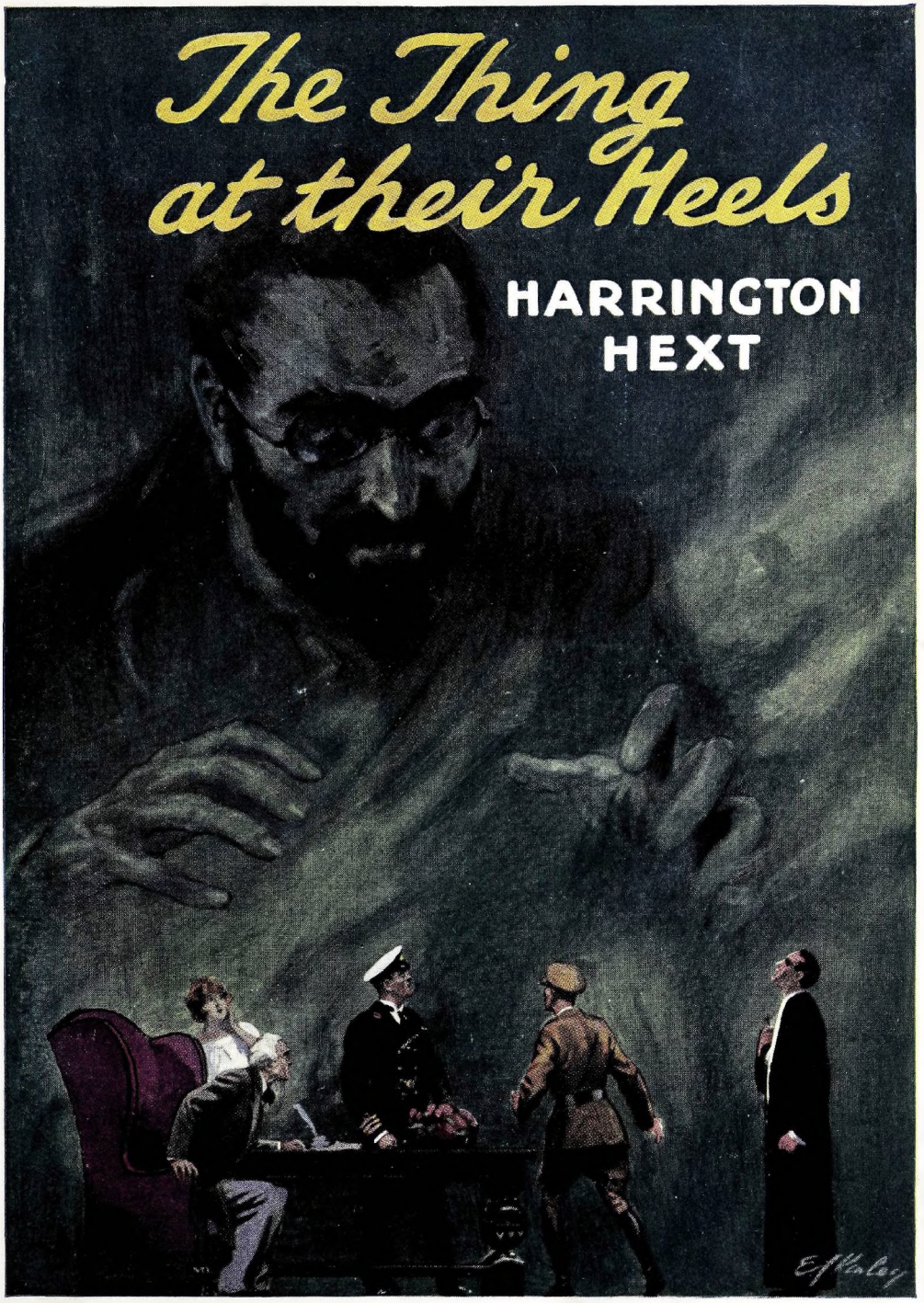

WHAT THE STORY IS ABOUT

THORNTON
BUTTERWORTH
LIMITED

The Thing at Their Heels

By HARRINGTON HEXT

WHAT THE STORY IS ABOUT

SIR AUGUSTINE TEMPLER—in his dignity, reticence and distinction of mind, a type of the old, Victorian ruler class—confesses to two ruling passions: his religion and his race. It would seem that he need fear nothing for his famous family, since intelligent and capable men remain to fill the old baronet's place when he shall pass; yet, within the ambit of one year, he sees his son and his grandson destroyed by unknown enemies; while of the two nephews who remain, one is murdered swiftly, the second only escapes death by a miracle. It is then the turn of Sir Augustine himself. The unknown, unsleeping enemy ends his life also; and with the destruction of his remaining nephew, the house of Templer is wiped off the earth. Why do these innocent men perish?

THE THING AT THEIR HEELS

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By

HARRINGTON HEXT

THORNTON BUTTERWORTH LIMITED
15 BEDFORD STREET, LONDON W.C. 2

First Published 1923

Printed in Guernsey

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THE THING AT THEIR HEELS

CHAPTER I

THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

CHANCE had so dealt with the ancient and honourable house of Templer that at the opening of these dark passages in their family history, they were reduced to a fraction of their old array. A generation had produced more women than men, and accident or sudden death was responsible for certain tragic losses. Thus it happened, during the festival of Easter, when the head of the house was always more concerned to have his family about him than at Christmas time, the few direct descendants of Sir Augustine Templer, together with his other remaining relatives, were collected under one roof at Kingscresset, the ancestral seat of the race.

The year was 1919, and though Easter had passed, the house party stayed on, for at this season there was no more delightful home in southern England than Kingscresset. The famous Inigo Jones mansion, with its great marble entrance hall, wide and lofty saloons, ball-room, music-room, state bedrooms and library, stood beneath the Wiltshire downs and shone with a face of red brick and marble upon its wooded hill.

Above this massive belt of trees the land ascended to Kingscresset Heath, whereon, at times of notable events, Sir Augustine took care that a royal beacon still should burn. To the east the wild lands circled the valley in which the house stood, and thence descended by gradual declivities to other woodlands and twin lakes that spread beneath. These waters were in shape of an hour-glass, and each covered five hundred acres. A light bridge spanned the link between them and along their margins, now blazing into their month of glory, the famous Kingscresset rhododendrons flourished—a collection second to none in England. From China and Nepaul they came, from the Himalaya and from America. The fifth baronet, Sir Warden, it was who had devoted his wealth and enthusiasm to the foundation of these magnificent plantations, and since his time it had become a tradition that the famous collection must be enriched, cherished and preserved from generation to generation. A skilled botanist dwelt on the estate and devoted his life and energies to the rhododendrons, for while Sir Augustine's interests lay elsewhere, the rising generation did not hesitate to tell him that his groves of flowering trees and shrubs were nowadays the most famous thing about Kingscresset. Indeed, facts proved it, for while not a dozen persons in a year applied to see the house, its statues and pictures, its old furniture and notable china, many enthusiasts begged to visit the lakes in spring time.

Park land opened before the broad front of the mansion, while some five thousand acres of shooting extended beyond the lakes, ever ascending to the heaths above. There stood the hamlet and ran a loop-line

to the nearest market town. A dozen farms comprised the property, and the uplifted village of Kingscresset beneath its four-square church tower lay within two miles of the house, but was hidden from it by the lifting contours of the land.

And here, upon a Sunday evening, the members of the diminished race were assembled in the private chapel, a modern building erected to harmonise with the house and situated some two hundred yards distant from it. The Templers had always been strong Anglo-Catholics, and Sir Augustine, as his father before him, was jealous and generous for the welfare of the English Church Union and the advanced wing of religious thought and action that it represented. His family had been high churchmen for a hundred years, yet drawn a broad line between their pre-Reformation attitude and that of the Church of Rome. A widower, aged seventy-five, Sir Augustine still stood for a vanishing section of the body politic and his vast wealth enabled him to stem the destruction that the war had brought to his order. He stood, a massive survival of the old Victorian traditions. He was generous, impulsive and warm-hearted—a typical Templer. The realities of life were concealed from him, for he lacked imagination to estimate the meaning of poverty, or observation to record that growing passion for change created in the massed mind of the proletariat by education. His own people, indeed, had scarcely plunged into the great wave of desire for freedom ; nor did they as yet partake of the wider world's unrest ; for under such a benevolent despot, and one to whom money meant so little, their anxieties were not concerned with bare security and

their future promised to assure their needs. Kingscresset and its inhabitants looked to Sir Augustine in a spirit of large trust that was never disappointed. Honourable service met generous recognition. The place remained a relic of vanished social conditions, resting upon the precarious tenure of two lives; for while the baronet's only son was a simple, country-loving and sport-loving man who might be counted upon to follow in the old paths, so long as the State allowed him to do so, what would follow, when a representative of the rising generation succeeded to the responsibility, none could predict.

For the rest, Sir Augustine was a somewhat secluded and meditative spirit. He possessed a modest store of scholarship and still read his Greek. Menander stood for his highest exemplar and guide, outside the Scriptures, and he was familiar with every extant scrap of that poet's work. "As Menander says," often served to prelude any opinion he might declare. Indeed, he had tutored his mind by so many years of varied reading that he seldom made an original remark, since apposite sentiments for most subjects of conversation were stored in his excellent memory. Physically, the old man presented a typical Templer, with the broad head, blue eyes and flaxen hair of the race. He also displayed the heavy Templer jowl and Roman nose. He was tall, with broad shoulders, that made him seem a little top-heavy; and nowadays, indeed, he needed a stick to support his going. Sometimes, when the gout troubled, he would demand two, but refused to be seen upon a crutch.

The beautiful chapel evensong drew to its close, and a

young priest made an end of his address. There were no seats reserved for the family or guests. The place of worship was open to all who cared to attend its services; men sat in one aisle, women opposite; and not a few of the folk would regularly come, for many dwelt nearer the house than the parish church, two miles away. Some fifty souls worshipped on this bright May evening, and the setting sunlight flashed through a western rose window, sparkled on the marble beauties of the chapel, lighted into flame the scarlet and lemon and snow-white clusters of rhododendron on the altar, and brightened the face of the preacher, where he stood at the chancel steps with his eyes lifted to the light. The young priest had a clean-shaven countenance, intellectual and earnest—a face in which the fervour of the brow and lips might have developed, without discipline and training, into fanaticism with passage of years. Intense conviction flashed from his grey eyes. He adopted no gestures, but stood quite still and held his hands close joined together on his breast. Rapture and a triumphant note of hope marked his expression as he drew to an end. There was something of the mystic in Father Felix Templer, and his friends noted that he seldom preached without quoting from Sufi poetry, or other Eastern wisdom.

"What does Mahmud Shabistari write?" he asked. "'See but One, say but One, know but One.' Conduct will be found largely summed up in that. 'In the heart of a barley-corn is stored a hundred harvests: all heaven is concealed in the pupil of an eye: the heart's core is a small matter, but the Lord of both worlds can enter there.' And to-day, before all else, we need a new union

and precious understanding between man's heart and brain. Night-foundered Heart has lost her way, and her great hopes and deathless will still are vainly seeking for the light; while Brain, too, staggering before the huge, unconquered woes of the earth, searches for a guiding star. Then let generous Heart and willing Brain come together and mingle their destinies, too long divided. Together in the name of our Lord God, sovereign of both, they shall save mankind, when human love and human wisdom come into their kingdom."

His family and the household assembled gave heed to the young man with respectful attention. In a front pew, one hand arched over his ear, sat Sir Augustine, and with him were his only son and his grandson. Thus the three generations of the house were gathered together. Captain Matthew Templer resembled his father. He was a man past fifty, of a cheerful and simple nature, cast in a smaller mould than Sir Augustine, but resembling him in feature, though with less thought upon his forehead, or care in his eyes. He lived largely for sport, but had begun life in the Navy and only retired two years before the war. Upon that event, Captain Templer immediately returned to the sea and worked until peace was declared. Salmon fishing was his prime pleasure. He understood the wide obligations of Kingscresset and was prepared to fill his father's place when the time came. But he lacked ambition and dreaded the interference with his easy, independent life that the obligations of birth and wealth would presently entail. His wife, who sat in the opposite aisle with their only daughter, was such another as

himself. She loved pleasure and contrived to get as much of it as possible into her existence. The heir presumptive, Thomas Templer—an Eton boy of fifteen —sat beside his father. He had brains and promised to be a scholar; but he also loved sport, though he displayed a quicker intelligence than his father and already gave evidence of higher ambition. He was enjoying his Easter holidays at Kingscresset and spending most of his time in angling for the coarse fish— —roach and dace and pike—that dwelt in the lower lake.

Petronell Templer, Tom's sister, was five years older than the boy—a gentle, handsome and rather colourless maiden, without much power of self-assertion. The father was proud of his son; but Helen Templer would have preferred a daughter more in her own pattern. Petronell displayed the Templer enthusiasm for religion. She loved the High Church and all that it represented. Thus it followed that her cousin, Felix, was her hero; and as he ended his sermon the girl's attention appeared to be fixed upon him. He had pleaded for the poor and preached something so near to socialism, that two at least of his hearers showed uneasiness and distrust. But then he had proceeded to the welfare of child life—a subject near his heart at all times—and none gainsaid his convictions on that theme.

Petronell was fair, with dreaming eyes and an emotional expression. In her forgetfulness of all but the preacher, she looked a little stupid, with her mouth slightly open. Indeed, she had forgotten everything but her own thoughts before he made an end, and only

the rustle and clatter of the rising congregation brought her back to reality. One other member of the family was also present—another nephew of Sir Augustine. Of his two brothers, the baronet had lived to see both pass before him, and Major Montague Templer was the son of the elder. The young soldier's mother had died at his birth, his father, General Montague Templer, had fallen in the war. Himself, the Major had been taken prisoner at Mons and passed four inglorious and bitter years in Germany—an experience that had somewhat served to sour the young man.

The Rev. Felix Templer was the son of Sir Augustine's second brother. He had lost the whole of his immediate family at sea; for when the Royal Mail Steamer, *Forres Castle*, sank on her way home from South America, John Templer, his wife, his younger son and two daughters, all perished in that remembered tragedy. Felix, at Oxford then, was left alone; and from that time he became the special care and interest of Sir Augustine. The lad from early youth had exhibited all the Templer enthusiasm for religion, and his uncle was well pleased that a nephew should dedicate himself to the Church. In mind and sympathy he knew himself to be nearer Felix than his own son, and he desired for the young man a great career.

As the little congregation streamed from the chapel, Tom Templer begged a favour.

"May we take the rhodo walk before dinner, grandfather? It's a ripping evening, and there's lots of time."

"I had intended it myself, my boy," answered the old man. "They look at their best in the evening

light. We'll round the lakes and come home by the Curtain."

The " Curtain " was a landslip that dated from Tudor times. The mighty displacement had torn a cliff through the hanging woods under Kingscresset Moor, and now this formation broke the green and golden green of early spring and offered a vast canvas of weathered limestone on which sunset painted and moonlight often dwelt with silver magic before the dawn.

The whole party descended to the bridge between the lakes. Sir Augustine kept the key of this slight structure, which was barred by a locked gate at both ends, and now all crossed it, presently to walk with the water on one side of them and banks and trees of the noble flowering shrubs upon the other. Here not merely specimens, but whole drifts and thickets of rare rhododendrons flourished gloriously, burning into splendour under the sunset and casting their reflections upon the still surface of the lake. Scarlet and rose they ascended to challenge the pines and scrub oaks, while the beauties of ivory white " Aucklandi " and giant-leaved " Falconeri," the butter-coloured bells of " Campylocarpum," the deep plum-crimson of " Roylei," the amethyst " Campanulatum " and some hundreds of other distinguished varieties spread beneath the giant species in a glorious harmony of pink and white, scarlet and purple, lavender and cream. Farther yet another scheme of colours reigned where the fiery orange and scarlet azalea banked like a conflagration under the evening light.

The Templers strolled forward in a scattered company, with Tom running hither and thither ahead.

There followed him his mother and Felix, who talked of nothing but the immediate beauty of the flowers. For the priest loved the great rhododendrons better than did any of his family, albeit he would have sacrificed the whole collection without sorrow for the welfare of one human life. Behind them came Major Montague with his cousin, Petronell. The young man's heart was in her keeping; but he had not yet spoken and he suspected that she would be hard to win. Some distance behind the rest, came Sir Augustine and his son, Matthew, the sailor. Their steps were slow and their theme disquieting. It arose out of another subject, for the elder loved to talk of himself to a sympathetic listener and could always rely upon Matthew to understand him.

"You and I, Matt, are not brainy men," he declared, "yet we must do what we can with our responsibilities. As Menander says, 'God help those whose only applause is on their gravestones.' We have great blessings; but they bring entail of trouble and anxiety in many directions, and the war has overset much that we cherished and believed precious. Therefore we must gird up our loins and face reality and, though it is good to have both brains and money, a man can do his duty without either. My immense wealth has stood the depletion of the war, as you know; but my attitude towards wealth has undergone a change."

"Don't let Felix influence you too much, however, father," urged the heir of Kingscresset. "I know how highly you rate him, but his views are extreme, and narrow, as extremes always must be."

"No; he is reasonable. He recognises the obliga-

tions of a great landowner and knows that it is impossible for me, or for you after me, to see life as he does. He is no fanatic. 'I am wooden without,' Matthew, 'but, thanks to the gods, not wooden within,'" again quoted Sir Augustine. "And the same may be said of you. In a word, if an old man like myself can move with the times, so much the more will you do so in your turn. And you have the privilege of a very clever son. One counts a good deal on Tom."

"Felix would like to take him from Eton and plunge him into a course of social science."

"Plenty of time. Let him enjoy a classical education first, while such a thing is still possible. That cannot mar him or dwarf his promise. Nor would I have him old before he is young. He loves Kingscresset, and the country is for all men and boys a teacher of virtue as I believe. Tom is high-spirited and suffers at present from that unsympathetic and selfish outlook common to youth; but he will develop as he should in your hands and his mother's. Petronell, too, pleases me. I have not seen her for a year. A placid, sensible maiden. 'A girl who sleeps on either cheek,' as Menander says. Heart-whole and care-free, I hope."

"That's just what she is not, father. You've missed the signs, and I daresay that I should have done the same; but her mother didn't. I think you know that Montague cares for her, and though Montey feels that he must always be a poor man, we should not raise any opposition on that score. She likes Montey, too, in her quiet way; but they are far too closely related."

"As to cousins wedding," said Sir Augustine, "I went into the question with one of our greatest experts

and biologists, who was my guest. He said that if the parents on both sides are healthy and the young people fit in every particular, there is not a shadow of objection to marriage of cousins."

