended efficacy of the detective police which does not immediately bear upon the argument under consideration, it may be said in a few words that in the time which elapsed between the departure and arrival of the son, the house was very effectively stripped.

The son, of course, was put almost immediately in possession of the suspicions of several neighbours as to the felony which they felt sure had been committed, and this gentleman was very quickly in a position to convince himself that a robbery had been effected.

The housekeeper was spoken to, told of her crime, which insolently she denied, and was at once dismissed. She foolishly threatening law proceedings, on the score of defamation of character.

The son of the deceased lady refused to take any action in the matter of the robbery, urging that he could not have his mother's name and death mixed up with police-court proceedings, and he allowed the affair, as he supposed, to blow over, though it should be here observed that he suffered very considerable inconvenience by the absence of certain papers which were associated with the death of his mother.

Four months pass, and now the police appear upon the scene, and with an efficiency which is an instance of the value of the detective force. The police had, of course, in the ordinary way of business, heard of the robbery referred to, but could not move in it while no prosecutor gave them the word to move. But if the police had not moved in the case, they had not forgotten it.

A robbery takes place in the neighbourhood, and a search-warrant is granted. A search is prosecuted, and in a shed beyond a small house, belonging to a couple whom the housekeeper already mentioned knew, and who had been up at the house while the housekeeper was left in sole charge of it, was found a japped cash-box.

The detective who made this discovery almost immediately identified the box with the robbery at the house of the late lady, and upon finding, after a close examination, the initial of her surname scratched

upon the lid, he became so convinced his conjecture was right, that, upon his own responsibility, he took the tenant of the house in question into custody.

The case went clear against the unhappy man. The police, by a wonderful series of fortunate guesses and industrious inquiries, found out the son, and this latter was enabled to produce a key, one of a household bunch belonging to his late mother, that opened the cash-box in question, which had been forced in such a manner that the cash-box had not been broken.

This gentleman, however, refused to prosecute, and the prisoner got off with the fright of his arrest and an examination.

Which of the two, the gentleman or the detective, did his duty to society, is a question I leave to be answered by my readers. My aim in quoting this instance of the operation of the detective system is to show how valuable it may become, even where should-be prosecutors make the mistake of supposing that leniency and patience form a much better course of conduct than one of justice and fair retribution.

The detective police frequently start cases and discover prosecutors in people who have had no idea of filling any such position.

Many cases of this character, several of them really important, have come under my own direction. Perhaps the most important is that which I am about to relate, and to which I have given the title of "Tenant for Life."

This case, as it frequently happens, came upon me when I was least expecting business, and when, indeed, I had "put the shutters up for the day," as an old detective companion of mine—a fellow long since dead (he was killed by a most gentlemanly banker who had left town for good, and who, after flooring John Hemmings, left England for good also)—would say.

It was on a Sunday when I got the first inkling of one of the most extraordinary cases which has come under my observation. It is on Sundays that I always put the shutters up. Even when I am engaged hot in a case, I am afraid I relax on a Sunday. I will not work if I can help it on a Sunday. I swim through the week, so to speak, for Sunday, and then I have twenty-four hours' rest before I plunge into my sea of detections once more.

I am what is called a talking companion, and I am bound to admit that women are in the habit of talking scandal, with me for a hearer, within three hours of my making their acquaintance.

Amongst others that I knew some years ago was a Mrs. Flemps. I think I first made her acquaintance because her name struck me as out of the common—it was out of the common, for I had not known her twenty-four hours before I learnt that she was married to a cabman, who on his father's side was a Dutchman who had been in the eel trade at Billingsgate market.

It was this acquaintance, it was the mere notice of the name of Flemps, which led to the extraordinary chain of events which I shall now place before the reader exactly as I linked them together—premising only that I shall sink my part in the narrative as fully as I shall be able.

As I have said above, I make Sunday a holiday, and coming to know the Flemps, and ascertaining that the cabman—perhaps with some knowledge of that cheerful way of spending the Sunday which I have heard distinguishes foreigners—was in the habit of using his cab as a private vehicle on a Sunday, and driving his wife out, I found my seventh days even more cheerful than I had yet discovered them to be. In plain English, during the summer through which I knew the Flemps, I frequently drove out of London with them a few miles into the country.

Flemps used to drive, of course, and I and his wife were inside, with all the windows down, in order that we might get as much of the country air as possible.

I find, by reference to the diary I have kept since I entered the service, and at which I work equally for pleasure, and to relieve my mind of particulars which would overweight it, for I may add that in this diary, which would be intolerable printed, I fix down every word of a case I hear, as closely as I can remember it, and every particular as near as I can shape it—I say I find, by reference to my diary, that it was the fourth Sunday I rode out with the Flemps, and the sixth week of my acquaintance with those people, whom upon the whole I found very respectable, that I got the first inkling of one of the best, even if one of the most dissatisfactory, cases in which I was ever engaged.

The conversation which called up my curiosity I am enabled to reproduce almost as it was spoken, for by the time the ride was over I had got so good a thread of the case in my head, that I thought it necessary to book what I had already learnt.

Mrs. Flemps was a worthy woman, who loved to hear herself talk, a failing it is said with her sex. From the hour in which I made her familiar with me, I ceased to talk much to the good woman; I listened only, and rarely opened my mouth except to ask a question.

By the way, I should add here that I in no way spunged upon the Flemps; I always contributed more than one-third to the eatables and drinkables we took with us in the cab, and thereby I think I paid my share of the cab, which would have taken them whether I had been in London or Jericho.

The first words used by the couple in reference to the case attracted my attention.

We had got into the cab, she and I, and he was looking in at the window as he smoothened his old hat round and round.

"Jemmy," he said, her name being Jemima, "where shall us drive to-day?"

"Well, Jan," said she—he had been christened after his Dutch father—"we aint been Little Fourpenny Number Two way this blessed summer."

"That's it," said Jan, with a triumphant, crowing tone. "Little Fourpenny Number Two."

And mounting his box, he drove out of the yard so briskly that for a moment, as we went over the kerbstone, I thought the only road we were about to take was that of destruction.

The extraordinary highway we were about to take naturally led me to make some inquiries; for it can readily be understood by the public that if there is one thing a detective—whether female or male—is less able to endure than another, it is a mystery.

"That's a queer road we're going, Mrs. Flemps," said I; and speaking after the manner of her class—for I may say that half the success of a detective depends upon his or her sympathy with the people from whom either is endeavouring to pick up information.

"Yes," said Mrs. Flemps; and as she sighed I knew that there was more in the remark than would have appeared to an ordinary listener. I do not use the words "ordinary listener" at all in a vain sense, but simply with a business meaning.

"Is it a secret?"

"What, Little Fourpenny?" she called out, as we bumped over the London stones.

"Number Two," I added, with a smile.

She shook her head.

"There was no number two," she replied, "though there ought to have been."

Now this answer was puzzling. Both husband and wife felt mutual sympathy in the affair of "Little Fourpenny Number Two;" and yet it appeared no Little Fourpenny Number Two had ever existed.

"Tell me all about it, Mrs. Flemps," said I, "if it's no secret."

She answered in these words—"Which I will, my dear, when we reach the gardings, but can't a jolting over the stones."

We drove six miles out of London, and got on the level country road. There is no need to say whither we went, because *places* are of no value in this narrative.

It is enough to say it was six miles out of London, and on a level country.

As we made a turn in the road Mrs. Flemps became somewhat excited; and almost immediately afterwards the cabman turned round, and looking at his wife, he said—

"We're a coming to the werry spot."

The cab was drawn about two hundred yards further on, and then Jan Flemps pulled rein, and got off his box.

"There's the werry milestone," he said, pointing to one at the side of the road; "and the werry identical where I lost Little Fourpenny Number Two."

And it was at this point that Mrs. F. remarked—

"Cuss the thutty pound."

"Never mind, old woman, we wanted it bad enough then, Lord knows; and but for it this cab might never ha' been druv by me, so put an han'some mug on it, old woman."

The reader will concede that this conversation was sufficiently appetizing to attract any one—to a detective it spoke volumes.

I said nothing till the cab was once more in motion, and I could tell how heartily the cabman appreciated the spot by the slow pace at which we left it behind us, and by the several times he looked back lingeringly at the milestone.

Meanwhile Mrs. Flemps, within the cab, was shaking her head dolefully; and I could see, by the wistful, far-away appearance of her eyes, that in thought she was a long way beyond me and the cab.

When she woke up, which she did in a short time with an exclamation, and such a rough, cutting sentence as I have noticed the rougher sort of folk are in the habit of making the termination of any show of sentiment, I reminded her that she had promised to tell me the history of Little Fourpenny. "Wait, my dear, till we get to the gardings, and Jan himself will oblige. He tells the tale better nor I do."

Therefore I said no more till we had ended our plain dinner at the tea-gardens, which were our destination. The meal done, and Jan at his pipe, I reminded Mrs. F. once more of her promise; and she mentioning the matter to the cabman, it appeared to me that he was not at all disinclined to refresh himself with a recital of the history.

It is necessary that I should give it, in order that the reader may appreciate how a detective can work out a case.

"I were a going home in my cab one night, more nor a little time ago—"

"It were in 'forty-eight, when the French were a fighting Louy Philippe," said the cabman's wife.

"I was a goin' home, not in the best o' humours, when a comin' across 'amstead 'eath I overtook a woman a staggerin' under what I thought were a bundle."

"It were a child," said Mrs. Flemps.

"Yes, it were," the cabman continued; "and it had on'y been in this precious world a fortnight. I pulled up, seein' her staggerin'; and to cut it short hereabouts, I told her she might come up on the box along o' me, for it were not likely I could let a tramp in on the cushions. She were werry weak, and the infant were the poorest lookin' kid I ever seed—yet purty to look at as I sor by the gass."

"As he sord by the gass!" responded Jemima.

"Well, arter some conversation with that young woman, I pulled up at a public, and treated her and your obedient; and which whether it were the rum put me up to it, or it were in me before and I knowed it not, no sooner had I swallowed that rum than the idea was plain and wisible afore me.

'What are you a goin' to do with it?' I said, pointing to the young un. 'I don't know,' says she, a lookin' out towards London. 'Father?' says I. 'No,' says she. I then looks out, and points towards London, which she thereupon shook her head; but she didn't turn on the water, being, I think, too far gone for that. 'Which,' said I, 'if you can do nothin' for her (knowin' as she'd told me it was a girl) somebody else may—my old woman and me, you see, never havin' had no family.'"

"Never having had no family—more's the pity," responded Mrs. Flemps.

"'Why,' says she, continued the cabman, 'who'd be troubled with another woman's child?—women have enough trouble with their own.' 'I would,' says I, 'my old woman never having had any, and not likely to mend matters.' 'Will you?' says she, and such a hawful light came upon that young woman's face as I never wish to see on another. 'Yes,' says I, 'and it shall be all fair and above board, and I'll give you my old woman's address, and what money I've got for her'—which it came about she got called Little Fourpenny, being that sum I had in my pocket after payin' for the rum, after a whole day out and only a shillin' fare. Well, the longs and the shorts of it are that that there wretched young woman gave me up the baby, and I gived her the fourpence, and she got down off the cab and went down a turning, and blest if ever she looked back once, and blest if ever she called at our place once—p'r'aps she lost the address though, and if she did, why she were not so bad after all, and p'r'aps she died—anyhow, that's how we came by Little Fourpenny."

"That's how we came by Little Fourpenny," responded Mrs. F., adding, as a kind of Amen, "blesser little 'art."

"Yes," said I, "but what of Little Fourpenny Number Two?"

"Ha, that's on'y five year ago. My Jemmy—meanin' Jemima, wasn't best pleased when I brought that poor Little Fourpenny home, and I think she thought I knew'd more of it than I did till she growed so uncommon unlike me—but let my wife have thought as she might, I'm sure no mother was ever sorrier than her were when Little Fourpenny was took and changed for the better."

"Much for the better!" said Mrs. F., with two or three tears in her eyes, as I detected.

"Lord, I see her now a comin' with my dinner, bein' not so much nor ten year old, and *all* the rank with a word for Little Fourpenny. All the fellers o' the rank wanted to stand when Little Fourpenny went off the road, which it was but nat'ral. Yes, we missed her when she died at nine."

"At nine," responded Mrs. F., adding, "five years ago."

"And it was but nat'ral we should think as our Fourpennurth was a good one, and as we was alone and might find another, which was the reason, as p'r'aps I began lookin' after Little Fourpenny Number

Two, and bless you, my dear, cabmen, and I dersay policemen, don't have to look far any night o' the week without finding a wand'rin' woman as 'as got a little un she don't know what on earth to do with."