"None the less, I should always object on principle. I don't trust science as you do, father. But the point is this: Petronell is half in love with Felix, or perhaps it would be truer to say with the mysticism and religious fervour of Felix and his charm and earnestness. She can't help it, poor child. I daresay she hardly knows it. But so it is. Needless to say that Felix, buried in his own enthusiasm and work, hasn't an idea of this. Of course, he'll never marry anybody. It is almost an unwritten law with the Anglo-Catholic clergy to be celibate."

"You astonish me and disquiet me," answered Sir Augustine. "I hope the word 'love' is far too strong. Women are much drawn to Felix. I have noticed that. He is picturesque and has a gentle charm and courtesy of manner that attracts and even affects them. But, if ever there was a man who would never allow human love to come between him and his work, it is Felix. As you know, he did glorious things in the war and risked his life a thousand times. He lived in the trenches with the men, and was preserved for his noble work, as I devoutly think, by a miracle. He closed the eyes of hundreds of grand Englishmen and whispered the promise of eternal life in numberless dying ears. Then, after he was gassed and useless there, he returned home a few weeks before the Armistice. He wanted to get back to his own Brotherhood of the Red Lion in London and resume the work the war interrupted; but I pre-

vailed with him to spend six months here and first regain his health. The time is up, and already he declares himself fully restored and anxious to join his friends."

"I thought it was almost settled he should become your permanent chaplain at Kingscresset."

"I much hoped it and even urged it upon him, seeing his health was broken; but he never agreed and never will."

"If he is going soon, then one need say no more. And yet—for Petronell's sake—we might give him a hint—eh? To be less charming and responsive."

Sir Augustine was considering this suggestion when his grandson ran back with a request.

"May we return by way of Gawler Bottom, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, Tom, by all means. By Gawler and the Curtain."

The groups changed; presently all passed from lakeside and, entering a narrow vale, through which a little trout stream from the moor discharged itself into the lake, they ascended the goyle by which it came, where king fern already lifted silver crosiers and forget-me-not and golden saxifrage sparkled beside the stream.

"Here," explained Sir Augustine to his nephew, Montague, "ran the pack-horse track of which you may have heard me speak. The interesting thing is that, while antiquaries can prove its passage clearly enough, they lose it a quarter of a mile higher up. The thing disappears long before we reach the moor. Yet it must have been a most important highway in early Jacobean times, when Kingscresset was a-building."

But the young soldier was not interested in antiquarian research.

"This is where I killed two cock right and left before the war," he said. "The best shot I ever made in my life. How are the pheasants going to be this year, Uncle?"

"Too soon to say. But Wharton tells me the promise is good."

"Snipe and duck are more fun all the same," declared Montague. "I wish the wild duck liked the lakes better."

"You must keep Matt up to the shooting in time to come," said the old man. "He cares only for angling, as you know."

They climbed the hillside and came out presently on a pathway that wound above the Curtain, where it broke the woodlands with its grey and golden scarps and counter-scarps. Then, turning left-handed, they gradually approached the mansion, descended through the screen of pine and oak behind it, and so found themselves at home again, the time then being eight o'clock.

An event marked the evening meal, taken half-an-hour later, and it was young Tom who created the painful diversion. He had been excited all day at the prospect of some fishing to-morrow, and after a glass of port wine with his dinner, he chattered so continuously that his mother told him to be quieter. Then worse things happened. Sir Augustine made some remark and, when he had done, Tom added:

"As Menander says—eh, grandfather?"

He expected a laugh, but was faced with ominous silence. Even Fastnet, the butler, stood with the port

suspended over Montague Templer's glass. He was a bald, clean-shaven servant of long standing, and his eyes grew round before the rude boy's offence.

But Sir Augustine did not reply. He would never have corrected a grandson while a parent was present. He turned his great mastiff-like eyes mildly to Matthew and the sailor spoke.

"How dare you, you insolent cub?" he said, and then controlled himself and continued: "Since you can permit yourself to be so grossly impertinent and forget the order to which you belong—an order that still maintains that manners help to make a man—you will forego your fishing to-morrow, Tom. Instead, you shall see a little for yourself what Menander says. Your grandfather will be happy to lend you the text, and you can devote the day to translating it. Now apologise and be off to bed, if you please."

The boy rose instantly, very red and very conscious of his shameless lapse.

"Please forgive me for being such a bounder, grandfather," he said quietly, and proceeded to the door.

"Willingly, Tom," answered the elder. "You shall have the books to-morrow, and we will see how your Greek prospers. Good-night."

"Good-night, Sir. Good-night, all," responded the youth, and disappeared, while his father expressed a thousand regrets. Sir Augustine was the least annoyed of the party, and Felix took Matthew to task.

"It's your own fault in a measure," he said. "A big, strong chap like that is full of beans and apt to get above himself in holiday time. Then you let him drink wine and actually encourage him to know the difference

between one port and another. What on earth does he want with liquor? It's folly to let him touch it."

But Tom's father withstood this argument.

"My dear fellow, one has to look ahead. Wine should be learned by a boy destined to fill my son's position, just as many other things should be learned. We don't want a future master of Kingscresset to be ignorant of what a cellar means, any more than we want him to be ignorant of what cattle mean, or lands, or harvests, or the administration of a great estate, or manners befitting his station."

"There is truth in that," admitted Montague. "You've got to look ahead, Felix, and make Tom an all-round man."

"Strike an average and endure—so Menander says," declared Sir Augustine. "That is to say, 'patience and the golden mean.' To teach youth patience is of all things most difficult, but personal temperance and self-denial must be impressed upon them from the first."

"It would be teaching him intemperance to deny him wine, Felix," explained Matthew, and the priest admitted the point.

"You're right, of course; but don't let him get fond of it," he begged.

Tom fell out of the conversation presently, and before long the men proceeded to the drawing-room, where Helen Templer and her daughter awaited them. Montague sought Petronell and together they strolled upon the terrace; Matthew and his wife mourned their son's lapse, bewailed the decay of manners in the rising generation, and puzzled that Tom, of all people, should have committed such an unexpected offence;

while Sir Augustine spoke with Felix. He had meant to discuss Petronell, but changed his mind. The subject was too delicate, and he shrank from mentioning anything so sacred as the dawning love of his granddaughter. He believed rather that his son was entirely wrong; but he determined to watch for himself during the few days during which Matthew and his family were remaining at Kingscresset. Then Felix began to discuss his own future, and life so fell out that the matter never again challenged any attention.

"I heard from Father Champernowne yesterday," he said. "He is very keen to get me back, and I feel that I ought to be going pretty soon. When does Warwick return?"

The Rev. Arthur Warwick was Sir Augustine's chaplain, and he had cherished secret hopes that he never would return.

"You feel positive it cannot be your duty to come and live with me and take the post?"

"Indeed I do. I shall dearly like to come when I can and as often as I can. I am never so happy as with you at Kingscresset, Uncle Augustine. But I am well again and as strong as a horse. I am only thirty years old, and this is a sinecure for a young man."

The priest, on leaving Oxford, had joined one of those Metropolitan organisations inspired from that source and, before the war, he had already worked for two years under a famous man in the Brotherhood of the Red Lion. Its headquarters lay near Red Lion Square at Holborn, and here Felix was already one to be reckoned with in the opinion of his elders. The Reverend Father Champernowne regarded him as a

right hand, and none knew better than Sir Augustine that the dream of his nephew as permanent chaplain at Kingscresset must be vain.

They talked on general subjects, and presently Montague and Petronell returned from the terrace, where dusk had settled. Nature was sunk into the amorphous and colourless gloom of a spring night. Only the lakes caught the remaining illumination from sky and spread like dim, blind eyes far beneath in the darkness of the grass lands.

It was half-past ten o'clock, the hour at which Sir Augustine retired.

Silence fell as Montague closed and bolted the French window behind him. He purposely hid his handsome face, for it was full of emotion.

"Let us sing together and then go to bed," directed the head of the house. It was an old Templer custom upon the night of Sunday.

Petronell went to the piano and the men lifted their voices in a hymn. All knew the words, for the simple rite had been familiar to them from youth.

"Abide with me" they sang, and then the party separated. The ladies and Felix retired, while Matthew, his father and his cousin turned to the library. There Fastnet dispensed whiskey and soda and filled an ancient Venetian glass from which Sir Augustine always drank his final potion. It was a present from his dead wife. The needs of all three men were small, and in ten minutes they had bidden each other "good-night" and retired. But a strange and inexplicable event marked the small hours before another day, and from that peaceful and moonless

night might have been dated the terrific tragedy now destined to modify or terminate existence for most of that little family party.

Felix Templer it was who first found himself aroused by an unexpected sound ; but the course of subsequent incidents became entirely changed by the intervention of his soldier cousin. Thus it happened:

The priest, hearing a noise beneath him about the hour of three o'clock, started into wakefulness, and determined to explore. His bedroom was immediately over the library, and he judged that a sound capable of reaching him must have been loud. By a coincidence, not ten minutes later, quite another reason roused Montague Templer from his bed and took him downstairs to the same apartment. The cause for his wakefulness was thought, and after many sleepless hours he found himself both weary and hungry. Whereupon he remembered the library, where biscuits and whiskey and a syphon would still be standing. That night upon the terrace, Montague had offered marriage to his cousin Petronell and been refused. He had declined to take " no " for answer, and indeed the negative was hesitatingly spoken ; but a refusal somewhat unexpected had caused Montague to reconsider his own suit and, though a young man of no little self-confidence, the small hours brought their withering perspective and showed him that in truth Matthew Templer's daughter had small advantage to gain from alliance with him. Which melancholy reflection kept him awake until the great clock in the hall chimed three, and soon afterwards, in despair of sleep and forgetfulness, he rose, set out in his pyjamas, switched

on the hall light, which he was able to do from the summit of the great staircase, and hastened down. But long before he reached the bottom, he heard a shout from below and the voice of his cousin bade him quicken his pace. He plunged down, therefore, as swiftly as his naked feet would carry him, and found Felix on his back beside the library window, which was open. He rose as Montague turned on the library lights and explained how he had been awakened by a sound immediately beneath him and how, descending quietly, he had listened at the door and heard a man moving in the room. It was a large apartment with a great desk midway between the fireplace and the window. The door was not locked and the place lay in darkness, save for an electric torch, which the intruder held in one hand while he sat at the desk, and read a paper of large folios spread before him. Felix thrust the door so silently that the reader was not aware of discovery, and indeed young Templer, supposing his uncle sat before him, had just been about to speak when he saw his mistake. The window was open, and the man who had entered the house through it appeared both younger and smaller than Sir Augustine. Felix found leisure to watch him, and was just considering whether to withdraw unseen and summon assistance, or tackle the stranger single-handed, when his cousin's action revealed him. He stood just within the open door, and when the hall light unfortunately flashed up behind him, became, of course, revealed. In a moment the unknown made a bolt for the window, while Felix, seeing his purpose, did the same; but a man in pyjamas is no match for one

well shod and clad in his clothes, and though the priest reached his opponent, it was only to receive a heavy blow on the side of the head, which flung him to the ground. At the time Montague appeared and helped him to rise; but the nightly visitor had made good his escape.

Both young men were swiftly through the window, and both were powerless to pursue any inquiry, for beyond a broad belt of grass, which ran immediately round the front of the house, whereon the library window opened at five feet from the ground, there extended the gravel terrace, which separated them by two hundred feet from the sward and gardens below. The intruder had already vanished into the crepuscule of day, and they guessed that upon grass and gravel he would leave no sign.

They returned, therefore, and roused the men servants, but not the house. Then Montague heard his cousin's story and, when day came, it was related to Sir Augustine. Nothing had been taken from the library and the baronet himself, with his son and nephews, made a careful study of the intruder's purpose. He had apparently turned the latch of the window from without, for it was a simple contrivance, offering no problem to a man skilled in house-breaking He had then evidently picked the lock of Sir Augustine's desk. Nothing was removed, and only one drawer disturbed: that which held a copy of the master's will. It was this that the visitor had apparently been reading when surprised. Behind him he had been driven to leave his electric torch and a skeleton key, with which it was evident he had unlocked the desk.

The mystery was complete, for by no stretch of imagination could Sir Augustine think upon any living being so concerned to know the contents of his will that he would commit a crime in order to do it. Nor did the torch help to reveal the fugitive. It was of a common pattern sold by ironmongers all England over.

Felix, invited by the local police to describe his assailant, could only give a shadowy picture of him. But he had watched while the other read and was able to report a sturdy man clad in black knickerbockers and coat. He wore also a black cloth cap and, in the light from the door, just before he was knocked down, the priest had caught glimpses of large spectacles and a close, black beard and moustache. His sight of the other's face had been instantly followed by the blow that put him out of action.

None of the Kingscresset party could remember any such individual within their acquaintance, nor did police inquiry furnish intelligence of such a man. There were a dozen ways in which he might have left Kingscresset, and though far-reaching search was made, neither from the neighbouring market town nor elsewhere came report of any stranger answering to the description.

"I wonder if he found his name in your will, grandfather," said Tom the following night at dinner.

"I feel very certain that he did not, my boy," answered Sir Augustine, "for I have remembered no gentleman to my knowledge with a black beard and moustache, or capable of paying this outrageous call upon me."

"What about the chap who saved your life at Zermatt, Uncle?" asked Montague.

"John Gratton? He is fair and tall, and I think we can go bail for him, Montey. I would trust him as willingly as I would trust you. A nobler fellow I never met."

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST STROKE

THERE happened to be a friend of Felix Templer's in the Police. The priest had known Bertram Midwinter for several years and been of assistance to the young constable. Now Midwinter, who had entered the higher branch of the service, was already a Detective-Inspector—a position won by the display of very exceptional ability. But though the detective was able to arrive at Kingscresset within forty-eight hours, his subsequent activities went unrewarded. There was not the shadow of a clue upon which to work, and neither trace of the bearded man nor explanation of his extraordinary trespass appeared.

Within a week the little family party broke up. Major Templer rejoined his regiment, at that time stationed in Plymouth. Matthew Templer, his wife and daughter, returned to town, while Tom went back to Eton. Felix resumed his work in London and Sir Augustine proceeded with his life. It was not free of thorns and among them, perhaps, the old man's chaplain and his bailiff were the sharpest and most prominent. But his large heart prevented him from depriving either of the comfortable situation each

enjoyed. It could not be affirmed that one or other failed of his duty, and both went on their way unhindered. More cheerful neighbours were the local practitioner, Dr. Forbes, a man of skill and understanding, and the Vicar of Kingscresset—one now nearly as old as the lord of the manor and an old college friend.

Sir Augustine's peace, however, was destined to be broken within a few weeks, and while he did not directly inform his family of a private sorrow, it was Helen Templer who discovered it in an obituary notice. Through Petronell, Felix came to hear of it. Her parents lived in London, and though Matthew Templer spent most of the spring and summer out of town with the sport that was his ruling passion, Helen enjoyed the season, and found herself now fully occupied.

A month had passed, and Petronell visited her cousin by appointment at the Red Lion Hostelry, where he lived with his community. The engagement she herself had made, and Felix, expressing pleasure that she wanted to see him, invited the girl to tea.

She sat in his little private study now, while he, in his cassock, which he seldom doffed, chatted over Kingscresset, regretted Midwinter's failure to solve the mystery, and waited to learn the reason that had brought her.

She seemed perturbed and Felix perceived that some emotional difficulties were making Petronell unhappy.

Her conversation began in melancholy fashion.

"It's such a strange coincidence," she said. "Not a month ago, you remember, the name of Mr. John Gratton was mentioned—on the morning of that

outrage at Kingscresset. The man who saved grandfather's life at Zermatt. And now he's dead."

"Dead! Why, he was quite young. Sir Augustine had used his interest to get him a fine opening in South Africa—a chair at the University of Capetown."

"I know; and he was just going to it. And then—in Derbyshire, I think—he met with a fatal accident on his motor-bicycle, and was found dead."

"But this will distress Uncle Augustine terribly. He was much attached to the man."

"He thought the world of him. Mr. Gratton visited at Kingscresset."

"I met him there, or rather I arrived just as he was terminating a visit. A young, rather assertive sort of chap; but he must have been magnificently brave. Very clever at botany, I believe. I saw no mention of his death; but I hardly ever open a paper. I must write to the poor governor and say how grieved I am."

"I wish you could have stopped with grandfather. You're so much more to him than anybody else."

"One must fight one's battle, Petronell, and the field is here, not at Kingscresset."

She looked at him.

"Don't work too hard," she said. Something of the old adoring expression had died from her face, or else she concealed it. But a suspicion that neither her father nor her grandfather could hint to Petronell, her mother had not hesitated tactfully to indicate, only to be laughed at for her trouble. Quite other interests were in the front of Petronell's life. She knew that Felix could never marry. She had always known it, and so permitted herself an interest in him that she

would have been more jealous to conceal under other circumstances. But now her cousin Montague had told her he loved her, and she had refused him, though not very finally. During the weeks that were passed since that event, the girl had contrived to glean that her father felt averse from any such engagement, while her mother, who was much attached to Montague, supported the young man's ambition and approved the match.

"Did you read Lao-Tse?" asked Felix, and Petronell confessed that as yet she had not found time to devote to the Eastern philosopher.

"Mother rushes me so," she complained. "You know what she is in the season. We're to go to Eton for the Fourth of June, of course, and fifty other engagements. I wanted to escape with father to Devonshire, but she wouldn't let me."

The mind of the priest remained with Lao-Tse.

"Of all men he might help you. It is so wonderful that, through the centuries, these mighty ones from a far past speak with such living voices still. It is a criterion of real truth, that it never grows old and is as precious to us, toiling in these bitter times, as to those who first heard the golden words. Still, as then, we can only comprehend appearance. Reality remains for ever beyond us. All things appreciable by the senses are unreal—cling to that, Petronell; it is unspeakably helpful. Sorrow and pain, cravings and desires, hopes and fears—all unreal; and especially the craving to know what TAO, the Essence, really is. For those who know what TAO is, tell it not; those who presume to tell it, know it not."

"Christianity seems so simple and steadfast and sup-

porting after these vague abstractions, Felix," she answered, and he strove to explain that there was nothing in the mysticism of the East to confound the eternal verities. He spoke of Asian Christology and Buddhism as veiled Christianity.

" There are parallels, even between their symbols, and I am one who believes the time will come when the lesser shall be swallowed up by the greater and Buddha vanish, as it were, into the Christ."

" TAO, then, is in all created things ? " she asked—to interest him.

" It is so. All discords are at last composed. Chuang Tse expresses it wonderfully when he says ' The greatest joy is none.' It follows that we should neither seek happiness nor shun grief too much. And, as you say, not one emanation can be banished out of TAO. You must not curse so much as a stinging fly, for if you do, you curse TAO. The murderer and harlot, the philosopher, the poet, the priest—all are a part. All action is illusive, and deeds, whether good or evil, are unreal manifestation."

" Stop," she said. " These things are as yet far too difficult for me. I want you to help me. What I am going to tell you will seem only a dream that doesn't matter one way or another ; but as I have got to live the dream, it must be real enough to me."

He was instantly sympathetic and the remote aspiration died from his eyes. Even his voice became gentler and more intimate.

" Anything that matters to you matters very much to me. Tell me all about it, Petronell, if you think I can be the least use."

"Montey wants to marry me and mother approves, but father strongly disapproves."

"Very interesting; and might one ask your view? That, too, has something to do with it."

It was characteristic of Petronell's colourless quality that she should thus state the situation in terms of other people. But she had humour, if she lacked self-assertion, and now laughed at her cousin's question.

"It does seem absurd; but I'm not sure. For the moment I have said 'no.' All the same I like Montey, and feel he has the strength of character and power of decision that I lack; but you understand what father is to me. It's a matter of principle, apparently. He doesn't think that cousins should marry."

"But what is far more important is your indifference, my dear. If you don't love Montague with all your heart and soul, then you ought to tell him so."

"I have; but that makes not the least difference to him. He says he has got enough love for both of us."

Felix reflected. He judged on purely rational grounds, having no knowledge or understanding of personal love, and he suspected that it might be Petronell's prospects rather than herself that had prompted Montague's declaration. It was the natural mistake of an intelligent man who lacked imagination to view the situation fairly and impartially. Petronell would be a very rich young woman in time to come, when her father succeeded to the title; for Matthew Templer adored her, and she stood far higher in his esteem than his son or his wife. But none the less Felix was mistaken, for Montague had not been in-

fluenced by any thought of his cousin's position. He loved her for herself, being that sort of strong man who finds in weakness combined with beauty the paramount appeal.

"You must first decide what you want to happen," said the priest. "You must be quite clear in your own mind; and the fact that you are not makes it look to me as though Montey was never meant to be your husband. Had you been of his mind, I might have taken longer to reflect before offering any advice, but since you are so exceedingly impartial, I do think, in fairness to him, that you ought to say 'no.'"

"So do I," she answered, "and I will. I'll wait till I get his next letter and then I will decide. Of course father's view carries very great weight with me, and so does yours—that the fact I have not yet decided shows I cannot be in love with Montey. But I'll wait for his letter, Felix."

"What has he to write about more than he has told you already?"

"He is stationed at Plymouth, quite near father. Father has rented a mile or two of the River Dart, for salmon fishing, and he is down there now, to spend a month or six weeks, before going to the Tweed. He says there are plenty of fish, but small. And Montey is going to him at his quarters on the river, near Holne, from Saturday till Monday next month. And after I hear the result, I will decide."

"So be it then. Now pour out our tea."

"You shall know all about it very soon. I expect it must go as you say, but I don't think it's really settled. He does care about me very much, and

Montey would make a woman like me cheerful and happy, because he's so clean-cut in his mind and so definite and determined. You could let him decide everything and know it would be all right. I daresay he'd strengthen my character too."

Felix shook his head.

"I don't like to hear you talk so. You must not leave the formation of your character to a fellow-creature. God can be trusted to do that, and only God. Take your doubts to Him, Petronell, and do not suppose you are going to shift your obligations and decisions on to a husband's shoulders. No man can be keeper of your conscience."

They ate and drank, and Petronell asked again concerning John Gratton, the dead botanist.

"I never heard all about him—only that he saved grandfather's life."

"Sir Augustine was a great alpinist in his early days—a famous climber," explained her cousin, "and after his athletic powers were gone, he still went out to his old haunts for many years—in fact, until his adventure with Gratton. Zermatt he generally chose for his centre, and he was pottering about there quite early some years ago, in June. The climbing season hadn't begun, but that didn't matter to him now he was past climbing. Then he must needs venture somewhere to take some small risks upon snow. He generally had his man, Westcott, with him upon these strolls, but on this occasion Westcott stopped at the hotel. And your grandfather found himself in a serious mess. It wasn't his fault, but some melting snow fell—a little avalanche was arranged for his

benefit apparently—and but for the fact that Gratton, botanising on a moraine half a mile off, saw him engulfed, he would most certainly have lost his life. The young man succeeded in saving the situation and, at tremendous risks to himself, crossed some very difficult and dangerous ground at a pace hardly possible to imagine. His own life was in utmost peril, and he reached Sir Augustine just in time to work upon the snowfall and get air to him before he was gone. The dear governor remained unconscious for half an hour and then came to himself and learned particulars of his accident. He drank the contents of John Gratton's flask, learned whence he had come and quickly perceived the extraordinary feat that had been a necessary prelude to his own salvation. A few days later, with Gratton beside him, he went over the ground again and judged how the young fellow had imperilled his own life a dozen times while obeying his noble, human instinct to save the life of a fellow-creature. You know your grandfather and guess that his gratitude no doubt took a substantial shape. He had now just used his influence to obtain this excellent post in Africa. His sorrow will be great, I fear."

They chatted for another half-hour, and Petronell promised to let her cousin know all there might be to tell as soon as possible.

"I will come to mass at St. Faith's presently, and if you are not there, will look for you here afterwards," she promised. "It will be in about a fortnight, I expect. Mother and I are going down to the Warringtons for a few days next week."

Then they parted, and the man's first care was to

write to his uncle concerning Gratton's end. Sir Augustine replied that he had felt the event not a little, and expressed a hope that Felix might presently pay him a visit, if only a short one. But they were destined to meet quicker than either imagined, for within ten days of Felix's conversation with Petronell, she appeared at his church by appointment, on a morning when Felix was celebrant, and after the service had ended, she waited for him.

"I've come to share your breakfast," she said.

It was upon that hour the first tragic event in a series fell, and the girl had barely begun her narrative, concerning the visit of Montague Templer to her father, when the incidents that she meant to relate were swept into past history and became of no importance. A tremendous shock awaited the cousins on the threshold of this day—a fact that was destined to alter the future history of their clan and bring extremity of grief upon its present head.

They were walking homeward together, and Felix was considering what delicacy he might buy for Petronell's breakfast. He stopped at a little shop, but she pointed to two flower girls and bade him buy her a bunch of roses instead. They stood chatting thus with the girls, who knew the priest very well, as did most dwellers in that neighbourhood, when a telegraph boy, passing on a red bicycle, caught sight of them and, dismounting, approached.

"Good-morning, Father Templer," he said. "I catched sight of you, so I stopped. I was just going to Red Lion 'Ostel with this."

"Thank you, Fred," answered Felix, to whom nearly

every boy in the district was known. He chaffed the lad, paid for Petronell's flowers and then read the telegram, which Fred produced from his pouch.

Instantly his face changed, and the smile died from it. Indeed he grew suddenly pale, then for a moment stared before him with eyes that saw only a picture of the mind. Anon he returned to himself.

"No answer," he said, then drew Petronell away.

"My dear," he began, "I'm very much afraid there's tremendous trouble lying ahead for both of us—indeed, for all of us. This is from your mother."

"From mother, Felix! She wouldn't be awake yet. She knew I was coming to mass this morning."

"Things have happened to awake her. She has evidently had a telegram from—about your father."

"Oh, Felix—nothing bad?"

He handed her the telegram.

"*Matthew dangerously hurt—very little hope—please see Sir Augustine as swiftly as possible. Am leaving Paddington at eleven o'clock. Tell Petronell.—Helen.*"

Petronell read the ill news and knew what it meant. She reeled, and put out her hand to her cousin.

"Father is dead," she whispered, and Felix, who had both received and sent too many similar messages in the progress of the war, could not deny it.

"Somebody has tried to break the truth gently," he said. "I'm afraid we must face it, Petronell. Come in and sit down. We can't be sure, but—oh, my dear child, I know what this means to you."

His thoughts, however, were with his uncle. The young can better bear sudden separations than the old. Matthew's wife was a strong, self-reliant woman, who

cared for her husband well enough, but had little in common with him; whereas to Sir Augustine his only son had ever been inexpressibly dear. Felix judged that the two destined to suffer most were Petronell and her grandfather. He made the girl eat and drink a little, and then declared that they had better await another telegram before he determined her movements.

"If your father is alive, you will, of course, go down with your mother," he said.

"In any case I must go," she answered. "Mother can't take this horrible journey alone."

"Was his valet with him?"

"Yes, Brown was with him."

"Then he will have telegraphed to Montey at Plymouth—be sure of that. He is at hand and can be there pretty quickly no doubt."

"They had quarrelled," she answered. "At least, I hope not a quarrel exactly. But they had differed sharply about me. I was going to tell you."

"Nothing, at any rate, can have happened to prevent Brown telegraphing to Plymouth; and as soon as Montague knows, he will probably let me hear first. Sir Augustine must know to-day."

"And Tom must know—if it's true."

"Leave him to me." Felix proved correct, for at half-past nine, just as he was about to hire a taxi-cab and take his cousin home, there came a telegram from Plymouth.

"*Just heard Matthew lost his life. Going to Holne at once. Break it to family.—Montague.*"

He handed the telegram to Petronell and they were

soon on their way. Helen Templer had not learned the final, fatal news, but it occasioned her no surprise. Within an hour, Felix saw both women to Paddington, for the girl accompanied her mother ; then he returned to the Red Lion Hostel that he might make his own arrangements. Some hours later, he was about to start for Kingscresset and the melancholy duty that there awaited him, when a second telegram from Montague Templer arrived. It was brief, but added no little of poignancy and horror to his cousin's forthcoming task.

"*M. murdered. Will write to you at Kingscresset tomorrow. Send down Midwinter if possible.—Montague.*"

CHAPTER III

THE BLACK MAN AT POUNDSGATE

BERTRAM MIDWINTER, on his way from London to Devonshire, read again a letter and a covering letter which together indicated the outlines of the task before him.

He was a fair, big-boned man of forty, with fine eyes, an intelligent brow and long-jawed, clean-shaven face. His goodwill had thrown him into union with the Red Lion Brotherhood, for Midwinter possessed a warm heart and could find enthusiasm and even leisure for other interests than those of his business. Among these enthusiasms was Felix Templer—whose life had won the respect of many harder-headed than himself. Midwinter admired the young priest, for Felix had served him on more than one occasion, and he was proud of the real friendship that existed between them.

Since the detective firmly believed that Captain Templer's death was a sequel to the nocturnal raid at Kingscresset, he regarded his present activities as a continuation of the previous problem and felt small doubt that his first failure would now be atoned.

He lighted a pipe and read the two letters again.

The first came from Felix Templer; the second was a full description of the situation in Devonshire, written by Montague Templer to his cousin Felix.

"DEAR BERTRAM," wrote Midwinter's friend from Kingscresset: "Here is my cousin's full account of what he found at Holne, together with all that is yet understood of Captain Matthew Templer's murder. For so it must surely be described. I have been through scenes of great grief and shared the suffering of poor Matthew's father and son. For the boy is here with his grandfather and will stop here until after the funeral.

"I need add no more save to hope that you will reach Holne, as my cousin wishes, in time to attend the inquest. The case is an absolute mystery, for the dead man (if ever it might be said of anybody) had not an enemy in the world; and his destruction advantages nobody on earth.

"I shall see you, no doubt, later on, and if I can do anything at Kingscresset to aid your efforts, command me.

"Always sincerely yours,

"FELIX TEMPLER."

Then Midwinter concerned himself with the more important communication.

"CHURCH HOUSE INN,
"HOLNE, S. DEVON.

"MY DEAR FELIX,—

"I got here by motor car from Plymouth, soon after

eight o'clock this morning, and must now, much to my sorrow, give you an account of the horrible thing that has happened. Matthew had rented salmon fishing for a couple of miles on the River Dart, and yesterday he left the little house, where he was living at this village, soon after breakfast, telling his man, Brown, that he should be gone for the day as usual. He took no keeper and had made no arrangements to meet one. The Dart runs here amid high hills clad in forest. Falls and pools succeed each other and the bed of the river is much broken by immense boulders, so that a fisherman does not wade as much as in slower streams and often has to proceed by the bank.

"At one spot the river is not fishable for a hundred yards, and here the fisherman's path rises into the woods, above a little cliff which towers over the river. The path runs through dense underwoods and is arched with trees. At its highest point it would seem that Matthew lost his life. He was shot through the head by a heavy bullet from a revolver or pistol, which struck him on the left temple and penetrated the brain. He must have died instantly ; but was not found where he fell. Only an accident discovered him, and but for that accident it might have been some time before the body was recovered. But a woodman, passing this way some time after the murder, caught sight of a bright and flashing object beside the path. A gleam from the setting sun penetrated the place and struck on some metal point in the grass beside the way. The man—Adam Foster by name—examined the object and found it to be a fisherman's salmon reel with the line still wet and newly wound in. By good chance,

Foster is an intelligent, sharp fellow, and this singular discovery led him to look about him instead of merely pocketing the reel and proceeding on his way. As a result, not a dozen yards distant he came upon the rod and gaff. They were thrust into a bed of fern and bramble between two rocks. Pure luck revealed them, and then, still hunting about, Foster thrust through the brush at the edge of the little cliff and scanned the river beneath. In a moment he had found poor Matthew. The unfortunate fellow was lying half in and half out of the river, and when Foster reached him, after a difficult descent, he found the body still warm. The fall had broken not a few bones, and, at first, the discoverer supposed the terrible injury to the head was the result of a fatal accident and the fall to the rocks. Indeed, those he presently summoned to bring in the body were of the same opinion, and not until the local medical man examined him was it known that our cousin had been murdered.

"Only this morning I have been able to throw some light on one point. It is a German bullet from a heavy revolver that killed him. I know the type exceedingly well. There is nothing much to add, and, of course, though the local police have been tremendously energetic, to trace the murderer in this wild country is a hopeless sort of task. One thing seems certain: it will be only waste of time to examine and trouble the local people. Matthew was never here before in his life, and only knew a few of the larger landowners round about—men whom he met in London. Those who murdered him are off and away long ago, and it can only be by finding what motives existed for such

a crime that we shall ever reach them. But the very idea of motives is madness.

" Brown telegraphed to Helen early to-day, to break the news, and when I arrived I felt it better to send the truth at once. I'm afraid you must have had a cruel time with Uncle Augustine. But you and he have religion to comfort you.

" Tell Midwinter to get down for the inquest if he can. He's got a hard row to hoe ; but we must hope the infernal blackguards responsible for this tragedy will be laid by the heels.

" A point to note is that, as the wound was in the dead man's left temple, he was probably coming down the river homewards when he died. Anybody watching him must have known that he would return that way, and this was the best spot possible to be quite close to him and still unseen by him. Since the body was warm when Adam Foster found it, the chances are that he had not been dead very long before he was discovered. He might have perished about seven o'clock possibly, and it was, of course, much later before the woodman could bring news of his discovery, and long after midnight before the body reached Holne.

"For the moment, that is all there is to tell you. Helen and Petronell are very brave about it ; but the precious girl suffers most. My heart bleeds for her, and I wish to God I could comfort her. Her father meant so much to her and their devotion was absolute. Helen never really loved Matthew : I don't blame her, for they were too fundamentally different in every taste and interest. However, this

has knocked her out pretty badly, of course. They will come to Kingscresset after the inquest, and I shall follow and travel with the body. It is lucky I was so near. Tell me if anything occurs to you.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"MONTAGUE."

Midwinter relighted his pipe, which had gone out. He returned the letters to his pocket and drew forth a note-book wherein he made certain memoranda and re-read others. The points that specially interested him at present concerned the manner and means of Matthew Templer's death, and he already saw the direction in which his activities must lead. He drew a large scale ordnance map from his pocket, spread it upon his knees and studied the district, with special reference to the farm-houses or hamlets indicated within a radius of some miles from the river valley.

He then ran over the case to himself, as he saw it. Between a spot near the Eagle Rock and New Bridge —some three miles down the river—Matthew Templer had been murdered. He was on his way back to his quarters and the hour would be about seven, or earlier, leaving a full two and a half hours of daylight. He had taken down his salmon rod and was carrying it when he came to the spot where he lost his life. He was shot through the head, fell and dropped his rod. The reel doubtless fell from the butt as he did so, and after the murderer had flung his victim out of sight over the cliff to the water, he had hidden the rod and gaff, but failed to find and conceal the reel. This

accident led to the discovery of the body almost immediately.

Midwinter studied the map and marked how few were the habitations in this lonely and heavily timbered region. The murder had taken place on the northern bank of Dart, and, with the exception of one or two remote farmsteads, there was no inhabited spot nearer than the small hamlet of Poundsgate, due east of the river valley and distant but little more than a mile from the actual theatre of the crime. The gradients indicated a tremendous ascent from the river to the high lands above and a more moderate descent again to Poundsgate. The other spots at which dwellings occurred were still more distant and only approached by farm roads over the moor above.

The detective reached Ashburton soon after four o'clock, and was met by Montague Templer with a motor car. The young man could add little to his letter; but chance had enabled the hour of Captain Templer's death to be very accurately determined. He had killed a salmon within half a mile of Dartmeet, where his right ended, and he had left it, with five shillings, at the post office above Dartmeet Bridge. A labourer was going to bring the fish to Holne at a later hour. The angler drank a cup of tea at the post office and took down his rod. He left, to walk beside the river, at six o'clock. From Dartmeet to the place of his death was about a mile, and it appeared certain that he had perished between half-past six and seven o'clock.

Montague Templer was chiefly interested to learn if

the detective associated the tragedy with the visit of the unknown inquirer to Kingscresset six weeks previously. He himself guessed that the two events must be connected, and he heard with satisfaction that Midwinter was of the same opinion.

The newcomer wasted no time and, after a cup of tea, went to the police station and spent an hour with Inspector Pearce—a local man who knew the district well. Careful search in the immediate region of the crime had produced no results, and Pearce doubted not that those responsible for Captain Templer's death were able to make good their escape without suspicion attaching to them. Inquiries had proved fruitless. The Inspector considered it essentially a case for headquarters, since only thorough knowledge of the dead man's affairs and lengthy investigations, in which his relations might or might not be willing to assist, would light upon those responsible for his death be likely to shine. He had, however, taken some steps before Bertram Midwinter's arrival, and was able to give particulars of a long conversation with the captain's wife.