"Little Fourpenny hadn't been off the rank three months afore, sittin' on that very milestone as I pointed out, and one evenin' in this very month o' July, there I saw her. My 'art was in my mouth, for it was as though all them years had never been, and jest as though Little Fourpenny's mother was jest afore my hoss's head agin. *It* was another on 'em. She was a woman with a little un as she didn't know what on earth to do with. Which I spoke to her, and havin' that experience of our gal, I soon made 'er understand me, though I do assure yer my 'art was in my mouth as I thought o' the other. She didn't understand me a' fust, but she did at last, and I thought she were orf 'er 'ed abit by the way she went on, sayin' as Providence 'ad interfered, when it were on'y *me*. And she took the address greedy-like, but when I offered her the five shillin's, doin' it pleasant like and callin' her mate, she shrinks back she does, and calls out to Heaven if she can sell her child. Which then promisin' to call and see my old woman, and kissin' the child till it got into my throat agin', she run orf with her arms wide out, and goin' from side to side like a jibber—which *she* never come to see the old woman!" "Which she never come!" responded Mrs. F.; adding, "which if she had what could I 'a said, and which if she'd tore my eyes out I could not ha' complained."

"*For* you see," continued the cabman, "that there child and that there old woman o' mine never met." "Never met!" responded Mrs. Flemps.

"*For* you must know," continued the cabman, "*I* sold that there child o' that there woman afore I'd left that there milestone a mile behind."

"A mile behind!" adds Mrs. Flemps, shaking her head.

"Lord lead us *not* into temptation, but I could not rersist that there thutty poun', bein' at that identkle time werry hard up, owin' to havin' to pay damages for runnin' down a hold man which was more frightened nor hurt, but the obstinest old party ever a man druv, and had to pay 'im that identkle sum o' thutty poun's, which it seemed to me a kind o' providence when the woman offered that identkle sum, since it seemed to me as I was taken pity on acos of runnin' down that obstnit hold gent while hard a thinkin' o' lost Little Fourpenny."

Now by this time my curiosity had been thoroughly roused. It was impossible to avoid comprehending that the child that the wretched mother had given up to the cabman had been literally sold by him within twenty minutes of the time when he came into the possession of her.

And perhaps it is necessary that I should remark that I was not struck with the idea that it was at all unlikely that this cabman should have met a second woman in his life ready to part with her child. I am, detective as I live, almost as much ashamed as pained to admit that there is not a night passes in this large city of London during which you are unable to find wretched mothers ready to part with their children. Perhaps I should add that my experience leads me to believe that these poor women are mothers for the first time—mothers of but a very short duration, and that therefore, while they have not been with their little ones long enough to be unable to separate from them, they are still under the influence of that horror of their position, and consequent fear or dread of the child, which is the result of their memory of a time when they were free and respected. These young women are mostly seduced servant and work girls. Poor things!—we detectives, especially us women detectives, know quite enough of such matters.

Said I to the cabman—

"Who was the woman who took the child?"

"Why, 'ow should *I* know? I was a joggin' on, with the little un on the floor o' the cab, atween the two cushions to prevent co-lisons, when she calls 'Cab!' to me. 'Gaged,' says I. 'I'll pay you anythink, says she. 'Well,' thinks I, 'anyhow you're a queer customer.' She were about thirty—a wild looking party as ever I saw by the gas-lamp, under which she was standin', but she were a real lady, and had dark eyes. 'Can't do it,' says I. Then she says, 'Have you come far down the road?' 'About three miles,' says I. 'Ha,' says she, 'ave you seen a woman with a child?' which, continued the cabman, you might ha' knocked me orf my box when she made that there remark—'a poor woman,' says she, 'with a very young child?' And then as luck would have it—or *ill* luck—which sometimes I think it were one, and at other times I'm sure it were the other; as some luck would 'ave it, at this identkle moment, the child sets up a howlin' fine. 'What's that?—oh, what's that?' she asks, a flyin' at the cab-windy, and I can tell you I was nearly a tumblin' orf my box, I was so took aback. 'Heaven

'ave sent it!' says she, lookin' in the cab, and I s'pose seein' on'y the child there at the bottom o' the cab, 'which,' says I, 'it's that identkle young woman's you was speakin' of!' Then she screals out she does; an' if there'd been a p'leaceman about I should ha' been in Queer Street, savin' your presence, my dear, a talkin' about the p'leace on a Sunday. Then I ups and tells her that me and my missus have lost our Little Fourpenny, and how I've got the kid; and then she calls out again that Heaven is at the bottom of it, and she says—'My good man,' says she, 'here's thutty poun's,' which there was, all in gold, 'and take it, and give me the child;' and then she says how that I can have no love for the child—not havin' ever seen it afore, and 'ow by doin' as she wished, I might do great good, and, to cut it short—after a time—I gived 'er the child, and I took the thutty poun's; and that's how it was my old woman never, never saw the little un, and how it was, as I hoped that there poor mother ud never call at our house. She never did; so p'r'aps them poor mothers are all alike, and don't care to look them in the face as they once deserted, and can't reasonably ask back again, and that's how it was that my old woman never saw Little Fourpenny Number Two."

"Never saw Little Fourpenny Number Two!" responded Mrs. Flemps.

Now I may say at once that this tale, told in common English, by an ordinary man, smoking his common clay pipe in a plain tea-gardens in the suburbs of London—this tale called forth all the acumen and wits with which nature has endowed me. The detective was all alive as that extraordinary recital, told with no intention for effect, was slowly unfolded to me, with many stops and waves of the pipe, and repetitions with which I have not favoured the reader.

It was a most remarkable history, that of the woman who had obtained the child, from beginning to end.

The series of facts, accepting the cabman's statements as honest, and as he had no purpose to serve in deceiving me, I was at once inclined to suppose he spoke the truth—as he did; the series of facts was wonderful from the beginning of the chapter to the end.

The extraordinary list of unusual facts began with a woman, evidently belonging to a good class, being out late at night and hailing a cab. Then followed her inquiry concerning a woman with a very young child. To this succeeds the discovery of the child in the cab, and the ejaculation that Heaven has been good to her; and finally had to be considered the fact of her having thirty pounds in gold with her, and which she offers at once to the cabman for the child.

Accustomed to weigh facts, and trace out clear meanings, something after the manner of lawyers, a habit common to all detectives, before I began in a loose, half-curious way to question Flemps upon the history he had betrayed to me, I had made out a tolerable case against the lady.

As she knew that the woman had passed that way it appeared evident to me that she had seen her, guessing her to be a beggar, at some earlier period of the evening than that at which she addressed the cabman. And as after the cabman refused her for a fare she expressed great joy at hearing the crying of the infant, the inference stood that her despair at the cabman's refusal was in some way connected with the child itself.

Continuing out this reasoning—and custom was so ready within me that the process was finished before the cabman had—I came to the conclusion, after duly balancing the fact of her having with her thirty pounds in gold, and her bribing the cabman with it, that for some reason unknown she had pressing need for a child. I felt certain that she had seen the woman in an earlier part of the evening, that she had set out to overtake the woman, to purchase the child of her, if possible, and that meeting the cab, the driver of which could have no knowledge of her, she had hailed him in the hope of more speedily overtaking the woman and child.

The questions, as a detective, I wished answered were these:—

Who was she?

Why did she act as she did?

Where was she?

At once I apprehended I should have little difficulty in ascertaining where she was, provided she still lived in the district, and provided the cabman could give me some clue by which to identify her.

For I may tell you at once that I saw crime in the whole of this business. Children are not bought in the dark in the midst of fear and trembling, if all is clear and honest sailing.

So pretending to be really interested in the story, which I was, I began putting questions.

"Did you ever learn anything more?"

"Nothink," said he.

And his wife, of course, responded and repeated.

"You never saw the woman again?"

"Never."

Echoed by Mrs. F. I will leave her repeats out from this time forth.

"How long ago did it happen?—you interest me so much!"

"Five years this blessed July."

"Then it was in the July of 1858." I knew that by the date of Little Fourpenny's death.

"It was."

[I should here point out to the reader that though I put this singular case, "Tenant for Life," as the leading narrative in my book, it is one of the later of my more remarkable cases.]

"You are quite sure about the milestone?" I said.

"Quite," he replied.

"What kind of a woman was she?"

"Which," the cabman continued, "I could no more say nor I could fly—save she was wildish-looking, and had large black eyes, and was an out-and-out lady."

"Did she—pardon my being so curious—did she have any peculiarity which you remarked?"

"Any peccoliarity? No, not as I am aweer on."

"No mark—no way with her which was uncommon?"

"None sumdever," said the cabman. "Ha! I year 'er now. '*Firty* poun's,' says she, which I could hardly unnerstand 'er at fust; '*firty* poun's for that child,' says she, '*firty* poun's.' But what 'ave you started for, my dear?" he asked me.

"Which," here his wife added, "well she may start, pore dear, with you a tellin' about Little Fourpenny in a way to child 'er blood."

Now, the fact is, I had started because I thought I saw the end of a good clew. We detectives have quite a handbook of the science of our trade, and we know every line by heart. One of the chief chapters in that unwritten book is the one devoted to identification. The uninitiated would be surprised to learn how many ways we have of identification by certain marks, certain ways, certain personal peculiarities—but above all, by the unnumbered modes of speaking, the form of speaking, the subjects spoken of, and above all the impediments or peculiarities of speech. For instance, if we are told a party we are after always misplaces the "w" and "v," we are inclined to let a suspected person pass who answers in all other ways to the description, except in this case of the "v" and "w." We know that no cunning, no dexterity would enable the man we are seeking to prevent the exhibition of this imperfection, even if he were on his guard, which he never is. He may change dress, voice, look, appearance, but never his mode of speaking—never his pronunciation.

Now, amongst our list of speech-imperfections is one where there is an impossibility to pronounce the troublesome "th," and where this difficult sound is replaced by an "f," or a "d," or sometimes by one or the other, according to the construction of the word.

This imperfection I hoped I had discovered to be distinguishable as belonging to the woman who had purchased the child.

"Do you mean, Mr. Flemps," I said,—“do you mean to say that the woman said *firty* instead of *thirty*? How odd."

"'*Firty*,' says she, and that were the reason why I could not comperend 'er at fust. '*Firty*,' says she; an' it was on'y when the gold chinked as I knowed what she meant."

"And you have never seen nor heard from her any more?"

"It wasn't likely as she would, if you'd a seen her go off as she did."

"And which way did she go?"

"Why a co'rse as I *met* her, my dear, and as she was coming from somewhere to foller the young woman with the kid, she backed to'ards London, and I 'ad to pass 'er afore I left her behind, an' she never so much as looked at me."

I did not ask any more questions.

I suppose I grew silent; and especially so when we got in the cab and were driving once more home. Indeed, Mrs. Flemps said she had no doubt that *he* had quite upset me with their tale of Little Fourpenny.

When we reached the milestone, however, Mrs. F. was as full of the subject as ever; and I need not say that—though perhaps I said little—I was very hard at work putting this and that together.

After we had passed the milestone, every house on each side of the way had a strange fascination for me. I hungered after every house as it was left behind me, fancying each might be the one which sheltered the infant.

That I would work it out I determined.

So far I had these facts:—

1.

The woman must have lived near the road, or she would not have seen the beggar and her child, provided these latter had been on the high road when seen by the former.

2.

The time which had elapsed between seeing the woman and meeting the cabman could not have been very great, or she never would have hoped to find the mother and child.

3.

The occurrence had only taken place five years previously, and therefore the woman might not have moved out of the neighbourhood.

4.

The purchase of the child in such a manner suggested it was to be used for the purpose of deception—in all probability to replace another.

5.

Therefore, deception being practised somebody was injured—in all probability an heir.

6.

The woman was not needy, or she could not have offered thirty pounds in gold to a stranger, and evidently at a very short notice, for it was clear there could have been no demand for the child when she saw it with the mother.

7.

Whoever she was, she had the far from ordinary failure of speech which consists of an inability to utter the sound of “th.”

8.

Finally, and most importantly, *I had dates*.

Poor Flemps and his wife—they little thought what a serpent of detection they had been nourishing in their cab. I believe they thought I was a person living on my small property, and helping my income out by a little light millinery.

With the information I had already obtained, I determined to try and sift the matter to the bottom; and I may as well state that, not having anything on my hands at that time, I set to work on the Monday morning, telling Mrs. Flemps that I had some business to look after, and being wished luck from the very bottom of her heart by that cajoled woman.

I took a lodging in the first place as near that milestone as I could find one—it was a sweet little country room, with honeysuckle round each window.

I may at once say that the first part of my work was very easy.

Within two days of my arrival at my little lodging at the honeysuckle cottage, I had found out enough to justify me in continuing the search.

As I have said, I could have no reason to doubt the cabman, because he could have no object in deceiving me. But evidence is what detectives live upon.