"Mrs. Helen Templer was very willing and agreeable to tell me all she knew, and that amounted to nothing," declared Pearce. "The gentleman served at sea during the war. He was never in Germany in his life, so far as Mrs. Templer knows, and though they met Germans now and again in society before the war, they never have since. The Captain hated all Germans, but, so far as she can tell, he didn't know one of 'em, and the idea that any particular German should have a down on him seems to her absurd. But the case is quite

different with Major Montague Templer. He'll tell you a very interesting story, which may have to do with the matter, and I've got a strong theory myself that it has got to do with it. Major Templer was in Germany after Mons, till the end of the war—a prisoner in an internment camp. While there he had a bitter quarrel with a subordinate of the commandant, and these two—Major Templer and the German—agreed to fight a duel when the major was free. They did so, all quite correct and regular as far as such things can be. Major Templer went back to Germany last winter—in January—and he took a friend and found his man. The chap was very well pleased to go through with it, and they fought with pistols. The German missed and the major hit. He got his man high up on the right side and dropped him, but didn't kill him. However, he died afterwards; but the class of people responsible for the meeting was quite straight about it—according to their mistaken lights. It was an affair of honour, and the Englishman had got the best of it, and no more was said, so far as the major knows. Still Germans are Germans, and after this yarn, which no doubt is true enough, I've come to the conclusion that there's been a big mistake. My theory is that a German shot Captain Templer all right, but that he messed up his mission of revenge and trailed the wrong man. I reckon that somebody was after Montague Templer, and whether he's now making tracks for home, under the impression he's killed him, or whether he's found out his mistake and may try again, is up to you to find out, Detective-Inspector."

As may be supposed the story interested Midwinter

not a little, and before the day was done he heard its confirmation, with many added details, from the hero of it. Before he met the major that night in private, however, Midwinter made some excursions by motor-car to clear uncertain points. It was routine work and should have been done by the local police; but Inspector Pearce had not judged it to be necessary.

The London man, with a local driver, now visited every outlying farm and cottage within the district indicated, and left only Poundsgate for further inquiry. At no abode could he learn anything concerning visitors and lodgers. Farmers and their wives were anxious to serve him, but none had seen or lodged any visitor, or stranger, man or woman.

The ground cleared and the night at length fallen, Midwinter returned to the Church House Inn at Holne, and after supper, which he shared with Major Templer, he heard again the story of the duel. Asked if he could remember those present at the event, Montague replied that he could not. The affair had been arranged with utmost privacy and had taken place in the woods outside Potsdam. The Germans behaved in a manner perfectly fair and seemly, and made no attempt to interfere afterwards with the safe return to England of himself and his second. A German doctor and two or three soldiers had supported his opponent. He recollected the Herr Doctor as a very big, fair man, who wore a moustache. He had said after the duel that Templer's opponent would not live.

"You don't recollect anybody at all resembling the man that Father Templer saw at Kingscresset

that night ? " asked Midwinter, and the soldier declared that he did not.

" It is a common German type," he explained. " You see scores of solid-built, close-bearded, dark chaps in glasses, but I cannot remember such a person at the duel."

Though the hour was late before Midwinter retired, at six o'clock next morning the police motor awaited him by his direction, and he quickly descended from Holne over the river at New Bridge, buried in morning mist, and climbed up the great hill on the other side to Poundsgate and the scattered abodes of Leusden and Lower Town. He desired to clear up the district before the inquest and, accustomed to swift inquiries and no waste of words, believed that it would be possible to do so. He did not, however, know the deliberate methods of Devonshire folk in conversation, and his hope must have been much disappointed but for chance, which furnished a very startling clue at last and directly linked Matthew Templer's death with the incursion at Kingscresset.

As he set forth, Bertram Midwinter found his thoughts centred upon the soldier, and Major Templer rose considerably in his respect after the story of the duel. He wondered, among other points, what Englishman had accompanied him on such a risky venture. To the middle-class mind of the detective it appeared that, apart from the peril of the actual encounter, young Templer must have taken his life in his hand to return to Germany immediately after release ; but he did not understand that the Junker spirit possesses the qualities of its defects, or appreciate the fact that

Montague had no little of the Prussian in his own composition. His peers respected and admired the courage that took him back to the Fatherland on a point of honour; and they shared young Templer's bent of mind and aristocratic, if reactionary, predilections. Midwinter had noted that the Major took himself and his class very seriously, but showed indifference to the lower orders of society and displayed impatience with the methods of such local men among the folk as could furnish information respecting Matthew Templer's death. Montague did not conceal his attitude and those who came in contact with him were quick to react to his indifference. From a measure of respect, the detective found a gradual aversion grow in his mind against this man. It was not class prejudice, for he suffered no irrational attitude of that kind; but the qualities of distinction and breeding which, displayed in Felix Templer, caused no diminution of his regard, were combined with an egotism and selfishness in Montague that created an unpleasant impression upon Midwinter. He was more or less a student of character, as all in his trade are bound to be, and while granting nothing sinister in the character of the dead man's cousin, recoiled from its aloofness and pride.

At Lower Town the detective found little to delay him. It was the holiday season and certain of the habitations contained lodgers; but in one resided an old clergyman and his wife, who were paying their fifteenth annual visit; in the second was a widow with three young children; in the third he found a couple of London bank clerks, taking a fortnight's holiday

together. He proceeded next to the inn of this scattered hamlet and had not been in the company of its landlord for two minutes when his search yielded fruit.

The "Seven Stars" was a small public-house on the banks of a tributary of the River Dart. Fishermen occasionally put up there, and Mr. Halfyard, the proprietor, while recording the fact that the house was empty for the moment, explained that it would be occupied again anon.

"I'm very well thought on," he said, "and there's sportsmen come to me year in year out. Two rods will be down along next week, and more to come."

"Nobody been here lately?" said Midwinter.

"Yes, there was then. A learned man, if you please, though 'twas in a pretty doubtful channel his learning ran. All for the herbs of the field you must know. A botanist, he called himself. Come to hunt for wild flowers round about, and used to bring in a lot of mess and keep the things alive in his washing basin. And that drove my missis wild, being a cleanly woman."

"How long did he stop with you, Mr. Halfyard?"

"Inside of four days. On the first two he couldn't find the herb he was after, and then one day he found it, and if he'd found a king's ransom he couldn't have been better pleased. And the next evening he was off and away. I drove him back to Ashburton myself, and he caught the night train for London at Totnes. A very nice sort of man."

"What was his name?"

"He went by the name of Lubin. You can see the

entry in my visitor's book. He talked English, but didn't waste many words."

Midwinter studied the entry, in handwriting that was obviously of German type.

"*Mark Lubin, Munich.*"

That was all.

"This is very interesting indeed to me, Mr. Halfyard," began the detective, "and you have thrown a sidelight on rather a puzzling subject. Is it too early to have a drink? If not, I beg you'll name it. For my part, half a pint of Burton is what I'm after."

Mr. Halfyard showed satisfaction. The drink was poured, and the publican himself took a small bottle of dry ginger ale.

"'Tis a harmless fluid," he explained, "and my doctor have made me swear off liquor till night time."

"I want to hear all you know about this Herr Lubin," began Midwinter. "I'll tell you why afterwards. It's very important, and you must understand that I'm authorised to ask questions. I don't come for curiosity. You'll understand that when I tell you what I am."

"As to that, I reckon I know, mister. You're a detective from London. Us heard last night from Holne you were come about the fisherman who was murdered."

"Describe your guest."

The other considered, then finished his glass of dry ginger and spoke.

"Medium height and average build. His hair was black and cut pretty short. He wore a close, black beard and moustache and whiskers, like a sailor. He

also wore dark, big spectacles, set in what looked like black horn, or tortoiseshell. He was very close-sighted—along of living with his eyes to a microscope, so he said—and I never saw him without his glasses. His clothes were all black—black Norfolk jacket, black knickerbockers, black stockings and black boots. He was a very polite sort of a man and gave no trouble, but he had very little to say and was out from morning till night. He'd take his tin box and his trowel and a packet of sandwiches and not be back afore supper."

"Did anybody visit him while he was here?"

"Not that I know on."

"I must be sure of that. Somebody would know if inquiries were made?"

"They'll know in the bar."

"Any letters come for him?"

"I believe there was. I'll ax my missis."

Mr. Halfyard summoned his wife—a little, grey-haired woman, who had been listening with deep interest behind the door of the bar-parlour. She had already learned the name of the visitor.

"This is Mrs. Halfyard," said the publican, "and this gentleman is from Scotland Yard, and I can see he thinks that our botanist chap, who left Poundsgate the night of the murder, may have something to do with it."

The little woman's eyes grew round.

"Oh, my good God!" she said. "Him! Butter wouldn't have melted in his mouth. He was a simple lamb, sir, and not interested in nothing but weeds."

"Did he get any letters while he was here, Mrs.

Halfyard ? " asked Midwinter, " and did he have any callers ? "

" He didn't have no callers to my knowledge, and if he did, he never saw them, for he was out all day and took his breakfast at six—summer time. But he did get two letters—that I know."

" Can I see his room—his sitting-room and bedroom ? "

" He didn't have no sitting-room. He took his breakfast and supper in this room. That was all he was in for ; and the moment his supper was eat, he went straight to bed."

They ascended to the little chamber in which Herr Lubin had slept, and Midwinter made a swift, but close, examination of it.

" He left everything neat as neat," exclaimed Mrs. Halfyard, " and the fender did ought to be cleared too—that's my lazy girl ; but perhaps 'tis as well the scraps was left if they be like to tell you anything."

The detective had already made a clean sweep of some torn paper upon the hearth. Then he inspected the fender and grate more closely.

" Did he smoke ? " he asked.

" He did not. But he took snuff. That was his weakness. He didn't drink neither. He'd join me in a dry ginger afore he started of a morning, but that was all."

Midwinter quickly satisfied himself concerning the paper. In five minutes it had told its tale. There were two envelopes, both directed to

Herr M. Lubin, F.R.S.,
The " Seven Stars," Poundsgate,
Ashburton.

One envelope had been posted in London, from the Westminster district, and the direction was typewritten; the second, in neat, close caligraphy, came from Exeter. This had evidently contained a letter still in the grate. The communication was roughly torn across and across in eight pieces, and it had been written by the same hand that directed the letter. Midwinter put it together in a couple of minutes and then read it.

"THE MUSEUM,
"EXETER.

"DEAR HERR LUBIN,—

"The habitat of that very rare British plant, *Lobelia urens*, is said to be near Axminster, not far from this city. I cannot, however, substantiate the report, never having found the flower. As for *Trinia vulgaris*, the Cornish money-wort, that occurs pretty freely at Berry Head, near Brixham, together with other uncommon plants.

"Believe me,
"Faithfully yours,
"JOHN JACKSON."

"I trust I may have the privilege of seeing you at the meeting of the British Association in August. Your *magnum opus* is very familiar to me."

Midwinter stared blankly before him after grasping the significance of this communication, for it was the last thing that he had expected to find. It meant much. If taken at its face value, it indicated that Herr

Lubin existed, enjoyed an authentic reputation, was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and had written at least one important work on the science of botany. Yet these alleged facts might be dust designed for the eyes of the searcher. Nothing would be easier than for some unknown individual to pose as Herr Lubin and deceive a local botanist for private reasons. The important fact remained, that Mr. Halfyard's description of his guest confirmed in every particular with that glimpse of the midnight visitor to Kingscresset who had been seen by Felix Templer in the library.

A farther search of the bedroom produced nothing, and Midwinter then turned his attention to the railway, that he might get any information respecting the object of his search. The inquest was timed for noon and it was now no more than ten o'clock. Mr. Halfyard himself had driven his visitor to the station on the night of his departure, and at Ashburton, the railway terminus for the district, a porter remembered the black-bearded German and could recollect his arrival some days earlier. His description tallied exactly with that of the publican, and he was able to add that Herr Lubin carried nothing but a kit bag and a hand-bag, which he directed should be put into the rack of the first-class carriage in which he travelled. He had not booked at Ashburton, but offered the return half of a first-class ticket from Paddington to the checker.

Thus far, all was straightforward enough and Midwinter doubted not that a figure, somewhat conspicuous, would be remembered at Totnes also, where the traveller must have left the local train for the night

mail to the Metropolis. He proceeded, therefore, to establish the certainty that the stranger had departed for Totnes. But this proved impossible. Herr Lubin, or the individual travelling under that name, had been seen by nobody on the Totnes station. None had carried his kit bag, or remembered any traveller in the least resembling him. An intelligent porter supplied particulars.

"I opened the doors of the loop line train when she ran in," he explained. "There's but two carriages and a guard's van, and few come or go by it except market days. That night there was four folk all told. Mrs. Pridham from Totnes—been up to Staverton to see her son; a gentleman and lady—strangers to me—a stout-built gentleman and a thin lady with knapsacks, on a walking tour, seemingly—and one of the monks from Buckfast Abbey, at Buckfastleigh. That was all that came. And Mrs. Pridham went out of the station and the other three all left on the night mail."

Asked to describe the stout gentleman, the porter could only recollect that he was of fat habit, clad in a grey flannel suit and looking very tired. The lady with him wore a short walking skirt and appeared a good deal younger than himself.

Before these facts Midwinter felt doubt. He had expected no such complication, and could see no reason why the botanist had sought to create this confusion at a time long before it was possible that suspicion should rise respecting him. If the porter's word was to be relied upon, it seemed clear the traveller from Ashburton had left the train at one of the two intermediate stations—Buckfastleigh or Staverton. As he

returned to the inquest, Midwinter called at both these points, but could learn nothing of any passenger leaving the train at either. He learned, however, that the stout man and his female companion had entered the train at Staverton.

These circumstances modified his intention, and he decided that he would not attend the inquest. The information that he had collected was better in his own keeping at present, and seeing that search for the man with the black beard might prove an arduous and possibly unsuccessful business, he decided not to handicap his inquiry by any premature publication.

A private conversation with Inspector Pearce and the coroner placed the situation before them, and they did not question Midwinter's decision. For himself, he concentrated on the course likely to have been pursued by the wanted man, and the difficulties of his disappearance increased. A dark night might have made evasion easier, but the evenings were light until nearly ten o'clock by summer time, and the train for London had left Totnes before ten. Unless Herr Lubin, so to call him, had effected a disguise and reappeared at Totnes therein, it appeared difficult to see how he had left by that train. The Benedictine monks from Buckfastleigh Abbey were constant travellers, and it was hardly possible that he knew of their existence, or had donned any such disguise between Ashburton and Totnes.

The inquest threw no light upon Captain Templer's death. He had been shot through the head at close range, but his discoverer had heard no report and, in any case, the shout of the river would have muffled

the sound of an explosion, unless the hearer were within fifty yards. Montague Templer spoke positively to the fact that a German bullet had slain his cousin. Mrs. Templer and her daughter were not called upon to give evidence. In summing up, the coroner indicated that he might, if he so desired, postpone the inquiry; but he held this to be an idle course under the circumstances. He invited the jury to find in the usual manner and explained that investigation of the crime lay in skilled hands.

A verdict was therefore recorded of murder by a person or persons unknown: and that night Helen Templer and her daughter took leave of the dead and travelled to London, there to break their journey on the way to Kingscresset. On the following morning, Montague Templer, with a motor hearse, conveyed the dead to his last resting-place, and he heard before he started, from Felix, that Sir Augustine was bearing his affliction patiently.

"Poor Tom suffers more acutely than his grandfather," he wrote. "He is an intelligent boy, and his feelings prove deeper than I suspected. In a sense, he serves to distract Sir Augustine from thoughts of his immediate loss, for the old man already looks ahead and wonders how Tom will face his destiny. He would probably have been safe, had his father lived, to follow the old traditions when his turn came; but his mind may now be influenced during his minority by all the changes in the air. You can guess how these thoughts agitate Uncle Augustine. But I say little, for such shadowy fears serve to distract his mind from the agony of the moment, and that is to the good.

It is a blessing that the aged have their senses and their power of feeling blunted. The funeral is fixed for Friday, and poor Matthew will lie beside his grandfather."

CHAPTER IV

DEATH OF JOHN GRATTON

"'LOYAL words help to heal grief,'" declared Sir Augustine Templer. He was holding his daughter-in-law's hand while he spoke and bidding her farewell. For the funeral of Matthew Templer had taken place; eight-and-forty hours were passed since the sad ceremony, and now the widow, with her daughter, was about to leave Kingscresset for their home. A motor waited to convey them to the station and the members of the family had assembled to take leave. Sir Augustine himself, with Tom, Montague and Felix, watched the two women depart.

The old man strove, when in the presence of other people to preserve patience and conceal his suffering. His religion went far to support him, and the ministration of his nephew played an invaluable part in helping him through the first tragic days that followed his son's death.

The motor bore the ladies away and Tom, who was not returning to Eton immediately, left his elders. Then Sir Augustine discussed the future.

"Through sleepless nights," he said, "I have considered the tremendous change that my dear son's

loss must mean and its effect on those lives directly and indirectly interested. Helen will, no doubt, continue to dwell in London, and my allowances will extend to her as long as she needs them. One may guess now what she will do in a year's time. I shall not regret it, nor would Matthew have done so."

"You mean Woodbarrow?" asked Montague.

"Yes, she will wed him. It is idle to pretend that I entertain any great affection for Helen. She married Matthew for worldly reasons rather than affection. But she was a good, if not a devoted, wife, and since Lord Woodbarrow is free, her future may be regarded as assured. As for Petronell, she may choose to observe her father's attitude to you, Montague. I mean that she may still decline to consider you as her husband; but presently, when the time is ripe, I shall speak to her about it and let her know my view. I'm inclined to think dear Matthew was prejudiced in that matter and stuck to old opinions now exploded by science."

"Thank you, Uncle. I shall be very thankful if you can influence her. I know she cares for me."

"As Menander so truly says, Montague, 'Mortal forethought and mortal wisdom are no better than smoke and folly, for Fortune alone holds the helm,' or Providence, as we prefer to regard the controlling power. But another consideration has always comforted me. The poet tells us that he who displays most commonsense is at once the best prophet and wisest counsellor. That is my modest satisfaction: to have, at least, a measure of commonsense. This has enabled me to support my dear son's terrible and

mysterious death and look forward steadfastly to all that it implies for Kingscresset."