The first thing I did was to find traces, if possible, of the mother.

It will be remembered that the mother showed great sorrow at losing the child, and that yet she never knocked at the cabman’s door. The inference I took was this, that as she had shown love for the child, and as she had never sought to see it after parting with it, that she had been prevented by one of two catastrophes—either she had gone mad, or she had died.

Where was I to make inquiries?

Clearly of the first relieving officer who lived past the milestone, at which she had parted with the child, and in the opposite direction to that which the cab had taken—for I know much of these poor mothers—they always flee from their children when they have parted from them, whether this parting be by the road of murder, or by desertion, or by the coming of some good Samaritan (like the cabman) who, having no children of his own, is willing to accept a child who to its maternal mother is a burden.

I went past the milestone, made inquiries, and in time found the relieving officer's house. I was answered in double quick time. I think the man supposed I was a relation, and that perhaps I would gain him some credit by reimbursing the parish, through his activity, its miserable outlay in burying the poor woman.

For she was dead.

Circumstances pointed so absolutely to her as the woman who had parted with her child, that I had no reasonable doubt about my conclusion.

In that month of July, on the night of the 15th, a woman was brought in a cart to the officer's door. The man who drove stated that he found the woman lying in the road, and that had not his horse known she was there before he did, she must have been run over.

The woman was taken to the union infirmary, and that place she only left for the grave.

She never recovered her senses while at the union hospital. She was found, upon her regaining half consciousness, to be suffering from fever, and as she had but very recently become a mother (not more than a fortnight) the loss of her child made the attempt to overcome that fever quite futile.

She died on the tenth day it appeared, and she had not spoken at her death for three.

[I should perhaps here remark that I am condensing in this page the statements of the relieving officer and a pauper woman who was nurse in the workhouse hospital.]

I was at no loss to understand that this speechlessness was due to opium, which my experience had already taught me is given in all cases where a fever-patient has no chance of life, and in order to still those ravings which would only make the death more terrible.

But during the preceding week she had said enough to convince me, upon hearing it reported, that she was the mother of the child. She had called out for her baby, pressing her poor breasts as she did so, and frequently she had shrieked that she heard the cab far, far away in the distance.

I returned to my little cottage lodging not over and above pleased. If there is one thing which foils us detectives more certainly than another, it is death. Here we have no power. Distance is to us nothing—but we cannot get to the other side of the tomb. Time we care little for, seeing that during life memory more or less holds good. Secresy we laugh at in all shapes but that of the grave.

It is death which foils us and frequently stops a case when it is so nearly complete as to induce the inexperienced to suppose that it is perfect.

I saw at once that I had lost my chief witness—the mother.

Now came the question—was the child itself alive?

If dead, there was an end of my inquiry.

However detectives never give up cases; it is the cases which give up the detectives.

It now became necessary to ascertain what children were born in the milestone district in the month of July, 1858, for I have already shown that the purchaser of the child must have come from somewhere in the neighbourhood of her purchase, and I have hinted that a child purchased under such circumstances as those set about the sale of the child in question, presupposes that the infant is to be used in a surreptitious manner, and in a mode therefore, *primâ facie*, as the lawyers say, which is in all probability, illegal, by acting detrimentally upon some one who benefits by the child's death.

To ascertain what children had been born in the district during that month of July, was as easy a task as to convince myself that the child in question had been registered as a new birth by the woman who had purchased him of the cabman.

The reader has in all probability made out such a suppositive case as I did, and to the following effect:—

The woman-purchaser saw the mother and child an hour or more before she met the cabman, and had some conversation with her.

This supposition was confirmed by the knowledge I obtained that this woman, found in the road, had a couple of half-crowns in the pocket of her dress. It will be remembered that she refused Flemps's money.

Between the time of seeing the woman and bargaining with the cabman, it may readily be supposed that a pressing demand for a newly born child had become manifest, when the woman recalled to her mind the beggar and child she had seen, hoped the poor creature's poverty would be her temptress's opportunity, and so set out to find her; when a chain of circumstances, which the ordinary reader would call romantic, but which I, as a detective, am enabled to say is equalled daily in any one of many shapes, led to her possession of the infant.

I searched two registers, and made such inquiries as I thought would be useful. Happily in both cases I had to deal not with the registrar, but with his deputy, who is, as a rule, the more manageable man. We detectives have much to do with registrars in all of their three capacities.

I knew that in all probability I had to deal with, what we call in my profession, *family* people. It was no tradesman's wife or sister I had to deal with. The cabman had said she was a *real* lady, (your cabman is one who by his daily experience has a good eye at guessing the condition of a fare), and the immediate command of thirty pounds told me that money was easy with her.

My readers know that the profession or trade of the father is always mentioned in the registration of birth; and therein I had a clue to the father or alleged father.

The probability stood that he would be represented as "gentleman."

There were three births I found, after both registers were examined, in that month, in the registration of which the-father was set out as "gentleman."

The addresses in each case I copied—giving, I need not say, some very plausible excuse for so doing; my acts being of course illustrated with several silver portraits of her majesty the Queen.

And here I would urge upon the reader that he need feel no tittle of respect for my work so far. To this point it had been the plainest and simplest operation in which a detective could be employed.

Registers were invented for the use of detectives. They are a medicine in the prosecution of our cures of social disorder.

Indeed it may be said the value of the detective lies not so much in discovering facts, as in putting them together, and finding out what they mean.

Before the day was out I dropped two of my extracts from the registers as valueless. The third I kept, feeling pretty sure it related to the right business, because of two facts with which I made myself acquainted before the day was over. The first of these lay in the discovery that the house at which the birth in question had been alleged to take place was within nine hundred yards of the milestone, where this business had commenced; the second, that the mother of the child had died in giving it birth.

I felt pretty certain that I was on the right road at last, but before I consulted my lawyer (most detectives of any standing necessarily have their attorneys, who of course are very useful to men and women of my calling), I determined to be quite certain I was not wasting my time, and to be well assured I was not about to waste my money; for it often happens that a detective, like any other trader, has to lay out money before he can see more.

Learning that the household consisted of the infant—an heiress, then five years of age—the father, and his sister, I fixed my suspicions immediately upon the latter, as the woman who had purchased the child.

If she were the woman, I knew I had the power of convicting her, in my own mind, by hearing her speak; for it will be remembered that I have said that imperfection of speech is one of the surest means of detection open to the use of a high-class detective.

Of course I easily gained access to the house. It is the peculiar advantage of women detectives, and one which in many cases gives them an immeasurable value beyond that of their male friends, that they can get into houses outside which the ordinary men-detectives could barely stand without being suspected.

Thoroughly do I remember my first excuse—we detectives have many—such as the character of a servant, an inquiry after some supposed mutual friend, or after needle-work, a reference from some poor person in the neighbourhood, a respectful inquiry concerning the neighbourhood to which the detective represents herself as a stranger. I introduced myself as a milliner and dressmaker who had just come to the neighbourhood, and, with the help of an effective card, which I always carry, and which is as good as a skeleton-key in opening big doors, soon I reached the lady's presence.

Before she spoke I recognised her by the large black eyes which the cabman had noted, even in the night-time.

She had not spoken half-a-dozen words before she betrayed herself; she used the letter "f" or "v" where the sound "th" should properly have been pronounced as "Ve day is fine," for "The day, &c."

This mal-pronunciation may read very marked in print, but in conversation it may be used for a long time without its being remarked. The hearer may feel that there is something wrong with the language he is hearing, but he will have to watch very attentively before he discovers where the fault lies, unless he has been previously put upon his guard.

I had.

I went away; and I remember as I left the room I was invited to return and make another visit. I did.

Thus far all was clear.

I had, I felt sure, found the house—the purchaser of the child—and the child herself, for the infant was a girl.

What I had now to find out was the reason the child had been appropriated, and who if anybody had suffered by that appropriation.

It was now time to consult with my attorney. Who he is and what name he goes by are matters of no consequence to the reader. Those who know him will recognise that gentleman-at-law by one bit of description—he has the smallest, softest, and whitest hand in his profession.

I put the full case before him in a confidential way of business—names, dates, places, suspicions, conclusions, all set out in fair order.

“I think I see it,” said he, “but I won’t give an opinion to-day. Call in a week.”

“Oh, dear me, no!” said I, “my dear M—, I can’t wait a week. I’ll call in three days.”

I called on the third day—early in the morning.

The attorney gave me a nod, said he was very busy, couldn’t wait a moment, and then chatted with me for twenty minutes. I should say rather he held forth, for I could barely get a word in edgeways; but what he says is generally worth listening to.

He wanted further information; he desired to know the maiden name of the wife and the place of her marriage to Mr. Shedleigh—which I will suppose the name of the family concerned in his affair.

I was to let him know these further particulars, and come again in three more days.

At first sight this was a little difficult. Singularly enough, the road to this information I found to be very simple, for as a preliminary step, ascertaining from the turnpike-man in that neighbourhood where Mrs. Shedleigh had been buried, I visited her tomb, in the hope perhaps that her family name and place of settlement might appear on the stone, which often happens amongst the wives of gentry. In this lady’s case no mention was made either of her family name or place of residence, but nevertheless I did not leave the cemetery without the power of furnishing my lawyer with information quite as good as he required.

The lady had been buried in a private vault at the commencement of the catacombs, and the coffin was to be seen through the gratings of a gateway, upon which was fixed a coat of arms in engraved brass.

Of course as a detective, who has to be informed on a good many points, I knew that the arms must refer to the deceased, and therefore I surprised the catacomb keeper considerably when, later in the day, I spoke once more with him, and told him I wanted to take a rubbing of the brass plate in question.

The request being unusual, the usual difficulties of suspicion and prejudice were thrown in my way. But it is surprising how much suspicion and prejudice can be bought for five shillings, and to curtail this portion of my narrative I may at once say I took away with me an exact copy of the late lady’s coat-of-arms. I need not say how this was done. Any one knows how to take a fac-simile of an engraved surface by putting a sheet of paper on it, and rubbing a morsel of charcoal, or black chalk over the paper. The experiment can be tried on the next embossed cover, with a sheet of note-paper and a trifle of lead pencil.

This rubbing I took to the lawyer, and then I waited three days.

He had enough to tell me by the end of the second.

In the simplest and most natural way in the world, he had discovered a reason for the appropriation of the child, and not only had that information been obtained, but the name of the man injured by the act, and his interest in the whole business was at the command of the attorney.

We neither of us complimented the other on his discoveries, each being aware that the other had but put in force the principles and ordinary rules of his business.

I had gained my knowledge by reference to registers, he his by first consulting a book of the landed gentry and their arms, and secondly by the outlay of a shilling and an inspection of a will in the keeping of the authorities at Doctors’ Commons.

The lawyer had found the arms as copied by me from the tomb-gate in a book of landed gentry, had learnt an estate passed from the possession of Sir John Shirley in 1856, by death, and into the ownership of his daughter, an heiress, and wife of Newton Shedleigh, Esq. The entry further showed

that the lady, Shirley Shedleigh, had died in 1857, and that by her marriage settlement the property descended upon her children. A child of this lady, named after her Shirley Shedleigh, was then the possessor of the estates, which were large, while the father, Newton Shedleigh, as sole surviving trustee, controlled the property.

So the matter stood.

"I can see it all," said the lawyer, who, I am bound to say, passed over my industry in the business as though it had never existed. "I can see it all. The defendant, Newton Shedleigh, marries an heiress, who, by her marriage settlement, maintains possession of her estate through trustees. As in ordinary cases, these estates devolve upon her children, supposing her to have any, and that they *outlive her*. But here comes the nicety of the question. If she has children, and they all die before her—granted that her husband outlives her, he, by right of the birth of his and her children, becomes a tenant for life in her possessions, though by the settlement, in event of the wife dying without children to inherit her property, it passes to her father's brother."

"Well?" said I.

"The motive for a supposititious heir is evident. The lady dies in childbed, as the dates of her death and of the birth of her assumed child testify—in all probability her infant is born dead, and therefore the mother dying without having given the father a just claim to the tenantage for life—by the conditions of the settlement the property would *at once*, upon the death of the wife, pass to her uncle, her father's brother. To avoid this, the beggar-woman's child has been made to take the place of the dead infant. The case is about as clear as any I have put together."

"But—" Here I stopped.

"Well?"

"Your argument suggests accomplices."

"Yes."

"Four—the father, his sister, the doctor, and the nurse."

"Four, at least," said the lawyer.

"Do you know, or have you heard of the true owner of the estates?"

The reader will observe that I and the lawyer had already given in a verdict in the case.

"I do not know him—I have made two or three inquiries. He is Sir Nathaniel Shirley. From what I can hear he does not bear a very good name, though it is quite impossible, I hear, to bring any charge against him."

"This will cost money," I said.

"It will cost money," echoed the lawyer.

I have always noticed that when a lawyer has anything not too agreeable to say, generally he echoes what you yourself observe.

"Is he rich?"

"Who?" asks the lawyer, with that love of precision which irritates any woman, even when she is a detective.

"Sir Nathaniel Shirley."

"I hear not."

"Who, then, is to pay expenses?"

"Who is to pay expenses?" says the lawyer, repeating my words. And then, after a pause, as though to show he made a difference between my own words and his, he adds—"Expenses there certainly will be."

"Shall we speak to Sir Nathaniel at once?"

"*You* can speak to Sir Nathaniel at once. As for me, I shall wait till the baronet speaks to me."

"Oh!" said I.

"Yes," replied my attorney, softly turning over a heavy stick of sealing wax, such as, in all my detective experience, I never saw equalled out of a law-office.

It stood clear that the case was to be left in my hands till it was plain sailing, and then the lawyer would take the helm. I have noticed that the law gentlemen with whom I have had to do are much given to this cautious mode of doing business.

We detectives, who know how much depends upon risk and audacity, are perhaps inclined to look rather meanly upon this cautiousness, knowing as we do that if we were as fearful of taking steps we should never gain a crust.

"I'll see you again, Mr. M—, in a few days."

"Well," said he, looking a little alarmed I thought, "whatever you do don't drop it; turn the matter over in your mind, and let me see you again in three days."

"Thank you," said I; "I'll come when I want you."

I think I noticed a little mixture of surprise and satisfaction on the lawyer's countenance—surprise that I showed some independence, satisfaction by virtue of the intimation my words conveyed that I did not mean to abandon the case.

Abandon the case!

Good as many of the cases in which I had been engaged might have been, I knew that not one had been so near my fame, and, in a small way, my fortune, as this; for I may tell you we detectives are like actors, or singers, or playwrights, who are always hoping for some distinction which shall carry them to the top of their particular tree.

I had saved some money, for I am not extravagant; and though my necessary expenses were large, I had for some years earned good money, and had laid by a trifle, and so I determined myself to find the money which was required to begin and carry on this inquiry.

So far I had got together only facts. Now I had to prove them.

To do this, it was necessary that I should gain an entry into the house.

I had, as the reader knows, planted my first attempt by calling at the house and presenting at the outset a small written card, setting out that I was Miss Gladden, a milliner and dressmaker, who went out by the day or week.

This *ruse*, practised with success upon Mrs. Flemps, and resulting in two caps and a bonnet for that lady, I had always exercised; indeed, I may say, that I took lessons as an improver in both those trades, in order the better to carry on my actual business, which, I will repeat here once again, is a necessary occupation, however much it may be despised.

If this world lost all its detectives it would very soon complainingly find out their absence, and wish them, or some of them, back again.

But I could not wait till Miss Shedleigh sent for me, even supposing that she remembered me and my application. Even this supposition was questionable.

It therefore became necessary to tout that lady once again. I sent up to the house a specimen of my work, and with it a letter to the effect that my funds were running low and I was becoming uneasy. The answer returned was that I could come up to the house on the following day at nine in the morning.

I was there to time.

The house was very splendid—magnificently appointed; and the number of servants told of very considerable wealth.

The lady of the house, this Miss Catherine Shedleigh, was one of the pleasantest and most delightful of women—calm, amiable, serene, and possessing that ability to make people at home about her which is a most rare quality, and which we detectives know sufficiently well how to appreciate.

I was located in the housekeeper's room, and I was soon surrounded with work.

I had not been in the mansion two hours before I saw the little girl upon whose birth so much had depended.

She was a very pleasant child—nothing very remarkable; and her age, as given by the housekeeper, tallied exactly with the cabman's story.

The arrival of the child, who, to look upon, was comely without being pretty, gave me that opportunity for which I was waiting. I had felt pretty sure I should soon see the heiress; knowing that if children are not desirous of seeing new faces in a house, their younger nurses always are.

"The little missy has lost her mother, hasn't she?" I asked the housekeeper, an open-faced and a candid spoken woman. Somehow we close-mouthed detectives have a great respect for open, candid-speaking people.

"Yes," said the housekeeper. "Miss Shedleigh never knew her mamma."

"Indeed! how was that? Will you kindly pass me the white wax?—Thank you."

"Mrs. Shedleigh died in childbed."

"Dear me, poor lady!" said I. Then, after a pause, I asked, "Did you know her, ma'am?"

The housekeeper looked up for the moment, a little offended. She soon regained her ordinary amiability, and replied—

"Yes, I was housekeeper to her mother, and afterwards to her father, up to the time of her marriage, and we both came to this house together."

"Ha! then you were present at her death, poor lady?"

"Pardon me, my dear," the old lady continued. "I do not think there is any need to pity my lady—as I always called her after her mother's, Lady Shirley's death—she was sufficiently good not to fear death over much."

"Did she die peaceably, may I ask, Mrs. Dumarty?"

"I was assured she did."

"Oh, you were not present, Mrs. Dumarty?"

"No, my dear, I was not; and I shall never forgive myself for having been away at the time. But the fact is, that we did not expect any addition to the family for fully two months from the time when the poor dear lady suffered; and I—I shall never forgive myself—had gone down home into the country to see our relations—I mean mine and my lady's, we both coming from one part."

"Oh!" I said, balked; for it was clear, as far as she herself was concerned, Mrs. Dumarty was valueless as one of my witnesses.

"There never was such an unfortunate business as that; and dear me, my dear, talking about it has so confused me that I think I must have made a wrong seam!. Yes, I have—it's two different lengths!"

"But the lady was not alone?" said I.

"No, not alone," replied the housekeeper; and then she broke off from the tone of voice she was using, and said, in a higher key, "But you do seem strangely interested in the family?"

"O dear, no," said I; "but it is a way of mine when I am working for a family. I beg your pardon, and will not offend again."

The old lady nodded her head seriously as she pursed up her lips and began to unrip the seam she had foundered on; but she was not silent for long. Soon she began to speak again; and as a kind of apology for having been a little severe, she became more communicative than she had hitherto shown herself.

"My lady was not alone," she said, "though more might have been about her. For instance, Mr. Shedleigh was away from home, though to be sure his sister was in the way."

"What! was he not in the house when his wife died?"

"No, poor dear; and I'm told that when he learnt the catastrophe—by electric telegraph—he was near broken-hearted, and mayhap he would have been had it not been for the little daughter. It upset him so he could not travel for two days. I learnt the news by electric telegraph, and I shall never forgive myself that I was away."

Here was information!

It was clear, if the housekeeper was to be believed, and she could have no aim in deceiving me, that the father was as ignorant as Sir Nathaniel Shirley of the real state of the case.

"Do you think," said I, leading up to another line in the case—"Do you think the doctor who attended the lady was a clever man?"

"Bless you, my dear," said the housekeeper; and I began to notice that she was becoming gratified rather than angry at the interest I was taking in the family, "Dr. Ellkins was the cleverest of medical men."

"Was?" I said, interrogatively.

"Dead," the housekeeper replied, in a kind of fatalistic voice. "He was never a very strong man, I should say, and he ought never to have tried the journey. He went to Madeiry, my dear, and in Madeiry he died."

So here was another of the four witnesses upon whom I relied beyond detection.

"Perhaps the nurse neglected the poor lady," I said, turning to another branch of my case.

"Ah me!" said the old housekeeper, "that could not be, for it was all so sudden and unexpected, and the death followed the birth so soon that she was not sent for till hours after my poor lady lay dead.

The only one she had to help her in her trouble was her dear sister, Miss Shedleigh, who saw her through all her trouble. Miss Shedleigh herself narrowly escaped with her life, and she has been like a mother to our little darling ever since."

So, of those four supposed witnesses to the birth, one only existed who could be of use to me in unravelling the secret; that one was she who had been entirely guilty of the fraud—the sister-in-law of the late lady, and sister of the self-supposing father, whom I now looked upon to be in all probability as certainly deceived as Sir Nathaniel Shirley himself. He had not reached home till two days after the

death of the lady, and therefore two days, at least, after the supposed birth of the child which now stood as the heiress to the property, which was very large.

The father was not in the house at the time of the birth or death.

The nurse had not been sent for.

The doctor was dead.

The sister-in-law alone remained. How could I approach her? It was she whose interest it was chiefly to be silent. She would be on her guard, and I could hope for nothing from her.

I began to see my chances of success getting narrower and narrower.

But I did not despair.

That same evening, after I had left the mansion for the night, I went down to the house in which Dr. Ellkins had lived, having learnt the address of the housekeeper, and I found that it was still in the occupation of a medical man, who, to be here short, was he who had purchased Dr. Ellkins's business of that gentleman, when he decided upon leaving England.

To inquire if Dr. Ellkins had had an assistant, and, if so, where he could be found, was child's play.

No; Dr. Ellkins had had no assistant.

I had thanked the doctor's housekeeper for her information, and was turning away, when I blushed for myself at the omission I had made when she remarked—

"The doctor had a 'prentice."

"And where is he?" I asked.

"Dear me, mum, how ever should I know! At one o' the 'spitals up in London I suppose, leastways, I know he said he was a going to a 'spital, and likewise to be a Guy."

This statement gave me courage, for I had had some experience of medical students. Having had a case in which one ultimately became my prisoner, I knew that when this young man had said he was going to be a Guy he meant he was about to become a student at Guy's Hospital over London Bridge.

"What was his name?" I asked.

"Dear me, mum! I do hope he's got in no trouble—his chief fault, while he was with us, being dancing—which were his fascination."

"No; no trouble. I want to ask him a question."

"Blessed be!" said the old lady; "his name was George Geffins—a young man with the reddest hair, which he were ever trying to change, and it coming out the brighter for what he did to that same."

Saying I would call again (I never did), I left the old housekeeper.

That same night I sent up word to the housekeeper at Shirley House, as Mr. Shedleigh's mansion was called, that I should not be able to be with her on the following day, and when the next sun rose it found me in London.

I was soon at Guy's Hospital, and within a quarter of an hour of seeing the building I had learnt that a Mr. George Geffins was a student at that place, and the porter, with a grin, had given me his private address.

It was then half-past nine o'clock, and upon reaching the house and getting into the passage I guessed that Mr. Geffins was at breakfast by the clicking of a spoon against a cup or saucer which I heard distinctly.

When the landlady said a lady wanted to see him, the clicking of the spoon ended.

Accustomed to hear with more than ordinary acuteness—for I have the belief that the senses may be sharpened up to any extent—I heard Mr. Geffins say—

"Why the devil didn't you say I was out?"

Then he bawled—"Is that you, Matilda?"

"No," said I; "it's not Matilda."

"Ho!" said he; (it struck me he spoke in a relieved tone)—"Ho!" coming to the door; "then who the devil *are* you, ma'am?"

It further struck me, and I am willing to admit it, that when he saw me, the gentleman in question betrayed no extraordinary inclination to become better acquainted.

The disinclination was the more marked when I said I had come upon business.

He was a dissipated looking young man, and it appeared to me lived about three years in one twelve-month.

However, he asked me into his parlour—the most forlorn and furniture-damaged apartment which I ever entered—and then awkwardly he asked me, his landlady having quitted the room with a

disturbed air, "What I wanted." He put "the" and a strong word between "what" and "I," but I refrain from quoting it.

"You were a pupil of Dr. Ellkins?"

"Oh, yes," he said, with a relieved air.

"You were so in 1858?"

"In 1858."

By this time, having got over his evident dread of me, he was beginning to suspect me, I saw.

"I only want to know whether you remember the birth of a child at Shirley House in the July of that year?"

"What, Mrs. Shedleigh's child? Oh, yes, *I* remember specially. What on earth are you asking me this for?"

"Simply because I want to find out the date of some business which relates personally to me, and which I can tell if once I know the date of the birth of Mr. Shedleigh's daughter."

"Well, I *can* tell you," said Mr. Geffins, "by as odd a chance as ever you heard. Sit down, ma'am, and excuse me going on with my breakfast; I've got to get to lecture by ten."

I sat down. It is the first lesson of a detective to oblige a victim; his second is to accept that victim's hospitality if he offers it. Nothing opens a man's or woman's mouth so readily as allowing him or her to fill yours.

"Will you take a cup of tea?" he asked.

I did immediately.