His nephews walked beside him on the great terrace and he proceeded :

"One is confronted," he continued, "with an unknown quantity, and, as if that were not enough, one is quite unable to predict with any certainty what conditions that unknown quantity will be called to face. I speak, of course, of Tom and the future. His own bent and attitude to life are still uncertain, for he is too young to declare them ; but what is certain we can see clearly enough. Social conditions and the position of the rich man are swiftly changing, and as the poet says, 'Prosperity covereth a multitude of woes.' Never was that truer than now. But again —a tremendous thought : 'That which is right is better than that which is legal.' A time is coming when the right may altogether swallow up and destroy the legal, and all our values be overset by the voice and will of the people. Then what about Tom ? How best to serve my heir ? As Felix will tell you, Montey, my thoughts of late have been much with the boy, and I have decided, if you please, to leave you and Felix his joint trustees until he comes of age. 'To each of us the gods have allotted character as garrison-commander.' Then to build character is our first duty towards the young, and I am one of those who believe that nurture is greater than nature in this matter. I have proved it and seen children with 'bad blood,' as they say, in their veins, rise superior to heredity by reason of wholesome mental and physical environment. Now you two young men are admirably

fitted to guide Tom along the right way, as far as in you lies to do so. I can trust you—each in your own province—to look to him, control his steps and fortify his judgment. Felix will see to the spiritual side of his life, sustain him on a high moral plane and remind him that 'the free-born should only think lofty thoughts'; while you, Montey, are a Templer with our best traditions in your blood. If anything, your task is the more difficult, because religion and duty are static ideas, but the administration of Kingscresset must depend upon circumstances. What the social situation may be, and what the law may be, in ten years' time, no man can tell. The rich are hated with increasing heartiness. Even those who have automatically added to their pelf by the action of the war—without taking thought, but because they could not help it—even such men win only harsh words and evil glances. But in our own domain, we Templers are known for what we are, and none quarrels with my immense riches, because all know my sense of obligation under them."

"Taxation halves your income anyway, Uncle?" suggested the soldier.

"True; but even so the war has actually increased it. I put a quarter of a million into the five per cent. war loan, buying at the issue price of ninety-five. This has now actually gone above par. Again, as you know, your grandfather's favourite business interest was the Tyne Shipping Traders, which he created nearly a century ago. The war found our fleet numbering five-and-twenty large and well-found ships, and the Government commandeered them all, with the

result of nearly a million access to the estate. One could not help these things. Then, again, consider my collection of bronzes and faience—the lifework of the fourth baronet. These treasures are now worth more than Kingscresset itself. But I am not to blame for that."

His conversation deeply interested Montague, but for Felix it possessed little apparent attraction. He returned to Tom Templer, and listened while his uncle expounded certain opinions concerning the lad. For half an hour Sir Augustine uttered his old-world wisdom. Then he apologised to them for his grandson's sake.

They accepted the trust, and promised to devote their best care and energies to development of the boy.

"And may you live to do more than either of us," added Felix, "and know, before you go, Uncle, that the youngster is well equipped and armed for his great adventure."

It was upon the day that followed this conversation that Bertram Midwinter arrived at Kingscresset by appointment to report; but accident willed that what he was to learn should prove far more important than what he had already discovered. It was Sir Augustine himself, rather than the detective, who now brought a light to bear upon the present from the recent past and opened an unexpected channel for renewed inquiry. Midwinter's own information was surprising rather than helpful. The most thorough investigation had revealed nothing concerning the reputed botanist from Poundsgate. But that he was not what he pretended

soon appeared, for, when the detective personally sought the writer of the letter from Exeter Museum, he was informed that no such person existed. The Museum authorities read the letter and declared that the botanical information contained in it was accurate ; but they had never heard of "John Jackson," and the name of "Marc Lubin" was also quite unknown to them. Whether such a man lived they could not say ; but if he did, he was certainly not a Fellow of the Royal Society ; that they were able to declare ; and they also asserted that no work on botany existed under his name.

"He doubtless sent the letters to himself," concluded Midwinter, "but why, it is hard to guess, unless he was an artist and wanted to add a touch of reality to his impersonation. He must have posted probably an empty envelope from London, and he must have dropped the second envelope into the letter-box at Exeter station on his way down. Or it may be that the London letter came from an accomplice and conveyed information concerning Captain Matthew Templer ; while the botanical letter, which he left for me to discover, was only a blind. But he over-reached himself with too much cleverness, as they so often will. Had there been no letters, one might have continued in the belief that the man was genuine and we should have had no opportunity to prove otherwise before inquiry at Munich ; but he tells a needless lie which can be confuted in twenty-four hours."

Sir Augustine was very deeply interested in this story, and it roused in him a recent memory that led to unexpected issues.

"This dreadful event," he said, "was not for a moment connected by me with a recent very real though minor sorrow, which fell upon me. John Gratton's end seemed a great trouble at the time and, indeed, was so, for the death of promising youth is always a disturbance to an old man. But what you have told me brings my mind back to the fatal accident which destroyed young John Gratton at the beginning of the present month. Only a few weeks separated him from his new work in Africa, and he was completing a book on the flora of his native country, Derbyshire, when violent death overtook him. To-night I shall give you full particulars of this incident, because all you have told me that is known concerning my dear son's end creates in my mind a mysterious but real link between the two events. As Menander says, Mr. Midwinter: 'Time and man's ways embroider many an unexpected marvel into life's tapestries.'"

Later in the same evening Sir Augustine told his tale; but not until Fastnet had filled the Venetian goblet with his final refreshment.

"Take another cigar, Montey, and you, Midwinter," he said. "My narrative must be as full as I can make it, and I think it may entail a visit to Derbyshire for you. After the young man's death, I communicated with his mother. He lived with her, and she was his only near relation. She would have accompanied him to Africa when he proceeded there next autumn to Capetown University. From her I obtained a full description of the events attending his end—that is, as far as they are known. For no one saw him die. He lived at Holmesfield, a little thorpe on the edge

of the Derbyshire Peak, and from this place he attended the Sheffield College for his duties, and was just completing his connection with that establishment, correcting the proof sheets of his *Flora of Derbyshire* and winding up his affairs in England. Then—five days before his death—he received a communication from a stranger. It was directed from a hamlet not far distant, known as Grindleford, and it came from a student of natural history working in the Peak district. The gentleman's name was Purvis, and discovering that he happened to be so near the famous local botanist, Mr. Purvis wrote a brief note begging for certain information.

"John Gratton, the kindest, as well as the bravest, man on earth, replied in person. With the help of his motor-bicycle, he could reach Grindleford from Holmesfield in half an hour, and the upshot was that he found in Mr. Purvis an agreeable and intelligent amateur, and was happy to impart his local knowledge to the elder man. He took the visitor to various habitats of rare plants, and, on one occasion, the enthusiast lunched at Holmesfield with John and his mother. This is important, for it enables us to learn what manner of man was Purvis. Then came the fatal night of the boy's death, and the circumstances —as related by his mother—are as follows. On the night before, Mr. Purvis concluded his excursion and left Derbyshire, John motored over to Grindleford and supped with him by invitation. Mrs. Gratton recollects that her son said something about a rare cryptogam, or moss, which his new friend had reported; but concerning this she had no particulars. At any rate, he

motored to Grindleford, and when Mrs. Gratton retired, her son had not returned. This did not alarm her, for he constantly rode off on his machine—to Sheffield and elsewhere—and did not come home until a very late hour.

"Now Purvis was in lodgings—two little rooms in a small house upon the high road into the Peak through Grindleford—and the landlady, who looked after him, could say little about the fatal event. Gratton had supped with Purvis, and she had waited upon them. Their talk was all of plants. At ten o'clock she went to bed, according to her custom, and on the following morning, at a very early hour, a trap arrived to convey her lodger to the railway station by the first train into Sheffield. He had left her before half past six. Subsequent events made it most desirable that Mr. Purvis should be discovered, for in the course of the morning it was found that poor Gratton had met with a fatal accident on the previous night. Yet, though an accurate description of Purvis was forthcoming both from Mrs. Gratton and his landlady at Grindleford, the man could not be traced. He had left Grindleford by the early train; but inquiry at every intermediate station as far as Sheffield failed to produce any information respecting him.

"Now I must return to Gratton himself. At what hour he left her house on the night of his death the woman at Grindleford could not say, because she had gone to sleep. She only knew that Mr. Purvis descended in good time to his early breakfast, which she had risen soon after five o'clock to prepare. He made mention of his guest of the previous evening, and

said that they were talking until a late hour before John Gratton left.

"Then, after Purvis was gone two hours, came the news that Gratton had been found dead in a narrow lane about midway between Grindleford and his home. The lane left the high road at right angles and descended steeply beneath an overhanging bank of earth and stone to a stream. Here, about one hundred and fifty yards from the main road above, they found him, with his skull smashed in, some three or four yards from his ruined motor bicycle. Why he had left the main road, of course, none could know; but the incidents of his death appeared clear enough and the police re-constructed the scene in the following manner. There had evidently been a fall of earth and heavy stones from the overhanging bank. That was clear, and a carter, familiar with the spot, who had actually discovered the dead body on his way to work, was sure that the stones had not fallen when he returned home that way overnight. But into this débris the machine had obviously run and thus caused the accident. Gratton was shot over the front of his motor bicycle with great violence and had evidently turned a half somersault and fallen on the back of his neck. The back of his skull was crushed and he still lay on the rock that had caused the fatal injuries. His machine had run straight into a larger boulder and apparently taken fire after the accident, for it was not only buckled, but everything that could burn had done so.

"A physician declared that the young man must have perished instantaneously, and the only mystery about the tragic death was how the victim came to

be where he had died. Extensive advertisements were published, both in the local and London press, and Mr. Purvis was invited to communicate with the police and give any information respecting Gratton's last hour on earth; but though it seems improbable that he could have failed to hear of the accident, he gave no sign and made no response whatever.

"As for Mrs. Gratton, when she rose the next day to find that John had not returned, she felt uneasy and, knowing that he had only meant to sup with his new acquaintance, she set off after breakfast to seek him. She was on her way when the Grindleford ambulance car met her conveying the body of her son to his home. Of course the police had recognised him, for he was well known in the neighbourhood.

"Now I should not have troubled you with this story, Mr. Midwinter, but for one important fact in your own description of the strange man known as Lubin, whom you are associating with my son's death. You may or may not be correct in supposing that Marc Lubin had anything to do with Matthew's murder, and you may or may not be right in suggesting that the murderer was a German and mistook my son for Montague here, being on a mission of vengeance for the victim of the duel. Of these theories, and whether truth lies hid among them, we do not yet know; but when you described Lubin, there instantly sprang into my mind the description of Purvis in the words of John Gratton's mother. Of course she had no idea how important the description might prove, and she gave no very full details. Yet all that she did tell me exactly corresponds with what you heard

at Poundsgate and, what is more, Lubin's operations upon the death of my son and his speedy departure at the earliest moment afterwards, seem to echo the manner in which Purvis left Derbyshire and vanished within a few hours of the death of Gratton. What conceivable link exists between the two events I cannot see, and we may only be faced with a coincidence of no importance: but I report the facts and a visit to Grindleford may glean more."

The old man stopped, sighed, and then drank from his goblet.

"And how did Mrs. Gratton describe the stranger who lunched with her, Sir Augustine?" asked Midwinter.

"As rather stout, clad in black knickerbockers, and everything black about him, including a close beard and moustaches. She said that his hair was short also, and that he 'seemed as if he might be a foreigner.' Those were her words. But she added that he spoke with no accent and was very sparing of speech. The coroner's jury, by the way, brought in a verdict of accidental death, and the matter challenged little but local attention. They held a memorial service for the young man in Sheffield, for he had many friends at the College."

The incident was discussed, and both Felix and Montague Templer seemed disinclined to connect it with their cousin's murder; but, on seeking for support to their opinion from the detective, they found him quite unprepared to agree with them. Indeed, he held the contrary opinion.

"The thing is to exhaust all possibility of there

being a link between the two events, as Sir Augustine says," he began, " but you cannot do so, gentlemen, for there is a strong link. I will come to it, but first let me remind you that we are dealing with three events, not two, and if we associate, both with the death of Captain Templer and that of Mr. Gratton, the third event, then we increase the probability that these two deaths are themselves connected. Indeed, to my mind, we prove it. The appearance of a black-bearded man, such as is described at Poundsgate by the landlord of the ' Seven Stars,' and in Derbyshire by Mrs. Gratton and the landlady, is not all we have to go upon. A man answering to exactly the same description was seen by Father Templer here—seen in this room. We know the particulars. You, Father Felix, were watching him and he was reading Sir Augustine's will, having broken into the desk yonder to do so. Then came Major Templer downstairs; the man was alarmed, bolted for the open window, and, when you attempted to stop him, he dealt you a heavy blow, knocked you down and made his escape, as Major Templer entered. And the details of that outrage immensely strengthen the likelihood that the self-same man was responsible for the tragedies in Devon and Derbyshire."

" But this establishes no link," argued Sir Augustine. " I mean," he added, " no link between my dead son and this dead lad—the young fellow who saved my life at such tremendous peril to his own in Switzerland."

" There lies the link, nevertheless," replied Mid-winter. " There lies the link forged by some unknown agency between Captain Matthew Templer and John

Gratton. What was the unknown man doing, gentlemen? He was reading Sir Augustine's will, and in that will, if I mistake not, he would have found, not only the name of the heir, but that of the man who had been privileged to save the testator's life at the risk of his own."

"Most true," admitted the baronet. "Money is all that I could give Gratton, except gratitude. I had remembered him handsomely."

"But, assuming that the black man had found John Gratton was generously remembered, how would that have tempted anybody to destroy him?" asked Felix. "Surely there was nothing to gain for any outsider by rendering it impossible for Gratton to enjoy his legacy? And, in the same way, how could the unknown man have reaped advantage from knowing my uncle's intentions respecting his son and heir?"

"I cannot tell you for a moment. I do not see at present a shadow of reason for what has happened; I am only indicating a link between the two tragedies. The unknown black man may even be three different men; but which is more likely—that these three events bear no connection, or that they are related? For my own part, I am convinced that they are related and that we have to do with an individual. I shall proceed on that assumption."

Sir Augustine rose.

"I will bid you good-night," he said. "There are no secrets in my will. It must soon be made again, for all is now altered in its paramount conditions. I should not wish my nephews to read it—they will quite understand that—but if Mr. Midwinter thinks

that anything is to be gained by reading it, he is at full liberty to do so."

"Thank you, Sir Augustine; but not at present. Indeed, there is only one thing I should like to hear that you can tell me in a moment. Assuming you left a legacy to John Gratton, may I ask whether any conditions accompanied it and whether your bequest was left to his heirs and assigns, or only to him?"

"I inserted the legacy in a codicil. And the gift I designed for him was accompanied by no conditions. Moreover, it was left to him alone."

"Did he know you had remembered him?"

"He did. I wanted him to accept the gift during my lifetime, but Gratton declared, very wisely, that any such thing would only disturb the plans he had laid for his life's work and perhaps make him idle. It was a most sensible decision, for nothing is more difficult than for a young man to work hard when he knows all the time there is no necessity to do so. In his case, ambition might have kept him to hard work; but I thoroughly approved his view."

"He doubtless guessed that you would leave him enough to be free of work?"

"I dare say he did. Money is a relative term, and to one, like myself, accustomed to think in what would be very large sums to another, my bequest may appear considerable. But, after all, it depends upon what value I attached to my life, does it not? I was very glad to be spared a little longer, though now I need hardly tell you, the desire has much diminished, Mr. Midwinter. A few years ago, however, I did not feel so old. The war began it; my terrible loss has com-

pleted the work. 'Few save the old,' says Menander, 'have imagination to know what old age is.'"

"Yet who but hopes he will be spared to find out?" added the priest.

"At any rate, I was very thankful to escape sudden death," continued his uncle, "and being conscious, after better knowledge of him, that Gratton would not abuse wealth, but devote it through the paths of science to increase of human knowledge and happiness, I gladly left him a little fortune—a hundred thousand pounds. Good-night, Midwinter; good-night, boys."

He departed, and Montague Templer stared at his cousin. Felix, too, was startled by the bequest.

"Good God!" said the soldier in amazement.

"Your uncle does things on the grand scale," murmured the detective.

They talked far into the night and Midwinter determined to leave for Derbyshire on the following morning. His purpose was to learn all that the unknown's landlady at Grindleford could tell him respecting her lodger's habits and collate the information with that he had gathered at Poundsgate. He also proposed to study the theatre of John Gratton's death.

CHAPTER V

THE SECOND STROKE

A WEEK later, Felix Templer found it necessary to leave his uncle for a while and return to the Brotherhood of the Red Lion. He proposed, however, to be absent for a few days only, for, as he explained to his superior, Father Champernowne, he held his first call at this moment to be with the bereaved head of the family. But now he set off, after the morning meal, and the day being fine, chose to walk to the station. His way took him over the heath-clad hill, where stood the hamlet, and Sir Augustine, with Montague Templer, walked half a mile beside him.

The soldier was grumbling. He, too, had obtained leave, and spent some weeks at Kingscresset at his uncle's wish. And he had largely occupied the time with Sir Augustine's bailiff, for it was the old man's desire that Montague, as opportunity offered, should increase his knowledge of the estate and so improve his power to assist the heir in time to come. But the young man's investigations had made him indignant. He protested at the futility and idleness of the land workers.

"It's disgusting to see what they call a day's work—lazy, loafing, swindling beggars. They want discipline, yet half of them have been in the army and fought in the war," he said.

"Reaction," explained Felix. "It is just because they have been in the army and suffered, as we know they suffered, that they are now affected with a sort of physical inertia."

"They have forgotten how to work and should be sharply reminded—where they feel it most—in their pockets."

Sir Augustine patted Montague on his broad shoulder and shook his head at the younger's heat.

"It was always so. As we say of *Punch*, that it never is as funny as it used to be, so we may of labour, that it never works so hard as it used to work. No new complaint, Montey. '*Genus humanum multo fuit illud in arvis durius*,' said the Roman poet; and that means, 'the former race was much more hardy in the fields'—'stood to work' better, as we describe it. I must apologise to Felix for quoting Lucretius, I fear; but the truth appears to be that no generation is ever satisfied with the last."

"It is a law of progress," declared Felix.

"It isn't a law of progress to give these beggars three times as much as they earn and twice as much as they even try to earn. And I told Terry, the bailiff, so. You can afford to make them these huge money presents for doing nothing, but what about the average landowner and employer of labour, who cannot?"