"Bless my soul," said he, "I remember the day only too well—the 15th of July it was—for well I remember seeing it on the summons paper—'That on the said fifteenth of July, 1858, you did wilfully and of malice aforethought, &c., &c.' You see the fact stood, it was our *guv's* old housekeeper's birthday, and I had promised her a surprise, and she got it in the shape of a whole bundle of crackers, all set alight at once just under her window. And the constable passing at that time, why I got summoned, and had to pay five shillings fine and thirteen shillings costs—well I remember the date. I have got the summons now. I remember it was the governor going up to Shirley House which gave me the chance of firing 'em. But by Jove," he continued, taking a great bite out of his dry toast, "I must be quick, or I shall never be in time for lecture."

"Excuse me, sir," I continued, "but I want to hear every particular about times. At what hour did Dr. Ellkins come home from Shirley House?"

"I think it was about ten—and at eleven he was rung up and had to go back to the house again!"

"Ha, exactly!" I said. "Now comes the point which especially interests me. I know he returned to the house, or I never could have wanted to know anything about this matter. May I ask why he returned to the house, or what excuse he made to you when he left his house? Did he say *he* was going back to Shirley House?"

"Oh yes! and I am quite sure he did go there, because it was the groom who came down for him."

"Is it possible? I wish you would tell me all about it!" I said in an eager tone, "seeing as you must I am indeed most interested in the details."

"Well now, look you here," and I must confess the lad improved upon acquaintance exactly as an ugly dog frequently will; "I'll tell you all about it. Ellkins was not expected to be up at the big house on that job for a good two months, and therefore you may guess he was rather surprised when he was sent for at ten p.m., on the 15th of July. He came back before eleven, and I remember I asked him if it was all right, and I remember he said no, and it never was likely to be all right."

"What did he mean by that?" I asked.

"Well, you are not easily shocked, are you?"

"No," I said, looking the young man plainly in the face.

I cannot reproduce the statement he made, but it ran plainly to the effect that Mrs. Shedleigh had not given birth to a living child, and that it was highly improbable that such could ever be the case.

Now this was the very information I wanted, but it would not have done to show this was the case, so I said, in as impatient a tone as I could assume—

"But, now, I want to know what was the time when the doctor again went to the house—if ever he went at all, which I doubt."

I must have completely thrown the young man off his guard as to my real attempt, for he set his cup down, and speaking in a far more gentlemanly tone than any he had yet used, he said—

“Oh, but I assure you that he did go to the house, and returned in about three hours. He looked amazingly upset, I assure you, and when I asked him if anything was amiss he replied Mrs. Shedleigh was dead. He said no more, and went into his room without wishing me good-night, which for him was a very extraordinary thing to do—he being rather a civil man. Well, you may judge of my surprise the next morning when old Mother Smack—I beg your pardon, when the doctor’s housekeeper said to me, ‘So there’s an heiress up at the great house. I suppose we shall have rare doings?’ Well, it was so; and when I asked the doctor he told me to hold my tongue, and added another birth had taken place. Then he begged I would say nothing about the affair, nor have I until now. But it matters little now, for I might talk about it, and damage the poor old doctor’s reputation ever so, and he would not feel it, for he has left the faculty and gone up above; let’s hope for his diploma. You see, *he* had made a mistake, and I was afraid to say anything about it, for perhaps he helped the poor lady into her coffin—doctors *do* do that sort of thing sometimes, and it can’t be helped; but really I hope, ma’am, you’ve got no more questions to ask me, and I hope I have been of service to you. If I stop any longer I shall be too late for lecture, and there’ll be no end of a row.” Well, no, I replied, he had not been of much use to me, but I thanked him all the same, and would he allow me to call upon him again?

His jaw dropped. Well, he said, he did not care much to have women about his room, for that sort of thing got about and did a fellow no good, but I might come again, and—for *he* did not want to know my name—and would I kindly send in the name of Walker? I would remember the name—“Walker, you know.” But really he *must* be off.

And so saying he bolted, leaving me in the parlour and actually alone with his landlady’s silver spoons.

I had learnt far more than he supposed, more than even he, doctor as he was, had ever suspected, and I had no need to call upon him again, although at the time I suspected I should have to surprise him by appearing in my true character, and being instrumental in subpoenaing him as a witness.

What had I learnt in addition to what I already knew of the case?

More, far more than I can openly tell my readers, and yet they must be put in possession of my discovery in some more or less circumlocutory manner.

Know then that nature can bear such evidence of the inability of certain women to become mothers of living children, that long after death, even hundreds of years after death, if the skeleton be perfect, medical men could swear that such an incapacity had existed.

With the knowledge I gained I knew that I had the proof of Miss Shedleigh’s guilt in my own hands. An examination of the remains of the late body would set the question at rest, and the cabman, if he could identify her, as I had no doubt he could, would bring home the guilt to her if she denied it.

What should I do?

My actual duty was at once to inform the legal heir, Sir Nathaniel Shirley, of my discovery. But where was he?

This I could most readily find out, in all probability, by returning to Shirley House and making further inquiries.

Upon reaching the mansion early on the following morning I could not help looking upon it with a kind of awe, the knowledge being strong within me that only a short previous time it had been to me only as other houses.

The housekeeper welcomed me with a cheerfulness which went to my heart, but I told myself I was to remember that I had to deal with justice not pity. The end of the detective’s work is justice, and if he knows his place he must not look beyond that end.

What I was thoroughly to understand in this business of a “tenant for life” was this—that by a fraud people were enjoying property to which they had no claim. This was a state of things which I, as a detective, had a right to set right, and this was the work I intended to complete.

I little thought how sincerely I was to wish I had never moved in this business—that I had never questioned the cabman’s wife, and never followed up these inquiries.

It appeared I had given great satisfaction by the work I had completed, and Miss Shedleigh had pleasantly said to the housekeeper that I was a “needle and thread treasure.”

I presume it was this success which paved the way to the housekeeper’s familiarity. Let that be as it may, it is certain this morning she answered most of my questions—questions which resulted so

absolutely out of her own remarks that she could have no suspicion I was cross-examining her, poor dear old lady.

I learnt very much during that long day's work as I sat in the housekeeper's room.

To begin with the master of the house—the housekeeper said he was a most “welcome” master, but “crotchety, my dear;” and a question or so put me in possession of his crotchettiness, which took no other shape than the endeavour to reap double as much wheat to the acre as had ever been raised by the most advanced farmers.

“Miss Shedleigh says,” continued the housekeeper, “that her devoted brother hopes if he succeeds to annihilate starvation—which our miss very truly says must be the case if he doubles the quantity of wheat in the land; seeing that then it will be so plentiful that people will not want bread, as they do now.”

I own that this statement touched me; for though I may be a detective, I am still a woman. It struck me as good and beautiful that a man should work all his life for the benefit of his fellow-men; and this the master of Shirley House certainly did, if the housekeeper's statement were truthful. I saw no reason to doubt her words.

Every day throughout the year, I learnt, he was hard at work making experiments either on the land or in a kind of chemist's shop which it appeared he had in the mansion.

He took no pleasure, dressed plainly, ate sparingly, and slept little.

Was he happy? I asked.

“How can he be off being happy,” said the old housekeeper, wise in her simple experience, “when all his life is spent in trying to help in the happiness of others?”

I changed the subject. Was he fond of his daughter? I asked.

It appeared he was devoted to his daughter in a plain, simple way; but that he had given her up almost wholly to the care of his sister.

Had he loved his wife very much? I asked.

For a moment the old housekeeper looked as about to assert her dignity again, but apparently she thought better of it, for she smiled and said—

“Yes, my dear; but she was fonder of him.”

“Indeed!” I said.

“Yes; though he was almost old enough to be her father. She was but twenty when she died, my dear; and very beautiful she looked, I do assure you, and like a woman who had done her duty. She loved him, my dear, because he was trying to do good to the world; and though she was so much younger than her husband, it made not the least difference, my dear—it made not the least difference, I assure you. And when my lady was dead, she looked like a woman who had done her duty.”

“Did her family approve of the match, ma'am?” I said, “if I may make so bold as to ask the question?”

“My lady had only her father to consult, my dear; for the only other relation to the family was Sir Thomas's brother, now Sir Nathaniel, who was far away at the time, and who was no welcome visitor down in Rutlandshire, where we come from. Mr. Shedleigh lives near London to attend the societies, and to be amongst gentlemen of science.”

“Do you ever see Sir Nathaniel, now?” I asked, going on with my stitching.

“Oh, no, we never see him; Mr. Shedleigh and he are not getting on well together, though it's my impression our gentleman allows him an income, and a larger one than Sir Thomas paid him.”

“But—though perhaps you will think I am impudent in asking questions?”

“Not at all,” the housekeeper said; “by no means. You have done that last piece beautifully.”

“Then I was going to ask, how is it that Sir Nathaniel did not get the estates with the title, for I thought estates and titles generally went together?”

Said the housekeeper, “So they do, my dear, but in *our* case it was different. Sir Thomas did not inherit the estates from his father, but made the money which purchased them by banking, for he was a banker, and the greater part of the money he began with he had from a first wife, for they were poor as a family, the sixth baronet having spent everything he could spend, and that is the reason Sir Thomas left all the estates to his daughter, for which I know Sir Nathaniel never forgave him—never.”

“Where is Sir Nathaniel?” I asked.

“He lives, my dear, though I must say you are very curious about him, for the best part at Brighton; for he has been a terrible man, and his health is not what it ought to be—but for all that he looks a gentleman, and to speak to, he is one.”

“What has he done amiss?” I asked.

But here the housekeeper failed in her reply. She could only adduce very vague and faint rumours, all of which tended to prejudice me in favour of the man to whom I knew it was my duty to submit a history of my discoveries.

“That there must be something bad about Sir Nathaniel is certain,” said the housekeeper, “or surely he would be welcome here; and he is not welcome here, though from here, I am pretty well sure, he gets what enables him to live as he does—the life of a gentleman.”

There was then a pause. I broke it by saying—

“Was Mr. Shedleigh rich when he married your young lady?”

“As compared with my lady, my dear—*no*, but as not compared with her he was well to do—very well to do. People down in our parts, of course, said my young lady, a heiress, and beautiful, had thrown herself away; but that was nonsense, my dear, for never was woman happier.”

And so the morning wore away. Each moment I picked up some new little fact that might be useful to me; but this is certain, that by the time the housekeeper’s dinner arrived, my opinion of the brother and sister Shedleigh was much softened, and I began to look with some doubt in the direction of Sir Nathaniel; for there never was a truer remark than the observation that every grain of scandal helps to weigh down a character.

I may say at once that I remained working more than a week at Shirley House, and by the seventh day my opinion of the Shedleighs was very much altered for the better.

For you must note that we police officers see so much of the worst side of humanity, that, instead of following out a Christian principle, and believing all men to be honest till we find them out to be thieves, we believe all men to be thieves till we are certain they are honest people. Hence, when I dropped upon what I call my great changeling case, I supposed, quite as a matter of course, that I had to do with a crime—as undoubtedly I had; but it should be added at once that I found the crime tinged with a character of almost nobleness. It was crime, nevertheless.

However much I might find my opinion of the Shedleighs improved, I never once wavered in my determination of ultimately informing Sir Nathaniel of the means by which he had been defrauded.

This was but justice, and justice, I have already said, is the true end of the detective’s work.

For a week I worked in that house, and during that time I had ample opportunities of convincing myself of the characters of the people in it, and of obtaining all particulars which might be useful to me, and about which the housekeeper was able to yield me any information.

It will perhaps be well to condense at this point the work of that week.

In the first place, I think I have said that Sir Nathaniel only inherited the title; the property left by Sir Thomas Shirley to his daughter being made by himself in his capacity of banker. That property consisted of no less than four large landed estates, the income from which was accumulating at what may be called compound interest.

And it was during this week that, by a suggestion from my attorney, the case appeared in another light from that in which it had previously stood. The existence of the little girl and heiress kept the father from the enjoyment of the full income yielded by his late wife’s property, which he would have possessed had the child died. It was, therefore, clear that in substituting a living child for the dead infant, and caring for that child, something more was meant than fraud. It was clear that if the desire to obtain the life-possession of the property, and this desire alone, had been the motive for fraud, a person or persons who could commit such an act would not be very delicate in removing the substituted child, or, at all events, in turning her to the best possible advantage. Yet this latter benefit had not been taken, for the supposed father actually made no claim upon his supposed daughter’s estate, but left the whole of the yearly income to accumulate. (This fact we learnt with some difficulty.)

This discovery, into the particulars of which I need not go, as they are not necessary to the elucidation of my case nor very creditable to myself, tended still more to stagger me in my first conviction that the motive for the substitution of the living for the dead child arose in the desire to keep possession of the property.

During that week, I saw Miss Shedleigh twice. Each time I was working at some kind of needlework.

“Good morning,” she said. (She was going out.) “Does not working so many hours make your head ache?”

“No, thank you,” I replied.

“The garden is quite open to you when you wish to walk,” she said.

And this was how I came to see Mr. Shedleigh; for taking advantage of that permission to use the garden, and grounds (detectives must take all the advantages offered them and all they can otherwise obtain), I came upon him examining several patches of wheat of various kinds, and with which produce it appeared to me the garden was half filled.

He was a wonderfully pleasant, open-faced man, with dark, deep eyes, and an extraordinarily sweet, loving expression of countenance—something like that of a very young and high-class Jewess.

As detectives are always asking questions about everything which they see and cannot understand, it may be readily guessed that I asked what was meant by growing wheat in a garden.

The answer I obtained made me still more desirous of clearing away that first conviction of mine, to the effect that the substitution of the one child for the other was a crime of greed.

It was from my general informant, the housekeeper, then, I learnt Mr. Shedleigh passed his whole time (in winter in the laboratory, in spring, summer, and autumn in his garden and various trial-fields on the various estates) in making experiments with wheat and other cereals, with a view to increasing the average yield of wheat per acre.—I see I have here indulged in a repetition.

It is not often that criminals try to be so good to their fellow-men—if they did, or could, they would be happier—and, therefore, the probability of Mr. Shedleigh being a criminal became still more faint as I learnt this good trait of his character. My experience is this, that a man or woman who tries to benefit society is rarely bad at bottom—if either were, he or she would not think of any other than him or herself.

Mr. Shedleigh spoke very pleasantly to me, asking me what I thought of this and that, and taking his garden-glove off in order to pull me some strawberries.

I think I went back to the house a little ashamed of myself, and possibly had I come upon an unexpected looking-glass, I might have blushed for Miss Gladden and for her work.

But I never wavered for one minute in my determination to deal out justice, to see Sir Nathaniel and let him know all. I should not have been fitted to my trade had I allowed myself at any time to be turned from my duty by pity, or any argument based on expediency.

The second time I saw Miss Shedleigh I was going home to my small lodging for the night. Said she,—“There is a person living near you—a Mrs. Blenham, I think she is called—who, I believe, is in very poor circumstances, but who hides her poverty out of respect for the better days she has passed through. I wish you would find out the true state of her case. You could perhaps manage it much better than myself.”

I did manage it, and I had the pleasure and the pain of seeing Miss Shedleigh doing that best of woman’s work, an act of necessary charity.

I had previously learnt from the housekeeper that Miss Shedleigh passed almost all her time in looking after the wants and the children of the parish.

To be plain—these Shedleighs appeared to be about as good folk as any I had ever come across.

And it was I who was to throw down the house!

I was sick of my work by the end of the week, and perhaps, without being sentimental, I may admit that I had made up my mind that I would make no money by it. My legitimate expenses, a return of what I had laid out, and no more. This was my determination with reference to money matters, and one in which I meant to be resolute when dealing with Sir Nathaniel. For I assure you we detectives are able to have consciences, and to deal in points of honour.

At the end of that week I had my plans set out, and I left Shirley House with some downheartedness, thoroughly well knowing that the next time I entered the place it would be in my true character.

Within six hours from saying “good evening” to Miss Shedleigh I was at Brighton, and in presence of Sir Nathaniel Shirley.

I had sent up word that a person of the name of Gladden (that is the name I assume most frequently while in my business) wanted to see him, and I am bound to say that the answer I heard him send down was anything but complimentary.

I was not baffled of course.

I sent up a card on which I had written “Shirley House business.”

"Tell her to come up," I heard him say.

And up "she" went.

From the moment I saw him I didn't like him. In outward appearance a gentleman beyond any doubt. But he belonged to a class of men, I could see at a glance, who never say a rude thing to your face, and never think a kind one either before your countenance or behind your back.

Self!—you could see that in every feature. Gentlemanly selfishness, no doubt; yet nevertheless perfect greed notwithstanding. With some people it calls for far less an effort to be civil than brutal, as conversely many a harsh speaking man has a heart as tender as that of a good woman.

"What do you want?" he said, in a civil tone, as I entered the room, but not looking towards me.

"To see you," I said, in as civil a tone as I could adopt, and shutting the door as I spoke.

He looked at me quickly. He had those shifting eyes which can look at no one or thing for five seconds together. I have often wondered if such people can even look steadily at their own reflections from a glass.

"Who are you, pray?"

"I am a detective," said I.

I saw him visibly shrink in his chair. Woman as I was, I suppose he thought I was a man in that disguise.

He recovered himself in a moment, but I noticed that the skin about his lips went black, and that the lips themselves became of a muddy white.

"Indeed," he said; and by the time he spoke he was, as to his words, quite collected.

Have I said he was about fifty? He was near that age. His hair was thin, and turning grey, but he brought it over his forehead nattily, and curled it effectively. He dressed very young, and in the latest fashion.

"I have come," I said, "to give you some information."

"Go on."

"When Mrs. Shedleigh died, she left a daughter."

"Go on."

I knew by the tone of the words, though they were said with great good breeding, that he was already bored.

"At least," I continued, "it was supposed she died, leaving a daughter."

He was about to start, but he thought a great deal better of it, and remained quiet. I saw, however, that the darkness about his lips increased.

"In fact," I continued, "she did not leave a daughter."

By this time he had quite conquered his agitation, and I am prepared to declare that till the remainder of our interview he never betrayed the least emotion. Whether this callousness was the result of disease or determination I have never been able to decide.

"What did she leave?" he asked.

"No children whatever."

"Ho!—then you mean to say that the Shirley property is mine?"

"Yes."

He turned in his chair, and looked hard at me. I saw he was used to such battles as had experienced him in gaining victories.

"And you know all about it?"

"All about it."

"Why do you come to me?"

"Because you are the proper person to come to."

"Why haven't you gone to them?"

"Who do you mean?" I asked.

"The Shedleighs," he replied.

"I have just left Shirley House," was my answer.

"I thought so," he added, dropping back in his chair; and harsh as this answer may appear, I can assure the reader it was uttered in the softest tones.

"Why," I urged, "how could I have learnt the particulars of this business without going to the house?"

"How much?" he asked, speaking as civilly as ever.

"How much?"

“Yes,” he continued, “how much? I suppose, my dear creature—for I accept what you say, and agree that you really are a detective—I suppose you will make your market between me and those Shedleigh people. You have been to them, and now you come to me. How much? I dare say we can manage it. I suppose you will want it in writing?”

“You mean, Sir Nathaniel, what reward do I expect for the information?”

“That’s it, my dear creature—how, much? and let me know at once. I suppose I should have to pay more than the Shedleighs if your news is true.”

“I beg your pardon,” I replied; “but the Shedleighs know nothing at all about the discovery I have made, and I have come to you at once—I have only known the truth of this matter less than a couple of weeks.”

This was strictly the truth.

“Ha! I see; you are going to them after leaving me. I don’t blame you—rather admire you, in fact. Decided clever woman, if you can carry the affair through. Come, whatever they offer to you to keep the discovery dark I’ll pay you double to make it as clear as you can against them—what do you say to that?”

“Excuse me,” I said, and I am bound to admit I already felt as though I should like to get out into the fresh sea air once more; “but I do not care to make money for this work.”

He turned and looked at me without any excitement, but with an expression on his face which clearly meant—“Is she a fool, or is she fooling me?”

“All I should require,” said I, “would be the return of the money I have laid out, and payment for my time at the ordinary pay I receive from the Government.”

“Ha!—exactly,” he replied—the expression of his face had changed the moment I began to speak of my reimbursements—“you must have the money you have laid out returned to you, with interest. But first, my dear creature, prove to me that you are really speaking reasonably.”

“I shall have to go into long particulars,” I said.

He looked calmly at me; then he said—

“You will not perhaps mind much if I smoke, will you?”

“No,” I replied, wishing myself, still more heartily, in the fresh air; for I remember it struck me that I was speaking to a being neither alive nor dead, to a kind of man who was neither fit for the grave nor the world. I think I never approached such a passionless human being.

However, it was my business to tell him of his good fortune, if indeed all kinds of fortune were not the same to him.

I began the case exactly as it occurred to me, commencing with the cabman, Flemps, and so working to the culminating point in the evidence of the medical student, George Geffins.

The only interruption he made was to ask the addresses of the cabman and the student. After writing down each, he said, “Yes!” and again became perfectly motionless.

“You know now as much as I do,” I said, at last.

And I am willing to admit that I was heartily sick of my man. I apprehend I felt that kind of disappointment and ashamed anger which a man would experience who found that the answer to his offer of marriage was a blank stare.

“I suppose I can do nothing till Monday?”

“What?” I asked.

It will be remembered it was late on Saturday night.

“Nothing till Monday?”

“May I ask, Sir Nathaniel,” said I, “what you intend to do on Monday?”

“Why I suppose, give them into custody.”

“Custody?” I asked.

“Of course; what else is there to do? They have been robbing me for five years, and these people deserve to be punished. What else can I do than give them into custody?”

For a moment, it need hardly be said, it was a difficulty for me to find any reply. At last I said—

“No, Sir Nathaniel, the Shedleighs will not have robbed you, because you will recall that I have told you Mr. Shedleigh has not touched any of the income arising from the Shirley estates.”

“But I am not to know that. Much better give them into custody, detective, and see what comes of it.”

I confess I never had anticipated any conduct approaching such cool, business-like mercilessness as this. I had designed a dozen ways of setting to work in this matter during the week, each more

considerate than the previous mode as those seven days came to a termination — not one of them approached the idea of giving Mr. and Miss Shedleigh into custody.

“I do not think I would, Sir Nathaniel; much better think it over,” I replied.

“Can’t see what there is to think over,” said the baronet. “They’ve robbed me, and therefore the only thing to do is—give them into custody.”

“You had better sleep on it, sir,” said I. “I’ll see you on Monday morning, if you please.”

“Why not to-morrow?” he asked; “why not go up to-morrow and give them both into custody? I certainly shall.”

“Thank you, Sir Nathaniel,” said I, and I fancy I spoke a little resentfully; “I do not care to do anything but rest to-morrow, and I am quite sure that the business is not very pressing.”

“Not pressing, when they have been robbing me? What nonsense you are talking, my dear creature. Well, if you like, Monday,” he said, after he had gone to the window and looked out at the night. “It will be fine to-morrow, and I may as well have the day here as not. Good night, detective.”

“Good night.”

“Here, ma’am, though, you have not given me your address.”

I gave him a card, but not one word. I believe in my own mind I was beginning to quarrel with him.

“This is your right card, I suppose, ma’am?”

“Of course it is!”

“And you’re not fooling me, my dear creature!”

“No; what could I gain by fooling you?”

This answer appeared to satisfy him.

“Where are you stopping in Brighton, detective?”

I gave him the name of a little public-house in the town at which I had rested on several occasions.

“Good night,” I said, going towards the door.

Something I suppose in the tone struck even his dull senses.

“If you want any money, or that sort of thing,” said he, “I can let you have some.” The most positive expression I had yet seen on his face I had now the power of remarking. “I’m not a rich man, you can pull along till to-morrow with—”

And here, with some exertion of a slow will, he took half-a-sovereign out of his porte-monnaie.

I had brought him news which was to put some thousands a year in his pocket.

“No, thank you,” I said, hurriedly, and thereupon I left the room.

I did not directly go to the little house I have mentioned.

I crossed the parade, and began traversing the cliff walk.

To those who have walked on a summer moonlight night high up on the Brighton cliff, with the light wind whispering as it courses by, the soft sea kissing the rattling shingle beneath, I have no need to tell how all those natural, gentle sounds increased, and at the same time saddened, the mental pain I was suffering.

He had not uttered a word of thanks—he had not shown a spark of gratitude for his good fortune.

Mind, I was not wounded in my vanity by the omission of any expression of gratitude to me, but I was pained that he showed no gratitude whatever. His good fortune came, and he took it as a right. I know that I could not avoid associating him with a certain monkey I had seen at the Zoological Gardens.

This animal—and I watched him for an hour during that holiday of mine—stood still, holding out his hand without appearing to think of what he was doing, and when anything was put in his palm, he closed his fingers upon it, shoved the goody in his mouth, and without looking at the donor, or without testifying any knowledge of the gift, again he dropped his hand out between the bars of his cage. He took what came—what more could be wanted of him?

I had done my duty as an honest detective, and I was, as I do not mind confessing, since I am out of the business, sorry I had completed it.

Let me add here, at once, since I have said I have retired from the practice of detection, that I did not effect that retirement on the money I made in that profession. I had a small income left me, which of course now I enjoy. Detectives rarely make fortunes.