"Frankly, Montague, I always enjoyed far more

wealth than I had wit to spend, because my tastes are so unusually simple. Therefore, no doubt all our expenditure is on rather a needlessly lavish scale. You look at life differently, having an economical and rational mind. But Felix, now, if he were at the helm, he'd be content to live on a straw a day and benefit his people."

"Benefit the right people, then," urged Montague, "not all these good-for-nothing bumpkins."

"Tradition and obligation, Montey. The feudal tradition if you like; still, I must remain under its influence and practise the old precept, that charity begins at home."

"Social changes will soon decree these traditions obsolete and these obligations fancied," declared Felix. "It will be discovered that both are founded really on unsocial and dead values of property, only fit for the scrap heap. The world won't appreciate your personal distinction and fineness, your generosity and your kindly, considerate way of doing things. The happiness and content of your own community doesn't matter. Kingscresset is only an oasis in a desert of change."

"Let the classes pull together and they can still keep the masses where they belong," said the soldier.

"No, Montey—don't imagine it," warned his uncle. "We have given the masses education, and there is no question of pulling together against the fruits of that. The future must produce enormous changes; and that is why I am so anxious to leave my grandson Tom, with you and Felix for guardians. He is opinion-

ated already, and I haven't the heart to differ from him, because he echoes dear Matthew."

"He's a jolly, sane young shaver," vowed Felix, "and quite capable of looking ahead. But, of course, he's on the side of his class. But the world is going to change very radically in the next ten years. Signs are all round us; and if Tom stands for the old order, it will only be thanks to the tremendous revenues behind him. Take land alone. Do you know, Montey, that more than three million acres have changed hands since the Armistice?"

"So much the worse for England," declared Montague. "Tom tells me that there is any amount of trash at Eton now—the cubs of the new rich. But there's one thing about them: they may be supposed to stand on our side. I'd sooner—for England's sake—that even they had the land than the labouring classes of England. Profiteers have worked hard, anyway, and most of them helped us to win the war."

"The money that buys hate and envy is not riches, however, and if education——"

"For God's sake, don't talk of education, sir," interrupted the soldier testily. "I'm sick of the word. What is the education of the mass worth? Less than nothing. And where is it leading them? To fancied goals, which don't exist, and to social theories which Russia has shown are impossible in practice. Are they happier, honester, wiser, decenter than they were in your youth? Do they justify their existence better? Do they work as thoroughly? Are they as straight and self-respecting?"

"Transitions are always painful," explained Felix.

"We are going through a period of half knowledge, Montey. We must work through these lean years and put our faith in the next generation."

"You're a radical at heart," answered his cousin, "and the deadliest sort of radical too—the parson radical. You have it in your power to sow the seeds of a great deal of mischief, Felix, and I've no doubt you use that power."

The younger flushed.

"That's a hard saying," he answered. "It doesn't much become you, Montey, to speak so. We stand for different ideals; but I never allow myself to criticise you; and you are impertinent to speak to me in that way."

"You cannot have it both ways," said Montague coldly. "You cannot evade Compte's law of the three stages, Felix, or suppose that your sacerdotal ideas are going to get any consideration if your socialistic ideas prosper. What has Russia done to your profession? Compte says the first phase of man's mind is theological; the second, metaphysical; the third, upon which I suppose we have now fairly entered, is scientific."

The priest's eyes flashed.

"You will live to know better. It is not science that will save the world, and not selfishness and greed and class prejudice."

He proceeded hotly until Sir Augustine stopped him.

"Sorry, my dear Felix, but you will miss your train We can resume this interesting argument when you come back to me. You and Montey must compose

your differences, however, and pull together—for Tom's sake."

The reproof touched both men. Almost simultaneously they extended a hand.

"Differences of opinion will never part us, or cloud our regard for you and for one another," said Felix.

"Nor our pride of family," added the soldier. "There is no class prejudice in being proud of the Templers and their history."

Then the younger went on his way, ascending a track across the moor, and Sir Augustine turned homeward with Montague.

"I'm not going to quarrel with Felix; but my concern is with Tom and the future," explained the soldier. "You don't want these wild ideas put into Tom's head. Felix can follow what career his conscience prompts him; Tom's career is fixed and certain. He will be faced with plenty of difficulties; but he will be true to his class if I can help him to be."

"I'm sure of it. He has a fine nature—his father's fearless outlook on life, combined with higher intelligence and a quicker grasp than belonged either to his father or to me. With those swift, apprehensive natures, the peril is to become pragmatic, Montague, and set convenience and progress higher than steadfast holding to the truth. The politicians are only too fruitful exemplars of this danger. Few politicians are real men for that reason."

The valued young life round which this discussion revolved was spending his last day before returning to Eton in the sport he best loved—a taste inherited from

his father. Tom had gone fishing immediately after breakfast, and Montague, whose leave would soon terminate, had promised presently to look him up. Anon he left Sir Augustine and strolled into the valley, that he might reach the lakes, cross the bridge, which spanned the narrow water between them, and so follow Tom to the outlet of the lower lake, where he found the best sport.

It is with his cousin that we have to do, however, for at a later hour, in his study at the home of the Brotherhood, Felix was engaged to meet Bertram Midwinter and learn from him the result of his researches in the North.

The detective arrived soon after noon and accepted his friend's invitation to luncheon.

"I've got little to tell you, Father," he said, "and beyond proving pretty conclusively that 'Lubin' and 'Purvis' are the same person, I don't add to our knowledge. That, however, substantiates more than the fact itself, as you see. For if 'Lubin' went to Devonshire to murder Captain Templer, I think we may assume that 'Purvis' was quite possibly engaged in some sinister operations at Grindleford. In a word, the great stone against which Gratton appeared to have smashed in his skull may not really be responsible for his death. Until we can link the two events more closely, however, and try to reach the reason for them we must leave John Gratton out of the question. All I learn is that 'Purvis' behaved at his lodgings in Grindleford exactly as 'Lubin' behaved later at 'The Seven Stars' in Devonshire. A quiet, decent man—civil to all, and enthusiastic about wild plants.

It is impossible to say at what hour Gratton left him on the fatal night, and also impossible to prove that 'Purvis' went out with him when he left, and returned later alone. The landlady had long ago gone to bed and knew nothing about it. I closely examined the place of John Gratton's death and heard the local police on the subject. But it was too long ago. The fall of stones from the bank above the road had, of course, been cleared up and the stones themselves flung into a ditch. The traces of the motor bicycle tyres, and a thousand details that would have been important to me, were gone. Nor do I blame the local police for not approaching the matter with suspicion, or examining many things that I should have examined. They saw no reason to suspect foul play. There was not the least justification for seeing a crime behind the facts."

"None—to them, of course—or to anybody. It is only the thing that happened since that threw a sinister light."

"And the thing that happened before—the visit of the unknown man to Kingscresset. I have collected the scanty evidence now and tried hard to show some association between the items, so that we might get a synthesis into the actions of the unknown. But so far, frankly, I cannot explain his purposes. At first, I believed that the murderer had made a mistake. Guessing him to be a German, I argued that he came to this country as a result of Major Montague's duel, with the intention to destroy him, and that he went on the wrong tack and killed the Major's cousin in error. As you know, I went so far as to warn your

cousin that might be so, and that it behooved him to look to himself. Now I believe that to be a mistaken idea. I see no evidence of it, since we have so clearly associated the death of Gratton with the unknown man's activities. Tell me this, Father Felix, is there in your family history any page you keep shut, but which might illuminate our present problem? You know I do not ask for curiosity, but old families have many skeletons in their cupboards. I have known an extraordinary case, when a remittance man, with fancied grievances, returned unguessed to his own country and committed just such a crime as the murder of Matthew Templer. Imaginary wrongs often grow in the heart till they breed a fierce fever and end in criminal action."

"That is true enough, Bertram. There is no more fatal thing than to foster a suspicion that the world is against us and that we are suffering from the persecution of other men. No; I can say with absolute certainty that we have no such secret hidden in our story. You have yourself actually met every living member of the family. It is a singular fact that we should be so very few at this moment. Nor is the war altogether responsible. The hidden hand lifted against Matthew can have nothing to do with any of his own kindred—nor with himself; which is more to the point. He had no enemies and, if he was deliberately removed, it must have been for reasons of which he himself probably knew nothing."

"In that case," said Midwinter, "I should much fear we have not heard the last of this unknown assassin. He may not have accomplished his full

purpose. He may even be actively engaged still; and it certainly is up to every member of your family to take reasonable care."

But Felix shook his head.

"I do not think so. I rather judge that there may have been some link between Matthew and John Gratton, of which we know nothing, and that possibly both men were connected with others in some association that you have not discovered. I believe with you that more may yet happen, and this unknown power of evil strike again; but I do not feel convinced that the next blow will fall on us. Why should it?"

"There was the midnight examination of Sir Augustine's will."

"That is true; but it didn't implicate Matthew or Gratton. They were both in the will, but their destruction could not have served the advantage of anybody else."

Midwinter did not pursue the subject.

"We must wait," he said. "I have a notion that we may not have to wait long."

"You believe we have not heard the end of it? You remind me of a great saying of the mystics, Bertram. It refers to abstractions, but applies equally to little details of life. 'Thought is ever passing from the false to the true.' That is an eternal fact in philosophy and in life. For thought it is that confounds thought; only the eternally true can defy thought. When once you have for your foundation in this problem something eternally true, you will begin to build. I believe that you are destined

to get to the bottom of it, sooner or later, but you know that I rate intuition far higher than reason. Intuition burns up reason as a straw in the furnace, and all the great works of genius are founded on intuition, not reason. Intuition, like Revelation itself, is a gift from heaven, not an acquired accomplishment. You have genius in your dreadful profession, as I firmly believe, and it will lead you to solve this riddle if God so wills. Let us now go out and eat."

But the purposed meal was never taken. As though to substantiate Midwinter's prophecy there came at this moment a telegram for Felix Templer. He turned pale and stared at the paper as he read; but he controlled himself and handed the message to his companion.

"We have perhaps both spoken truer than we knew," he said, while Midwinter studied what was written.

"*Bad news. Return at once. Bring detective if possible.—Montague.—Kingscresset.*"

"I can be ready in half an hour," said Midwinter, while the other sought a telegraph form upon his desk, but failed to find one. The messenger boy, however, furnished him and he despatched a reply indicating that he would return and bring Midwinter with him.

"I'm awfully afraid this means my uncle," he declared, as the detective and himself travelled in a motor car to Waterloo soon afterwards.

"Why Sir Augustine?"

"Who else is likely?"

"I think it much more probable that you are going to hear of disaster to the lad; and if—but it is idle to speculate on the meaning of events before we know they have occurred."

Silence fell between them, and, taking a newspaper from his bag, the younger fell to reading, while Midwinter brought out a note-book. At Kingscresset station Major Templer met his cousin.

"Sir Augustine?" were the first words that Felix spoke as Montague opened the carriage door.

"He's all right—it's Tom. The boy's drowned—not an accident—a planned murder."

Felix stood still. In his shaken brain a curious, very minor, aspect of the disaster seemed to come to the surface. He breathed hard and turned to Midwinter.

"Honour where honour is due—Bertram believed that Tom was the trouble."

"Let Major Templer tell us the details here, before we get into the car, if time isn't pressing," interrupted the detective.

They walked up and down the platform and were soon alone, for the few to come and go by the train disappeared, and the station remained empty.

"After you went to London," began Montague, "I returned with the governor, left him at home and strolled down to join Tom as I promised. Mr. Midwinter may or may not know that his way led over the little bridge which crosses the narrow between the lakes. This bridge has a gate on either bank and is only used by the family—not by keepers and

woodmen. Tom took the key and promised to leave it in the lock for me when I followed him. On reaching the gate—it must have been as nearly as possible two hours after the boy had got there—I saw at once what had happened. The gate was open, but the bridge had disappeared. It is a very light rustic affair, supported by four lofty poles—two upon each bank. The wood was sound enough, for it had been renewed only a few years ago; but, notwithstanding that, the whole structure was down and lay floating. Some pieces had caught against the banks; some were swept far out into the water by the current that runs strongly from the upper to the lower lake. I got to the bank, and saw Tom's straw hat on the water and his fishing rod caught on the farther side. That seemed to show he'd nearly got across when the bridge fell. I knew in a moment where he must be, poor little beggar. He could swim, but he was laden with a heavy bag over his shoulder containing a bait can, two bottles of ginger-beer, and a few other things. He is drowned without much shadow of doubt. I looked across at the other side, and I saw a man watching me. It was no imagination, or hallucination, or anything like that. I am prepared to swear that a man stood behind that shrubby rhododendron, four feet high, where the path from the bridge divides and goes up and down the side of the water. I saw his head and shoulders over the bush, and we eyed one another for fifteen seconds, then he disappeared. I could do nothing but shout and try to attract attention, knowing all the time I was unlikely to be heard. I hesitated to attempt to swim across, because I am

a poor swimmer for one thing, and, for another, I was not sure that when the man heard me in the water, he would not wait and get me before I could climb up the bank on the other side. Moreover, there was Tom to be considered."

"At this point describe the man, Major Templer," begged Midwinter.

"Yes, of course. He was not more than five or six yards from the bank and I had a clear sight of him —at a range of twenty-five yards at the outside. He was thick-set and his head seemed rather low on his shoulders. He wore a black, close cap over his hair, large dark glasses, and a close, black beard—a sort of sailor's beard."

"And then?"

"I was torn in half between getting round the top of the lake and hunting the brute on my own, or at once seeking aid. Of course, there couldn't be any choice really. It wasn't possible for me to know when Tom fell in, or what had happened before we got to the bridge. I couldn't even be positive that he was in the water at all. I started to go to the tool-house and boat house, at the top of the higher lake, and get the wherry and pull down; but before I was half way there, I saw that was useless. It seemed too late to save Tom if he was under water and, if he wasn't, I should only be wasting time. So I ran to the house, got on the telephone and called up the bailiff and the lodges and the head-keeper. I told them to go to the bridge and take the wherry down. I also told Wharton—the head-keeper, Midwinter—to send men through Gawler Bottom and under the Curtain and

hunt all that side of the hanging woods for a stranger. If anybody turned up, I told them to detain him whatever he might say. I then went to Sir Augustine and broke it to him that I feared the boy was gone."

The young soldier stopped and his voice shook.

"Damn it, it's been hell, and I shan't feel a man again until that devil's caught and hanged. Sir Augustine's first wish was to send for you, of course, Felix, and so I telegraphed and then went down to the water. They had all tumbled to the situation and done the right thing. They took the big net and weighted it and dragged it from the narrow downward. They'd—they'd just found the boy when I got there. Weighted with his bag and paraphernalia he'd had no show. Doctor Forbes arrived as we brought him ashore, and we worked without stopping till an hour ago to try and get him to breathe. But he's dead."

"Have you had any report from the keepers?"

"They'd found nobody and no trace of anybody when I left them. They're hunting still, but, of course, the brute has got clear off."

"Have you examined the bridge?"

"I haven't, but Terry did while they were dragging. Terry's the bailiff, Midwinter. And what he discovered makes the thing clearly a murder. The bridge was destroyed. Each of the four fir poles that support it has been clean sawn through—in such a way that the thing held up when left alone, but a dog running over it was enough to have brought it down. Even if the wind had got up last night, that would probably have settled it. The boy, no doubt, started,

then felt the thing collapsing under him and made a dash to get across before it was down. But he hadn't time. He went with it."

They were silent, and Felix asked for his uncle.

"How is he facing this—Sir Augustine?"

"I don't know. I couldn't stop with him. Fastnet told me, just before I left to meet you, that he had the boy in the library and was kneeling down beside him."

"Let us get back," said his cousin, and in ten minutes Kingscresset was sighted. Midwinter saw Doctor Forbes—a brisk, middle-aged country practitioner of ordinary pattern—and Felix Templer joined his uncle.

"Have you examined the body?" was the detective's first question, and the physician replied that he had done so.

"After hearing Major Templer, I felt the importance of that," he replied, "and while we laboured to try and restore respiration, I looked carefully over every inch of the poor lad. He was neither struck by a bullet or injured by the light timbers of the falling bridge. His death came by drowning only. He was heavily weighted and probably sank at once. A strong current runs there; but he had not been carried far from where he must have fallen in. If, as it seems, the man responsible for it was actually close at hand to satisfy himself——"

But Midwinter was not farther interested by any opinion from the doctor. He asked Fastnet for food, and, after eating and drinking, proceeded to the lake beside Inspector Marchant of the local police, who already waited for him. To the surrounding district

had been published all particulars, but as yet no report concerning the unknown man was at hand.

Felix found his uncle with the dead. Eternal youth seemed to reign triumphant on the placid features of the boy, while the old man had suffered increase of years since the morning. He was grey and haggard; he clung to the hand that his nephew extended to him.

"The lad—the lad, Felix—the lad," he murmured. "The young are snatched and the old are still left. Have we not had sufficient destruction of youth?"

"Concentrate your thoughts on him, not yourself, dear Uncle Augustine. It has pleased God to call our little brother. So be it!"

He knelt by the dead boy and prayed earnestly aloud, while the old man listened.

They talked together afterwards.

"Montague believes that it was no accident, Felix; and in that case we appear to have fallen upon some awful vendetta directed not only against Matthew, but all his family. It seems inconceivable. This is no Englishman who has done it. We do not know all the war hides."

"Midwinter, remembering Montague's duel, suspected at one time that this dear boy's father had been slain as an act of revenge by somebody who mistook him for Montague. But there can have been no mistake a second time."

"There may have been. It is an idea. This stroke may well have been intended for Montague. I would almost sooner think such an error had been committed than the alternative," declared Sir Augustine.

"Why do you say this second stroke may have been intended for Montague?" asked Felix.

"Because," answered his uncle, "Montague was the last over the bridge. He crossed last night, after rabbit shooting in Gawler Bottom, and locked the bridge after him. Now, is it not possible that the man he saw this morning may not have been hidden there yesterday and seen him cross the bridge and lock it? He might then have guessed that Montague would probably be the first to return to the bridge to-day. I attach no importance to the notion; but it can be put before Midwinter."

"Bertram may find, after all, that we are wrong in supposing the bridge was deliberately wrecked. It would be a comfort in a way to know that our dear Tom met his death naturally."

But the elder shook his head.

"Impossible. Montague and Terry cannot be mistaken on a question of that sort. Besides, what was this accursed man doing there?"

Montague himself appeared as they talked. He had listened at the door for a few moments, to convince himself no scene of grief or emotion proceeded, for his every instinct shrank from any such display. But hearing his cousin and Sir Augustine discussing the situation, he joined them.