When I reached the little inn to which I have already twice referred, I made inquiries touching Sir Nathaniel Shirley, and I need not say I heard no good of him. I do not assert that I discovered any positive harm concerning him, but people spoke of him with a kind of reserve, as though their sense of justice and their prejudices were pulling different ways. What, however, I did ascertain certainly

agreed with the man. He had a good income, yet he was rarely out of debt. I could understand that. He never could refuse himself what that personage desired to possess; and, though he spent all his income, no one could say who was the better for it. He always had his worth for his money, and the impression appeared to be that he rarely lost in the game of life. Unquestionably, from what I heard, he was frequently made to pay very dear where he had to pay beforehand for his pleasure—but he had it. No one could give him a good word, yet at the same time not a witness was to be found who could pronounce upon him a downright bad verdict.

I am accustomed to fall asleep the moment I get to bed, being healthy, and, as the world goes, honest and clear in my conscience. But that night I could not fall off.

The idea of Sir Nathaniel going up to town and arresting the brother and sister, just after the manner of a machine, kept me hopelessly awake. I felt it was no use appealing to his mercy—I might just as well have harangued the steam hammer in Woolwich Dockyard.

It was a nightmare of itself to imagine Mr. Shedleigh taken away from his good work of trying to make the abundant earth more fruitful—to conceive of Miss Shedleigh divorced from her poor, from her lady-life, and locked up in a prison cell.

What was to be done?

And I fell asleep only when I had quite decided what was to be done. I determined to go up in the morning by the first train, hurry to Shirley House, warn and save them. Such an act was no breach of duty. My work was to obtain Sir Nathaniel his heritage, not to punish Mr. and Miss Shedleigh.

I was awake betimes, though I had slept but for a short period, and getting up with a new sense of imprisonment and weight upon me, I made for the station, and before eleven I was in London.

Taking a cab, I reached the neighbourhood of Shirley House, and there for the first time I faced fairly the enormous difficulty I had to encounter.

I saw her as she was leaving the church. She had a very plain black prayer-book in her hand, and as she came out into the porch, a smile spread upon her face as she addressed first me and then another of those she saw.

She was one of the simplest and most unaffected ladies I ever knew.

She saw me, and nodded.

As she did so, a lady came up and touched her on the arm.

But it was absolutely necessary that I should warn her, so I went up to her and said—

“Miss Shedleigh, may I speak with you?”

“Certainly,” she replied, with extreme frankness.

“I mean up at the house.”

“Oh, call when you like.”

“Can I come now?”

She looked at me a little eagerly I marked, and then she said smilingly—“Will not to-morrow do?”

“No,” I replied; and it is evident I must have spoken wistfully, for she turned slightly pale.

“Come up at three,” she said. “I shall be quite disengaged.”

I bowed, and was falling behind her, when she turned quickly, and said, with some little asperity that I marked—

“Is anything the matter?”

“Nothing but what can be repaired,” I said, smiling, for I saw it would not do to alarm her.

But between that time and three o’clock I had discovered new cause for alarm. I saw by reference to my “Bradshaw” (a book with which the library of a detective is never unprovided) that an express train left Brighton directly after church-time. What if Sir Nathaniel should send for me at the Brighton address I had given?—and what if, finding me gone, he should take that express train and hurry on to Shirley House, with a policeman as his companion?

He was quite capable of such an act I felt sure, but I hoped, on the other hand, that his natural laziness, and his cynical belief that I had more to gain than lose by him, would together prompt him to refrain from making inquiries about me.

If he, however, did take the 1 P.M. train, it was perfectly competent for him to be at Shirley House by three, the after-lunch hour appointed by Miss Shedleigh for my interview with her. And I desire here to remark that this lady must have been one of most unusual kindness and consideration to give way to my request—I who was almost a stranger to her, and to agree to see me on that day which those ladies most devoted to their poor look upon as private, and to be passed without interference.

The time between one and three was not past very pleasantly.

At three I stood on the door-steps of Shirley House.

I confess I was ashamed of the work I had in hand.

When I came to the room in which I knew I should find her, I declare I was afraid to follow the man, and when being in the chamber, the servant had left it, and she had said, "And pray, my dear, what is it that is so important that it cannot wait till to-morrow?" I had for a few moments no power to answer.

"I am afraid," said I, "you will not feel very great pleasure in what I have to say."

"Let me hear it," she replied, with a fine, delicate smile.

"I learnt a secret of your life quite by chance two weeks since."

"A secret of my life!" she said, after a pause, during which she hesitated, and evidently tried to reassure herself, though she turned paler at the moment.

"Poor thing," thought I, "it is clear she has but one great secret, which indeed is one no longer."

"Yes," I replied, "and I must speak to you about it."

Here there came a little feeling of pride to her support, and she said, though very softly and coolly—"Must?"

"Must," I echoed.

"Pray," she continued, speaking a little highly, "to whom am I addressing myself, that I hear such a word as—*must*?"

"I am a detective," said I, using the phrase which I have so frequently uttered when secrecy has been no longer needful.

"A detective?" she said, evidently not knowing what such an officer was, and yet too unerringly guessing.

"Yes," I continued, "one of the secret police."

She started, and muttered something to herself. She uttered no cry, no exclamation of fear; indeed my long experience assures me that in the majority of cases where a sudden and terrible surprise comes upon people, the shock is so great that they generally receive the news with but little expression of their feelings. It appears as though shock rather stupifies than excites.

In a very few moments she became comparatively calm.

"What do you want?" she said.

"Indeed," I answered, "to save you."

"From what?"

"From the consequences of my duty."

She looked at me intently, and at last she smiled.

"True," she said, "you have your duty to perform as well as others. What does this conversation mean?"

"It means, Miss Shedleigh," I said, "that I know the little girl who is in this house is not Mr. Shedleigh's child."

She thought she had prepared herself for the worst, but she had not.

She trembled, and uttered a short, sharp cry, which touched one's very heart.

"There can be no doubt about it," I said, desirous of preventing her from the attempt to fence with me and my information. "The cabman from whom you obtained the little girl pointed out the very spot where he placed the child in your arms. Pray do not fancy the case could not be proved. The doctor, Dr. Elkins, may be dead, but he said enough to an apprentice he had, and whom I have seen, to show that the late lady could not have been the mother of the little girl who goes by her name. Avoid any proceedings which might be terrible. I do not know, if you denied everything, but that Mrs. Shedleigh's remains might be brought in evidence against you."

These words, as partially I intended they should, shocked her inexpressibly.

"Surely they could not so outrage my poor sister's grave?"

"Indeed you are mistaken," I said; "the law knows no pity while the truth is doubtful."

"But—but what would you have me do?"

"Confess all to Sir Nathaniel Shirley."

"Sir Nathaniel—do you know him?"

She was now truly alarmed. But she did not betray any wild excitement, such as I believe most people would suppose she would have shown.

"I left him only last night!"

A blank, deadly expression, or rather want of expression, stole over her face.

"Then all is indeed lost," said she.

"No; not yet," I replied.

"Woman, you come from him?" she said, in a tone of weeping defiance, if that term can be comprehended.

"No, indeed," I replied, "I have come of my own will to warn you against Sir Nathaniel."

"And yet you have come so recently from him." Then catching, as the drowning man at the shadow of himself on the surface of the water, she said—"Perhaps *he* does not know all?"

"He does," I said, wofully; "all, even to the addresses of the people necessary to prove his case."

"And you furnished him with this power?"

"I did. I grieve to say I was forced to do so."

"Oh, woman, woman! if you did but know what you have done."

"I have done what it was but justice to do."

"You have done a wretched thing," she said. "Sir Nathaniel will have no mercy upon *me*, and I must suffer—I alone must suffer."

"Mr. Shedleigh," said I; "had not he better know—"

"Know? Know what?"

"Why, that the—the fraud has been discovered."

"Woman, he thinks the child his."

"What! he has heard nothing of the truth?"

"Nothing; the deception was practised on him in pity, and now you come, after four years' peace, and may perhaps kill him."

"But," said I, apologetically, "remember you have deprived Sir Nathaniel Shirley of his property."

"Sir Nathaniel—Sir Nathaniel," she repeated; "it were well for him that he should never be rich, and well for him that what was done was well done."

I shook my head. I knew that right was right, and that the property was by law the baronet's.

"Sir Nathaniel," she cried, beating her right foot upon the ground—by this time all fear for herself was past—"Sir Nathaniel, had he obtained the property, would have been a beggar by this time, whereas he would never have been unprovided for had you not learnt my secret. Now he will take the estates, though, if the wish of the late owner, my sister-in-law, could be consulted, I know she would keep every poor acre from her uncle. Oh, woman, woman, if you could but judge of the injury you have done!"

"I shall have a quiet conscience, Miss Shedleigh, whatever happens," I said; "but it will be quieter if you will but let me, who have been the means of bringing destruction near you—if you will but let me save you. I am afraid of Sir Nathaniel, he seems so merciless."

"First hear me," she said. "Before you speak again you shall hear my excuse for my conduct—hear me, nor speak till I have finished. I know not by what terrible chance it has happened that you should learn a secret which I thought lay hidden in my sister's grave and my heart. How you have pieced your information together I am unable to imagine, but since you know so much I would have you know the rest, and in learning it, believe that I am to be as much pitied as to be blamed."

I bowed, feeling rather that I was the poor lady's prisoner than she in a measure mine.

"You know my brother's wife brought a dead child into the world; you know that that child, being dead when born, in event of my sister-in-law's death her property could not be enjoyed by her husband for life, simply because the child had not breathed. It was she who put it into my head first. My sister's distress came upon us very suddenly, weeks before we expected, and no preparations had been made. When she learnt that she could not be a mother, news which she inferred rather than learnt, I believe the humiliation felt by her was so great that it led to her death, as certainly as that before she died she prayed Heaven to send her a child to comfort her husband after she was gone, for from the moment the doctor left her she never believed she would rise from her bed again. It was when she cried out that many a poor woman would be glad to find a home for her puny child, that the idea came upon me of the woman and infant I had seen pass the house about nine, as I came in at the south gate, and to whom I had spoken. I gave that poor woman some silver, pitying her much when she told me her child was barely a fortnight old.

“Perhaps I had no right to speak of this mother and child to my sister, for she was not quite herself at any moment from the time the doctor left to the moment of her death—perhaps I should not have excited her already excited brain. But no sooner did she comprehend what I said than she cried that heaven had heard her prayer, and bade me go and seek the woman. I refused at first, but she looked so powerful that it seemed to me as though she was inspired, and so I said yes, I would go, and I went quickly from the house and down the road, in the direction which the poor woman had taken.

“And when I heard the child crying from within that miserable common cab, I also thought that Heaven had had pity on us. I know now how guilty I was—how very guilty I was.

“I had not left the house twenty minutes when I was returning with the child, and when I came into her room, carrying the infant, I found her still alone, though I had taken no precautions to keep her by herself. She cried out, saying Heaven had been kind, and declaring how a good angel had brought it to me.

“There was no one in the house to see my act. It was the free-school *fête* day, and the servants, with the exception of one, were at Velvet Dell, three miles away—the only girl that had remained at home had gone down to the surgery with the doctor.

“Before a quarter past ten, at which time the servants came trooping home—they had been given to ten, and there had been nobody to send for them during that terrible hour-and-a-half—before a quarter past ten she was dying in the presence of Dr. Ellkins, who looked much confused and puzzled.

“Even then I felt the enormity of the crime in which I had engaged—I did indeed. Even then I felt that had I opposed my sister’s wild idea instead of having fostered it, she herself would never have laid such injunctions upon me as she did.

“It was before the doctor arrived for the second time—and the moment the lady’s maid returned with the medicine, I sent her back for the medical man—it was before Dr. Ellkins came again that she had commanded me to swear that I would never tell the truth about the child, she saying—‘Heaven sent it, Heaven sent it, though it was but a poor woman’s daughter.’

“She told me,” the poor lady continued, looking eagerly in my face—it was now half-past three, as I saw by the great French clock on the mantelpiece, so that if Sir Nathaniel had come up by the 1 p.m. train he would soon be at Shirley House—“she told me that it would break down Newton—Newton is Mr. Shedleigh—if he lost both her and his child together, and that he was doing the world good, and that nothing must stop his work. You know,” she continued, breaking off, “she married my brother because she rather admired his intellect than himself.

“She said also I should save a poor child from destitution, and finally she declared that she willed that her uncle should not have her property—that he was wicked and wasteful, and that her husband ought to have it to do good with.

“And then, as I heard the ring at the hall-door, and as *she* knew it was the doctor returned, she raised her right hand, looked wildly at me, and said—‘I command—in the name of God.’

“She never spoke aloud again. She only whispered messages to her husband, and taking the doctor’s head between her hands, whispered something to him which made the poor gentleman tremble.

“Then she died as the servants came trooping into the house from the school treat.

“I knew how wrong I had been long before the next day. But when I looked at her still face, my dear, I could not disobey her; and I felt more unable to oppose her last wishes when our housekeeper, Mrs. Dumarty, whispered to me that she looked in her sleep as though *she* had done her duty.