Elsewhere Midwinter laboured with Inspector Marchant until dusk and satisfied himself that, beyond question, another very deliberate murder had been committed. No attempt to conceal the fact confronted him. The four legs of the bridge were deliberately sawn through transversely—in such a way that the

erection held together until pressure was put upon it. Then any appreciable weight was destined to drive two legs off their foundations, with the result that the other two were bound instantly to follow. It was not possible to reach the legs with the gates locked save by water, and to do so a boat was necessary. But nothing would have been easier under the night than for a man to launch the wherry and operate from it. Midwinter examined the wherry, but it had been used for the business of dragging the lake, and offered no clue.

Meantime, an army of local men, many often employed as beaters, worked over the woods to the boundaries and the heath above. They left not a nook examined, and also ascended and descended the Curtain—the great precipice of weathered limestone that broke the slope of the hanging woods. But no evidence rewarded the search. It was tolerably clear that the unknown had not left by train, from either of the two nearest stations, since a recollection of him must have remained in the mind of somebody had he done so; but there was nothing to prevent him from having concealed a bicycle within the boundaries of Kingscresset. There were many places on the north and east side of the estate where a public road ran near its confines, and a thousand spots wherein a machine might have been concealed.

Midwinter directed a system of inquiry and presently returned to the house. He was invited at once to give an opinion on Sir Augustine's theory.

"Because, if it is conceivable," explained Montague, "if such a thing as a vendetta against Captain Matthew

Templer exists, then it may not end with his son. My cousin and I are going to London to-night in any case, to bring Miss Templer and her mother down by motor car ; but I'd like to know if you think she is in any danger."

Midwinter considered.

" Do the ladies know yet ? " he asked.

" They do not, Mr. Midwinter," answered Sir Augustine. " I would not inform them until hope was extinct, and after I knew that, I still delayed until my nephew joined me. Now he proposes to motor to London after dinner and break the news. Only he can do it. Montague is going up with him."

" Major Templer must be here for the inquest the day after to-morrow," explained Midwinter.

" I shall be back to-morrow morning," answered the soldier. " The point I ask you to consider is whether you think Mrs. Templer or her daughter is in any sort of danger at this minute."

" It is possible. One is entirely in the dark as to what is being done and who are doing it."

" Why more than one ? " inquired Felix, and Midwinter answered.

" I have got into the way of regarding this as the work of more than one," he replied, " but it is a fair question. I am quite unprepared at present to advance reasons for my opinion."

" But you think so ? "

" I do."

" Has to-day increased or modified your suspicion ? " inquired Sir Augustine.

" Increased it. But to-day has given me much

more than that to think about. I can hazard no definite opinions at all. There may certainly exist danger to Captain Matthew's family."

"Or, as I have suggested, this may only be another mistake," said Sir Augustine. "It may be that Montague's life was again intended, and that the poor boy was drowned in error."

"I think it most improbable," answered Midwinter. "Indeed, I no longer find the theory of an error tenable."

"One vital point certainly can be made," suggested Felix. "This was the work of somebody who knew that Tom would be the next to cross the bridge. If that is so, the murderer must have got his knowledge inside the house. The servants—two footmen and Fastnet—most certainly heard Tom make his plans for his last day at Kingscresset. They knew he was going immediately after breakfast to fish, and they heard him ask his grandfather last night if he might have the key of the bridge."

"That is very significant," admitted Midwinter. "Something may come of it; but leave the servants to me. Do not let them guess beforehand that I shall question any of them."

"All these three men are incapable of any evil," declared their master, and his nephews upheld him.

"But they may have mentioned your grandson's plans for to-day in all innocence, to ears that were not so innocent," explained Midwinter. "One has not as yet any idea of what organisation lies behind this attack. To-morrow may enlighten us and furnish clues at last. Meantime, I beg all three of you to exert

every care and run no needless risks. We are still in the dark. The worst may have been done and the object of this unknown enemy may be satisfied; but, until time proves if that is so, I hope you will exercise precaution and court no special danger."

Sir Augustine was agitated.

"I had not considered that," he said. "Do you mean that there may be peril threatening the family itself—that the life of every member is in the balance?"

"One cannot disguise the possibility, Sir Augustine. At least, commonsense urges the greatest care. I trust you will not walk out alone on the estate. Indeed, I think you should go nowhere alone. As for Father Felix——"

But his friend interrupted him.

"This is folly, Midwinter," he said, "this is indeed to meet trouble half way. We are in the Hands of our Maker, and must all proceed with our lives as our duty and conscience direct."

But Montague was more worldly-wise.

"Midwinter's right," he said. "As to duty, it's our duty to get to the bottom of this unknown abomination, not offer a target for it. You of all people must be careful, Uncle."

"Not I," answered the old man. "My life is the one that matters least of all now. It is for you, Montague, that we must think; and it is upon you the duty of prevenient care first falls. You will send in your papers as soon as possible."

Both Felix and his cousin were surprised out of themselves by this unexpected direction.

"Send in my papers!" exclaimed the soldier. "Why should I do that?"

"Because you are my heir. In a few years at most you will reign here, and the sooner you join me permanently at Kingscresset the better."

"By God, sir, I'd forgotten!" confessed the young man. But trouble and anxiety rather than any satisfaction marked his face and and his speech as he made answer; and Midwinter, who watched him closely as he spoke, marked the fact.

Montague's handsome features, indeed, clouded heavily. A wave of colour flushed under his sun-browned skin, and for a moment he seemed puzzled.

"Leave the army!" he said. "Just when I was going to exchange, with your kind help, and gratify my greatest ambition?"

Sir Augustine for the moment forgot his grief before this question; and as surely as he returned to himself, with a mind moving along its accustomed grooves, it was certain that he would fall back upon his poet.

"'When at a loss, take council with yourself,' Montey. This is a time to ask yourself questions, not me, or any other. 'In the midst of shouting and questioning the true course is lost; but it will appear again if we let reason have her way with us.'"

"That applies to us all," said Felix. "I, too, had quite forgotten what Tom's death meant to Montague."

"He must pray for courage to endure good fortune as well as bad. His life is changed. He has not sought this tremendous responsibility, but for purposes we know not and through ways of terrible sorrow and tribulation, it has been brought about. He must,

therefore, face the great change and bow to God's will," answered the elder.

At ten o'clock the young men left together for London, while the detective stopped at Kingscresset. He worked long after Sir Augustine, at the wish of Doctor Forbes, had consented to retire, and when he had gone to bed, the physician, who was remaining for the night, confided a fear to Midwinter.

" This business is shaking up the old man very badly," he said. " Small wonder either. But at his age these repeated shocks leave a pretty ugly mark. There have been tremendous calls upon his reserves of vitality to keep him going."

" He has religion behind him," answered the other, who was studying a large scale map of Kingscresset and its approaches.

" Religion won't strengthen a very tired old heart, my dear sir," replied the other, " and no more will the literary remains of Menander. Strychnine is better than either, if you'll pardon a man of science for saying so."

CHAPTER VI

A TERRIBLE THEORY

EACH member of the afflicted family reacted to this shattering blow in the different measure of their characters, and the mother who had thus lost her son so swiftly upon the death of his father was crushed with grief. She welcomed the ministrations of her husband's family and took most comfort in the company of Sir Augustine himself. She was not a particularly religious woman, and did not share the Templer devotion to the Anglo-Catholic party; but religion none the less availed her now, and she spent long hours, before and after the funeral, in the private chapel.

She granted Midwinter two interviews and strove to help him to the best of her powers; but she could throw no ray of light upon the hidden and far-reaching malice that appeared to have been incurred by her husband. She was unaware that he held any secrets from her, and had never heard him, or his friends, speak of an enemy. There was no sin of the father in Helen Templer's knowledge that could have thus been visited upon the child. After her first numbed grief, she rose into a furious passion of resentment and

called upon the men to exhaust all resources possible to find the murderer.

Her brother's loss struck Petronell with shattering severity, and for a time no wit of man could soften the blow; but there was at hand a powerful source of ultimate consolation; and in her grief she found Montague's blunt sympathy more helpful than her grandfather's platitudes. But all shared a gathering indignation, that now extended far beyond the range of the family and its immediate acquaintance and dependents. For a season the mystery challenged the public; the usual, irresponsible criticism of the police and their inefficiency appeared in the newspapers.

Sir Augustine's post brought him daily expressions of support and commiseration. He insisted upon replying to every correspondent with his own hand, and the task served mercifully to distract not a few of his waking hours.

The verdict of the coroner's jury echoed that pronounced when the dead boy's father passed. He had been murdered by a person or persons unknown—so it was declared—and there seemed no need to leave the inquiry unfinished. Then, as days passed, it was given to Petronell to repay something of the support that she had won in her own double grief and strive to cheer Montague in her turn. For, as the situation cleared, and from the smoke of the trouble there emerged a new order of future events, Montague Templer revealed himself in strange lights. A settled melancholy developed in his attitude to life. He was changed, and the thing least to have been expected overtook him. In private, Felix discussed this un-

expected reversal of character with Sir Augustine and voiced the fact.

"You would have thought if there was a man living who would love power, and who would accept, in the old Tory spirit, the great work lying before him, that it was Montague," he said. "Has he been explicit to you, Uncle? Can he define the causes for this indifference? It seems altogether unnatural to me."

"There is only one apparent reason—his profession. I have told him that I will yield if he feels it a question of duty to stop in the army. But Montey can't do that. He can't humbug himself so. He knows perfectly well that his career is defined and that it must lie here. As for me, I fly to the future and strive to bury myself in it, because to dwell upon the past and present is unendurable. You have done much for me, Felix, but the flesh is still stubborn. I still cry for my dear son and for the grandson who was to carry on our succession and follow him. That, however, is vain, and I make myself concentrate upon Montague, who must be so much to me while I continue to live."

"There is a break in the clouds for him too, Uncle Augustine," declared the other. "His own sorrow at Tom's loss and his anxieties at the challenge before him have helped to endear Montague to Petronell. I know her so well, and I can see this tragic chance, that has thrown them together, will soon determine her, if it has not already done so. Both always knew that you approved, and that was a tower of strength for him; while Helen has been very desirous for the match from the first."

"I did approve as long as Matthew and Tom lived," confessed Sir Augustine, "because, then, I did not regard the possibility of Montey inheriting. He mattered nothing in the light of the family; but now, if I could choose, since the future of our race rests with him, I should have liked better to see him wed into different blood and find a wife elsewhere. However, it is too late to consider that point now. They are, he tells me, actually engaged, and that being so, we might have expected to see your cousin recognise he had won the desire of his heart and find himself more reconciled to filling my shoes."

"Yet Petronell tells me he is still melancholy and finds it hard to realise the future."

"The fact that she has not power to dissipate his melancholy is unfortunate," replied Sir Augustine, "and her description of his moods strikes me as most curious. She says that it is really not so much the idea of giving up the army. Indeed, he appears to have exaggerated his regret on that score. He admits that it is improbable he will have any future opportunity to distinguish himself in the field, and I'm sure we must hope he is right. In his engagement and affection for Petronell he also declared himself as greatly blessed and more than content. But—now the puzzle. Montey is possessed of a settled presentiment, and confides to Petronell that he is not destined to enjoy the life opening out before him."

"Montague! Fears the future?"

"'Fear' seems, indeed, a word one cannot apply to his attitude towards life. How often, before he was captured and interned, used I to write to and

warn him against the unwisdom of taking improper risks. As Menander says, 'A soldier's problem should be to save his life—for losing it there is ample provision.' And yet now this fearless spirit—so Petronell declares—is clouded—not, surely, with fear, but a settled and rooted conviction that his life is in peril. He cannot believe, as I do, that we have seen the end of this terror. He is, in fact, very apprehensive of the future, and has gone so far as to doubt whether he ought to wed Petronell. At first, he was fearful for her; now he suspects that this unknown enemy, whom it seems impossible to discover and destroy, is only waiting to sweep him out of life."

"This is bad," declared Felix, "bad and surprising both. It sounds so exceedingly unlike Montague."

"Of course, his attitude has only increased Petronell's affection. Once her father thought she loved you, my dear boy, and it was natural that one of your gifts and vision should have attracted her. But now we may feel sure that her regard for Montague has ripened into real, heartfelt affection. Love may darken council sometimes; and, on the other hand, it may be the only possible light in many sad conditions to show blind human nature the road. I've no doubt that she reports him correctly. But how would you explain it? Do you think there is any real spiritual warning behind it, or is the condition pathological, we will say, or morbid? Or, what is still worse, can there be any truth in his instinctive dread?"

"I'm as puzzled as yourself, Uncle Augustine. Anything less likely to happen than loss of nerve on Montague's part, I could not have imagined."

"He was always a little bit of a pessimist, remember, after his disappointment in the war. He has a grim, slightly cynical way of looking at the black side, especially if he is criticising his inferiors and the proletariat generally."

"I'll have a talk with him if you like, though it would probably be much more useful were you to do so."

"No; it is a delicate investigation far better in your hands. He may open his heart to you."

"We will leave it a little longer," decided Felix. "I will return to my work in London shortly, and, while Father Champernowne takes his badly-needed holiday, you must not expect me here. But I shall see you in London, I hope, for the Conference of the English Church Union. Do not let anything prevent you from attending that, Uncle."

"I shall be there. It is my duty. I have composed my address."

"Then you'll bring the latest news of Montey and Petronell. And I hope, by that time, this cloud will have passed from him. If not, I'll tackle him in earnest and try to sharpen his eyes to his new obligations. He's been hit very hard by these terrible things, for chance threw him so close to them on both occasions."

Within a few days of this conversation, Felix Templer returned to his work and settled down to it with very real satisfaction. But he was not long destined to win reprieve from the torments in which his family was now involved. As the serpent coils wound about Laocoön, so the terror only loosed at one moment to

strangle more tightly the next. Bertram Midwinter swiftly communicated with Felix and had but awaited his return to do so. Now he desired to see him, and after three days were past, the detective found himself at the Hostel of the Red Lion Brotherhood with his friend.

Not until after midnight did they separate, and then only when the priest had received a call to a sick man and could talk no more.

Midwinter wasted no words on this momentous occasion, and Felix quickly perceived that he was anxious and careworn. He shook his head at the cigar his friend produced.

"I cannot smoke to-night," he declared.

"Your own box, Bertram—always waiting for you! What is amiss? No news, of course, or you would have let us hear?"

"Father Felix," began Midwinter, "I am going to say and you must listen to a horrible thing; so let me get it out as quickly as possible. I couldn't bring it to Kingscresset; but I can tell you here. I might take it elsewhere and spare you the pain; but that would only be to cause you much greater grief at a later date. Moreover, I want to know what you yourself think of these facts. Yes, I am going to deal in facts, and they take a certain form to me; but I hope to God they will appear in a different light to you. If you can show me from your standpoint that there is less in them than appears, I shall be thankful indeed. I trust you with my few secrets. You have done much to make me a wiser and a better man. You are my father confessor, and you know, I think, my deep personal love

and devotion. Therefore, if it is my duty to pain you now, you will understand that only because it is my duty I speak."

The detective's agitation was considerable, and from wonder the face of his listener passed to sympathy.

"My dear Bertram, there is no need to tell me, of all men, that your duty is always your first and honourable care. Often it must prove a painful duty enough; often I have had occasion to commiserate you in the doing of it. And even though this matter is personal to myself and you are called to bring sorrow to me, I shall not associate you with the sorrow. Tell me everything that is in your mind, but only if you are positive I am the right man to hear it."

"I do think so; I do think so," answered Midwinter earnestly.

He opened his despatch box and took out some papers. These he sorted, speaking the while.

"I am only concerned with facts—all of which are familiar to you, Father Felix—save one. These facts I will report and leave you to draw the inference arising from them."

He turned to the documents and read first from one, then another, until the contents of each had been recited to his listener.

"At three o'clock in the morning," he began, "the Rev. Felix Templer is disturbed by sounds beneath him in the library of Kingscresset and descends to learn what they may mean. He sees a black-bearded man in spectacles engaged about papers on his uncle's desk, and watches him. The vigil is interrupted by

Major Montague Templer, who descends to get food, being hungry and unable to sleep. He disturbs the unknown reader by turning on the hall light, and the stranger seeks to escape. The Rev. Felix attempts to stop him, but the intruder is the stronger. He strikes down his assailant and leaps through the library window, leaving behind him an electric torch of common pattern. No more is heard of the man, and an extensive and exhaustive search fails to discover the least clue to him, or his identity."

Midwinter turned to the next statement.

"Three weeks after the incident at Kingscresset, the young botanist, John Gratton, meets his death. The event appears so clearly to be an accident that no suspicion of foul play arises. But it transpires that a man calling himself 'Purvis' has been for some days, off and on, in the company of Gratton, and he it was who last saw the botanist alive. His description is easily obtained from various sources, and it corresponds with the much less elaborate description that the Rev. Felix Templer is able to give of the stranger at Kingscresset. A perfunctory search is made for 'Purvis' before the inquest on Gratton; but he has timed his departure so that none can trace him. He was remembered on his departure from Grindleford; but he is not reported again, either at the stations between Grindleford and Sheffield, or at Sheffield itself. Of the two persons who had come into collision with the unknown at Kingscresset, the clergyman is in London, when John Gratton dies, and Major Templer is at—Sheffield."

"Montague was at Sheffield?" asked Felix.

"On a mission to Messrs. Vicars for the Government. That was the point I referred to when I said I should tell you one thing you did not know."

The priest showed disquiet, as though by intuition he read into this trifling fact a greater significance than it appeared to hold.

Midwinter was not looking at him. He had turned to another page and now continued:

"A month and three days after the death of John Gratton, Captain Matthew Templer, R.N., is fishing on the River Dart, having rented some two miles of the left bank from the tenant. He is found dead—shot through the brain by a German bullet—and it is proved that a man calling himself 'Marc Lubin' and resembling in every particular the black-bearded and spectacled man reported from Kingscresset and Grindleford, was lodged within less than two miles of the spot where Captain Templer lost his life. This man disappears immediately after the murder. He leaves Ashburton, being driven to the station by the landlord of the 'Seven Stars.' He is seen to depart in the train, but is not seen again, either at Totnes, where he would have to change, that being the terminus of the loop line, or at the intermediate stations. When this murder was committed, the members of the family were distributed thus: Sir Augustine Templer was at Kingscresset; the Rev. Felix Templer was in London; Mrs. Matthew Templer and her daughter, Miss Petronell Templer, were also in London. Tom Templer was at Eton and Major Montague Templer with his regiment at Plymouth. He was first summoned by Captain Templer's valet and arrived at Holne as swiftly as a

car could take him. It was he who informed the family on the following morning."