“I know how wicked it all was, but as the years have rolled on I hoped I had done all for the best. My brother, when he came home at the end of those two days, found a deep consolation in the little child—and I could not tell him he was weeping over a stranger.

“I fell very ill myself, my dear, after the burial, and they thought it was grief which had overpowered me. But I am afraid it was more my conscience than my sorrow, though I am sure I loved my sister very dearly.

“As the years have gone on I have thought I had done all for the best. Sir Nathaniel has received a large income yearly from me; for I came into a good property very soon after Mrs. Shedleigh’s death. And I have made my will in his favour, so that he could never have been poor through my action—whereas had he inherited the estates he would soon have wasted them, for he is quite a prodigal.

“Now you know all. You tell me, my poor woman, you wish to save me. How can you?”

Long before the good lady asked me that woful question, I had hung my head in sorrow and regret.

Don't suppose we detectives have no soft places in our hearts because we are obliged to steel them against the daily wickedness we have to encounter. It is not long since that one Tom White, a detective of the R Division, was shocked by seeing a young thief, whom he was pursuing, fall dead at his feet. Tom White never was the thing after that; so he must have had some soft place in his heart, poor fellow.

I confess I was sorry I had shown Sir Nathaniel the cards he now held.

Could I save her?

I was determined to do my best.

"Well?" she said, a little wearily, and coming to me, she put her hand lightly on my shoulder.

I confess I never felt a hand rest so heavily upon me, though her touch was as delicate as that of the lady she must have always been.

"I am very sorry—" I said.

"There is no need," she replied.

"And very much ashamed—"

"Why, my dear? *You* have done your duty, whatever I may have omitted."

"I would rather be you," I said.

I confess these replies of mine were sentimental for a detective. Still, as they were uttered, I repeat them.

And lo! as I spoke, there came a sudden, fierce, imperious peal upon the great gate-bell.

As I glanced at the great clock, and read "a quarter to four," I felt certain the visitor was Sir Nathaniel Shirley.

He did not even send a card up; only his name, with the statement that he must see either Mr. or Miss Shedleigh.

The man added that he had replied his master was out in the grounds, but that his lady was in the house.

Positively Sir Nathaniel felt himself already so much master that he had not waited for permission to come upstairs.

"Good day, Catherine," said the baronet, entering; "I heard you were in, and so I did not wait for the man coming down again."

The coward! he was afraid she would gain the more advantage the longer the time before he saw her.

As he spoke, he glanced at me as though I stood his enemy. He had held out his hand to me, taken what I offered without remark (like my friend the ringtailed at the gardens), and now he was ready to snarl because he supposed I had nothing more to give.

When the man had left the room, he turned to me and said the following words, in as sweet a tone as he would have used for inquiring after my health.

"I thought I should find you here, you baggage!"

"Sir!" said I, and I think I was justified in the exclamation.

"Now, you don't get from me a rap," he said, still in a sweet voice, but with one of the ugliest countenances ever I remember to have remarked.

It is certain he was a miserable tyrant—infinitely more dangerous to his friends (if he had any) than to his enemies.

"And what have you got to say?" he asked, turning to Miss Shedleigh.

"What have you?" she asked, and her voice was as surprisingly steady as her manner was collected.

"You know what I have come for."

"Yes," she said, quite gently.

"So I have found you out at last?" he said.

It was clear he had passed *me* over in the matter as though I had never known of it.

Here I looked at him—perhaps a little keenly—and then it was that I noticed the blackness I had marked on the previous night round his mouth was still more observable as he stood confronting his niece's sister-in-law, and with as ugly a look of victory upon his face as a man could wear.

"One moment!" here I interposed with.

"Well?" he said, speaking sweetly, but looking at me as though I was one of the worst kind of dogs.

"I'm not wanted here. I will leave the room."

"You will do no such thing!" said he, brave I presume because he had but to do with a couple of women.

“Indeed!” said I, “take care. You know I’m a police-officer; impede me in the execution of my duty at your peril. I say I am not wanted here, and I think fit to leave the room.”

As I moved towards him another change in his face became apparent. Whether it was that he turned more generally pallid, and so he looked darker about the mouth—or whether the blackness around his lips did increase, it is certain that a change occurred.

He stood in my way till I came near him, and then he fell back almost as though I had touched him. I left the room, but before I did so, I said to Miss Shedleigh—“I shall be outside. If you call to me I shall hear you. Don’t be afraid of this gentleman.”

Then I left the room.

What was said I never learnt.

The need of my attendance was brought about by a scream on the part of the lady, whereupon I thought fit to run into the room, where I found—

But before I reach that last scene but one in this narrative I should make the reader acquainted with some observations I made.

Upon reaching the corridor beyond the room in which the war was to be fought out, I found myself near a window which, with the ordinary eyes of a detective, I knew must be in a plane with the windows of the room I had just left, simply because the view from it was such as I had noticed, without much intention of doing so (for observation of all before him becomes a habit with the detective), from those openings.

The whole of these windows looked over the sweep before the house, which was enclosed by a wall in front, and two heavy solid wooden gates. In each gate, however, was a wicket, one of which was open, and through it I saw the faces of two men who were peering from the cab, the top of which only I could see beyond the wall and gates.

Faintly as I saw their faces, and under such disadvantages, I recognised one of them as that of a policeman known to me.

Beyond any question the other individual was also an officer.

So, he had shown no sign of mercy. He had not sought to compromise with the Shedleighs, by having an interview with them. Cruel as he was, he had brought down two policemen with him, and it struck me at once that it was the time necessary for the procuring of these officers which accounted for the half hour’s grace he had shown before he arrived. To arrest Miss Shedleigh at an earlier hour than that at which now he was proceeding to accomplish that act, he must have got up early in the morning—a piece of severity which, doubtless, he could not force upon himself, though it was to lead the earlier to the exhibition of his cruelty.

I had been watching the faces through the open window—for it was the end of July, fine weather—and the gate-wicket, and without being seen myself, for about two minutes, when I heard the officer I knew say—

“There he is—he’s coming.”

It was not much above a whisper, but the breeze set my way, and my ears are uncommonly fine and sharp; indeed, I believe it is admitted that we women detectives are enabled to educate our five senses to a higher pitch than are our male competitors.

Clearly, the officers could see across the gardens, and round by the house over the grounds, whilst I was only to make observations in an opposite direction.

But in a moment I heard a clear light voice singing lowly and sweetly. I recognised it in a moment for that of the master of the house.

There was no sound but the rustle of the light wind (twittering the leaves and rippling patches of wheat) to interfere with his voice, and indeed it seemed to me as though the murmur made with his voice a sweet chorus.

He came round by the house, the volume of his voice increasing as he did so, and then he passed away on the other side, his voice dying away till the note of the wind was louder than his hymn.

The policemen followed him with their sight as far as they could, and if you have seen a cat lose a mouse you can comprehend the style of look upon the officers’ faces as their charge went round the corner of his own house.

I suppose this episode had taken up about two minutes of time.

But this is only guesswork.

Suddenly a quick, sharp, shrill scream.

Then—silence.

As I heard the officers leaping from the cab and cranching over the gravel, I ran forward and broke in rather than opened the door.

There lay Sir Nathaniel on his face.

Two or three yards away from him knelt Miss Shedleigh, her hands as tightly clasped as they could be, and pressed against the wall.

I may say at once—he was dead.

Afterwards, when the lady could speak calmly, she told me she had been certain it was death as he fell. She knew the family disease had grasped him—that fell heart disease which had killed his brother, which had helped in a measure to destroy his niece, Mrs. Shedleigh.

She declared she saw upon his face as he fell that expression which she had seen in death upon the countenance of her sister-in-law, and of that lady's father, at whose bedside she had been at the time of his death.

The policemen, I need not say, were in the house almost before I entered the room, into which they got quite as soon as the servants.

But before they had reached their client's dead side I had found a line of conduct to take.

The baronet was deceased. Very well—then all things were as they were before I told him of what was, perhaps, his good fortune, though he died over it; for, from what I heard, I doubt if he would have expired in his own bed but in a government one, had he been at liberty much longer to carry on his very bad life.

This question only stood in my way—

Had he told the police the exact state of affairs?

I guessed he had refrained from doing so. I felt sure he was a man who would say no more than was needed. It could not have been necessary to report at the station the history I had given him.

The course I took will perhaps be most quickly understood by a report of the words I used.

You may guess that the officer of the two who knew me was considerably taken aback by finding me in the room when he entered it.

"Blackman," said I, when the doctor had been, when he had pronounced his opinion (which did not take long), and when there was breathing time for the household once more—"Blackman, what on earth were you here for?"

"*He* brought us."

The emphasis on "*he*" plainly proved it was the dead man which was meant.

"What did he say?"

"Why, that he wanted to give his brother and his sister-in-law into custody for robbing him."

"Yes—he was mad," said I.

Blackman turned all manner of colours.

"Lord!" said he, turning at last quite red, "and to think that though I thought him such a queer customer, and the job such a queer job—to think as *I* didn't see that. Of course, G. (I am called G. by the force), *you* is here on that business?"

"Precisely," said I.

"Of course—I see it all."

"Of course you do," said I.

And it is astonishing how my explanation was accepted by all concerned in the inquest, and even by the general public.

[I have not much hesitation in telling this tale, however, for now, by certain events, no one has been wronged by the substituted child, for she has played *her* part out in the play of this world.]

Sir Nathaniel's pocket-book, however, gave me a fright, for it contained the addresses of Flemps the cabman, and Mr. Geffins the medical student. However, Miss Shedleigh was out of the way when the cabman gave his evidence, she having been a witness at the opening inquiry (together with myself), and the cabman offering his evidence at the adjourned examination. Flemps's evidence was not full. He had to look at the deceased gentleman for identification, and his evidence ran to this effect—

"Which if ever I sord the gent afore, take my badge away and give me three months."

I was out of the way when this evidence was adduced, nor did I show myself when the following witness, Mr. Geffins, deposed that he had never seen the "subject before in life."

Sir Nathaniel's medical adviser was called, and I have no doubt this gentleman, of great note—for Sir Nathaniel would have everything of the best of its kind, from his medical adviser to his blacking—I have no doubt that this gentleman considerably tended to close the inquiry quickly. He deposed, with some degree of pain evidently, a condition which gave his statement more weight, that the deceased gentleman had been suffering for some time from disease of the heart—a family complaint; that this disease had been much accelerated in its progress by the loose mode of life in which the baronet had lived, and that he had warned him only a few previous days to avoid any great excitement, as it might be dangerous. "I added," said the witness, "that if Sir Nathaniel kept himself quiet he might live into a green old age—a result of which there was a possibility, but little probability."

Hearing this evidence, to which was added that of the *post-mortem* examination, I could readily comprehend why his face, and especially the skin about his mouth, assumed such appearances as they did each time I saw him; and I could also understand how thoroughly well-fitted by nature he was to agree with his doctor's direction to avoid excitement.

It was clear his was a nature where selfishness provokes a man, habitually callous and insensible, till his natural licentiousness moved and carried him beyond himself.

I say I have no doubt the medical evidence against Sir Nathaniel blunted the inquiry—a result not proceeding from any wilful hoodwinking of justice, but simply from the fact that human judgment must be made up of previous impressions. When men hear a dead man has been bad, they surely are not so desirous of talking over his coffin as they would be did they learn he had lived an honourable life.

The coroner's "Oh!" showed how much even an old legal official could be impressed by a witness deposing against the gentleman on trial. I know that coroner. He is not a very moral man, but he offered that hypocrisy of faultiness, open respect for virtue.

Miss Shedleigh's evidence, under my direction, had been given to the effect that Sir Nathaniel came about money matters; that when he fell he was about to seek Mr. Shedleigh, and that she had run forward entreating him not to carry out his intention.

And when the coroner and the jury learnt that Sir Nathaniel had for some years been supported by the Shedleighs, Miss Shedleigh was asked no more questions.

My tale of a "Tenant for Life" is done. It has been told to show how simple a thing may lead to most important consequences. Had I not taken that ride in Flemps's cab on a Sunday, I never could have learnt that Sir Nathaniel Shirley was the actual heir to the Shirley estates.

However, I am glad the baronet never possessed them.

When the little girl died (about eight months since) Mr. Shedleigh gave up the estates to the next heir after Sir Nathaniel. As it had never been proved that the child was not his, he by law was Tenant for Life; but he waved his right, not because he had learnt the secret of his sister's life—for we kept it to ourselves—but because he felt that the only owner of the Shirley property should be one who claimed to be of the Shirley pedigree.

So it all came right at last, and no man was punished in order to procure justice.