The detective proceeded to further data, while his listener preserved silence.

"On the morning of the tenth of July last, Tom Templer, due to return to Eton on the following day, lost his life under the following circumstances:

"Immediately after an early breakfast, the time then being about eight o'clock, the boy set out for his fishing, taking with him the key of the bridge which separated the higher and lower lakes. The bridge is always kept locked, and the key hangs in Sir Augustine's library. An hour later, the Rev. Felix Templer left for London, and Sir Augustine and Major Templer accompanied him upon his way. They parted from him on the moorland road near the railway station, and returned to Kingscresset. The Major, having promised to follow Tom, presently did so, and within half an hour returned to report that the bridge had fallen and he had seen the unknown man, on the opposite side of the water, looking at him over a low bush near the lake side. He is powerless. He dares not swim across lest the enemy should take him before he can leave the water on the other side. But he is torn in half between following the unknown man, or returning to report the accident. The boy's straw hat is floating on the water and the pieces of his rod are out on the lake, where the current had floated them. He feels no shadow of doubt that his cousin is drowned, and finally decides to return to the house with the news of his discovery.

"Subsequent operations reveal no sign of the bearded

man, but the dead body of the drowned boy is recovered from the lake. Midwinter, who reaches Kingscresset the same evening, substantiates the fact recorded by the bailiff, Mr. Terry : that the slight wooden supports of the bridge were sawn through and left so insecure that the least weight on the rustic bridge would have been enough to throw it down. Midwinter also learns that from a tool-house, half a mile above the bridge, a heavy hand-saw is missing. There is no doubt about this, since the woodman who last used it can be certain that it was in its place two days earlier. The last person who used Sir Augustine's key before the morning of the murder, was Major Templer, who returned from rabbit-shooting in Gawler Bottom so late on the previous night that the family dined without him."

Felix was about to speak, but Midwinter held up his hand and raised the last paper.

" Let me read this first. I have little to add. My last note is headed : ' The Situation as it affects Major Templer.' "

He resumed his reading.

" Major Montague Templer fought a duel in Germany soon after the Armistice, and there accompanied him to Potsdam a junior officer, who had been interned with him. His name is Ernest Wilberforce, and he left the army when peace was declared. Since then he has often been in the company of Major Templer. He was at Sheffield with him, and for a time he was at Plymouth. The address of Mr. Wilberforce can be recorded at both these places. At Plymouth, Major Templer lived in barracks ; but at Sheffield his address cannot be traced.

"The present situation as it affects him is as follows: While his Uncle Matthew and his cousin Tom lived, he was removed by two lives from the succession to the baronetcy. He is now the heir. The fact that John Gratton is dead represents to the Kingscresset estate a gain of one hundred thousand pounds. This fact could only have been learned by the black-bearded man during the night of his inquiry, for, until Sir Augustine recently announced it, in the presence of his nephews and Midwinter, it was unknown save to himself and his solicitors. Gratton also knew that he would inherit a bequest, but was ignorant of the sum."

The detective ceased speaking, folded up his papers and restored them to his pocket-book. For some minutes Felix Templer did not break the silence. At last he spoke.

"An extraordinary series of coincidences, Bertram. It is wonderful—your work, I mean. But not for one moment—not for the fraction of a moment—do I believe any such horrible thing as you begin to suspect."

"I am thankful to God you don't, Father."

"There are weak points. There are numberless loopholes. There are gaps and situations where an *alibi* could, without doubt, be established."

"I hope so. You can guess what this work has meant for me. One thing, of course, is clear enough. Your cousin did not impersonate the unknown man. That is impossible, because you yourself were the first to see him, and while the murder on the Dart was being committed and while the man calling himself

'Lubin' at Poundsgate lodged there, Major Templer was performing his duties at Plymouth. Similarly, at Sheffield, though we do not know his address and only know that his visit synchronised with the death of Gratton, it may be easy for him to give his direction there. That he was there and carried out the negotiations with Messrs. Vicars we know."

"Then all would turn on the black-bearded man—the man you imagine might have been his accomplice?"

"Exactly. We have searched very thoroughly into the operations of Mr. Wilberforce and, so far, there is nothing to prevent the possibility of him having represented the unknown. His movements, when the nocturnal visit to Kingscresset occurred, we cannot trace. He was not at his chambers. He is not employed in any capacity, but is his own master. In that connection I submit that the Major might have been coming downstairs—not to get food, but to meet his accomplice. With respect to the death of Gratton, Wilberforce is not proved to have been in Sheffield until two days after the event. He then remained there—at the Great Central Hotel—and left for London when the Major did. He was at Plymouth off and on for some time later and put up at the "Duke of Cornwall" Hotel. He left Plymouth a week before Captain Matthew Templer died, spent a few days at his chambers and then departed—where, we have not ascertained. He did not, however, return to Plymouth until a fortnight later. He then inquired for Major Templer at the barracks and was apparently not aware that he had gone to Kingscresset. Thus you see the curious

chain of circumstantial evidence is extraordinarily complete. But I hasten to add that it is exceedingly frail. Many facts may be supplied by the Major and his friend to break it. It is indeed so frail, that only duty has forced me to see in it a possible, though not a probable explanation of this terrible affair. I want to place myself in your hands, Father Felix, before I take everything to headquarters."

"What would that mean, Bertram?"

"It would mean that the Major and Mr. Ernest Wilberforce would probably be arrested on suspicion."

His listener sighed; but it was a sigh of relief.

"In that case, my friend, I do most surely believe we need save ourselves any suffering. I do not find myself in doubt for a moment, because I am as sure as I am sure of death and judgment that Montague could no more have had a hand in such a series of dastardly crimes than he could have played a false part in the war. We may never know the truth, or what secret enemies destroyed poor Matthew and his son; but I am positive, after you have seen and questioned Montague and his friend, that this chain of coincidences will be snapped in a manner to give you the satisfaction and proof you need. It is too far-fetched to be worthy a moment's serious consideration."

Midwinter's anxious face lighted.

"I hoped with all my heart that you would answer me as you have done," he said. "You have taken a great weight off my mind."

The priest smiled.

"I have known Montey since we were boys together," he replied. "We differ—perhaps as much as it is

possible for men to differ—save in the respect of honour and duty ; but I am as sure as it is possible to be, that crime is clean contrary to his character. And there is a point that strikes me—to return to details. If this awful thing were as you imagine, then why should Montague have reported the vision of the unknown after Tom's death ? On your theory, the accomplice would have had no hand in the death of the boy."

" I considered that and, still pursuing the idea of Montague Templer's potential guilt, I explained it in this way. There was, of course, nobody there in reality ; but he reported an imaginary spectator, first to confuse the issue and cast the blame on the unknown, and secondly, to make it quite clear that Ernest Wilberforce had nothing to do with the matter. We know that Wilberforce was in London and can prove that he was there on the morning of Tom's death. Therefore the Major could not have seen him. It is highly improbable that he saw anybody ; and that is my greatest difficulty."

" Yet, if he actually did see the black-bearded man, then the case against Montague falls to the ground ? "

" It does. But it is honestly most difficult to suppose that this part of his narrative is true. Even assuming, as I want to assume, that he had nothing whatever to do with the affair, how can we seriously believe that he saw the unknown looking at him, when he came upon the scene of your young cousin's death ? It is too unreal. Why should the murderer have endangered his own freedom by deliberately revealing himself there ? What had he to gain by running into such needless danger ? He might as well have shown

himself on the spot where Matthew Templer died. He had set his trap, we will assume, overnight; but was it probable that he would stay to see it work? The newspapers would tell him in twenty-four hours if he was successful. No—the fact that Major Montague reported the unknown is, to my mind, one of the greatest difficulties against dismissing any doubt against him. But I shall thankfully leave it as you wish. At your next meeting, you will put some casual questions to your cousin, without causing him to suppose that there is any secret purpose in doing so."

Felix nodded.

"I will consider those questions carefully before I put them. I see exactly what we want, and, having obtained his answers, you will, of course, verify the truth of them at your leisure."

"My subordinates will do that—if they can."

"Be very sure they can. I feel no shadow of fear. Why the murderer chose to show himself to Montague we do not know; but there was a reason. That he did show himself I am positive, for Montague couldn't lie."

At this point there came an urgent message from a sick parishioner, and Midwinter departed to leave the other with his thoughts.

Here, reflected Felix, might appear yet another explanation of the change that had overtaken Montague Templer; and, as he hastened to a sick man, he considered all that the detective had told him. The vision of Montague a criminal, tortured by remorse before his crime, might have for a moment tempted his suspicion; but the idea was frankly too absurd to detain

anybody who knew Montague Templer. To advance it was to laugh at it, and had Midwinter's circumstantial evidence been a thousand times more conclusive, Felix would still have known that it could not stand before the accused's character and record. He reflected also on Petronell. There were certain questions which must now be put to Montague without arousing any suspicion on his part. Petronell might be invited to put them. She herself, of course, should not know the reason for such inquiries. The more he considered, the more grew Felix Templer's admiration for the detective's ingenuity. But he felt a measure of anxiety also, for it would be impossible to judge the effect of such opinions on those most involved, did Midwinter's devotion to duty prompt him to seek proof. Felix suspected that no mere appeal to friendship would prevent him. Nor was he likely to make any such appeal in the last resort. He therefore determined on prompt action and, as a first step, invited his cousin, Petronell, to see him at the Brotherhood as soon as possible.

CHAPTER VII

THE THIRD STROKE

PETRONELL was glad to accept her cousin's invitation, and she brought a message of good news with her, for when he explained what he had heard from Sir Augustine concerning Montague's mental depression, she was able to tell a more cheerful story.

"I do think—indeed I know—he's better," she said. "The cloud seems to be passing away from him. He's sent in his papers and he's preparing to settle down to his new life. You know how it is, Felix. We can't be miserable all the time, because we can't remember all the time. Even an old man like grandfather can't. He finds himself a little happier, off and on, when he forgets. No doubt it's easier for the old to forget than for us; but we do too. I must be happy when I'm with Montey, because I love him more and more dearly; and when he is happy, too, then I am happier still. But that doesn't mean I forget my dear father and brother. The loss and the horror sweep over me often enough till I feel drowning under them."

"I know it—none better," he answered, "and your mother feels as you do. I lunched with her the day

before yesterday. She wanted to see me and I gladly went."

"I'm sure you helped her. Mother suffers very keenly, but she can hide her heart better than anybody I ever saw. It's second nature to her."

"She does; but not always consciously. Second nature, as you say. I'm beyond measure glad about Montey. Make him work. Don't tempt him away from work. Work is my panacea, as you know, and it's never more precious than when one is in trouble."

They talked at length about Montague, and Felix learned one important item of news without even the need for a question. Petronell mentioned his visit to Sheffield, and added that, while there, he stopped with an old companion-in-arms—one Colonel Forde-Tracy and his wife. He hid from her his relief at this news, then questioned his cousin as to the future. Whereupon she declared that she trusted Montague completely, and knew that he would prove a strong and faithful guide and helpmate in time to come.

"I shall never be a great mistress of Kingscresset," she said. "I have no ambition to play the grand lady, and not enough brains and strength of character to do so even even if I had. Montague knows that I shall do my very best; but my best will be among our own folk—to help and cheer them—not in the county. I have no gift for society, as mother would tell you."

"Let Montey understand that. It may be your part to temper the wind to the shorn lamb sometimes and brighten the lot of the poor. He is hard on them. At present dear Montey seems rather inclined to regard himself and his class as the shorn lambs."

Petronell smiled wanly.

"He must, of course, move with the times. Even grandfather recognises that. The old relation between employer and employed is a thing of the past—even at Kingscresset."

"Yes, Uncle Augustine understands remarkably well. I have studied him closely of late. He is a beautiful character, Petronell; but life has never demanded from him much grasp of reality, save in those particulars of love and death from which wealth cannot protect any man. It is strange to us, who are younger and more capable of feeling, to see him accepting his terrible losses and returning slowly, after this turmoil of grief, into the placid channels of everyday life again. He endured all that he had power to endure, but the hand of use and the drag of custom never lift, however great one's passing sorrows. We go on doing the old things presently, and renewing interest in the old subjects. And so does he—by fits and starts already—just as if your dear father and brother were not in the grave."

Petronell wept, and the speaker did not seek to stay her tears. There was silence for a time, and then she spoke.

"Don't think I judge him any more than I do Montey—or myself. The world must go on. It is a tremendous upheaval. Indeed, I blame myself far the most; for it seems hard and hateful of me to be in love, while what I used to love so dearly has gone for evermore."

"That was different," he said. "Love for the dead does not clash with love of the living. Love for the

dead is an exalted, purified emotion, lifted above and beyond the fret and fever of earth, as they themselves are. Do Montague and his uncle get on well together ? "

" Very well. Grandfather relies more and more upon him. In one sense he finds the future less filled with uncertainty now than when my brother was heir. Because nobody could tell how Tom would have faced Kingscresset when he grew up, or how the future would unfold in the meantime. But Montey is a man, and his mind is moulded pretty much as grandfather would wish it to be. He is sterner than grandfather, so Mr. Terry, the bailiff, was telling me. But Terry is exceedingly glad of it. He sees the salvation of Kingscresset in Montague. What he doesn't see, poor man, is that probably Montague won't want him, or his son, who is being educated to fill his father's shoes in the future. But Montey has already got his eye on a soldier friend for bailiff some day. As you know, he argues that the men who fought should be first provided for ; and Mr. Terry's son didn't fight ; he was too young."

" Montey's mind is of the old order," admitted Felix. " You have immense influence with Montey, and you must never lose the chance of exercising it when your own heart prompts you, Petronell."

She shook her head.

" He respects my love and is proud of it ; but he doesn't respect my brains in the least. Why should he ? "

" Much is in your power," he assured her. " Like many of our best soldiers, he has a little lost sight of the eternal verities in the slough of despond through

which the world is passing. You must try and put into practice much that I have taught you. It is selfish to hide even our little wisdom in our own bosoms if it can be of service to another. Our earthly limitations are such that we can only comprehend appearance—reality is forever beyond our reason; but it is not beyond our faith. There is a disheartening tendency to materialism in Montague's present outlook. You must help him fight that. We have so much to help us, and it is a grief to me that he deliberately refuses the greatest gifts since he returned from the war. He thinks that he has seen and felt the very essence of reality, while the truth is that all things appreciable by the senses—all sorrow of mind and torture of body are equally unreal. All our desires and cravings—everything—is utterly unreal, save only the blessed certainty that within us lies the power to win from unreality the eternal truth behind its veil. You must guide him through these dangers, Petronell, by your example of an absolute faith and trust. That is better than any precept."

"I know what example means," she admitted. "I have followed a very good one, Felix."

"It is a tremendous privilege denied to none—that they have power to set a good example. Take Father Champernowne, a saint of God. He has not got a golden tongue, but his heart is of gold. It is a fragrant censer, and the sweet savour from that heart is about all who are blessed to work beside him."

They talked on until his work summoned Petronell's cousin.

"It is good to be with you," she said simply when

they parted. "Grandfather expects you next week. He wants you to read something that he has written for the Conference."

"I shall come if it is in my power; but it is difficult to get away until Champernowne returns. I'm glad Sir Augustine has the Conference in mind. Oh, Petronell, if we and the Mother Church could only get together and meet within the bounds of understanding and mutual respect! It galls me unspeakably that while we respect Rome, Rome cannot, or may not, respect us. Only last week, I heard the old gibe again —spoken not with bitterness but with almost kindly jest: 'There are Papists and apeists,' said Father Macbridge from the Church of the Holy Sorrow. He always tells me quite frankly that I am too logical and too much a martyr to truth to stand where I am forever."

"It would distress grandfather unspeakably if he heard this."

"Do not tell him then."

"I will pray for you, Felix, as you have so often prayed for me."

He pressed her hand as they parted, and both remembered that quiet conversation, for it was long before opportunity offered for another. His thoughts were not strange to Petronell, and as she returned home, she reflected upon them, for Montague was among those who sometimes hinted that the Anglo-Catholics occupied a position untenable to any clear intelligence.

Indeed, upon their next meeting, the young men came to bitter words, and Montague touched his cousin's

sensibilities with a rough hand. The event was never forgotten by him who lived to remember it, for within three short days of their dissension, one of them had passed from his existence in the flesh to what might lie beyond it.

Felix was able to keep his word and returned for a week-end to his uncle. The time passed peacefully, and on Sunday evening Sir Augustine sat in the library with his two nephews. On the morrow, Felix and the old man would go to London. An air of gloom had hung over Montague all through this day. He seemed rasped and on edge. He grumbled about the estate, and urged Sir Augustine to make changes and pension off certain of the elder men, whom he held past work.

The elder sipped from his Venetian goblet, smoked his cigar, and regarded the soldier with tired, ruminating eyes.

"You weary me, Montague," he said at length. "You bring to your coming responsibilities a power of caustic criticism which does not take account of my age and outlook on life. 'To be called rich by everybody, happy by nobody,' is a melancholy conclusion from which I had hoped and striven to escape."

"You are too gentle with idleness, too indifferent to the vices of those heartless, graceless people who have battened on you all your life."

Sir Augustine did not answer, but turned to Felix, who had just closed a manuscript.

"Will it do, my boy?"

"It is splendid, Uncle Augustine. Full of wisdom and fire. Yes, fire; it is your privilege to give a lead

to the younger men. The Conference will benefit greatly by your words."

"Not too strong? The times are difficult in the Church."

"Only because we make them difficult and our spiritual leaders are poltroons. Preaching is now all apologetics for Rome, or for Rationalism."

"A sign of the times," cut in Montague. "The world is sick of half-measures and sitting on the fence."

Felix coloured; his eyes flashed, but he controlled himself.

"It is because religion is toying with rationalism and there are false shepherds among us that the world is in its present evil plight," declared Sir Augustine.

"The world grows more broadminded," answered Montague. "It wearies of the bigots."

"You speak like a fool," answered the priest quietly. "Have you no perception? Can you not read the meaning of history?"

"I can read history as well as you, I suppose. Have you any objection to the history that teaches you an open mind?"

The argument waxed warm, and at last Sir Augustine rose and bade both be silent.

"Let us have no more," he said. "Thought, if it produce no fruit, is vain, and your thoughts are sterile, Montague, for your mind has been sown with the bitter salt of war. You are a barren ground for the moment, and I know too well what has led you to stumble into this desert. Now shake hands and go to bed."

The young men obeyed instantly, and Felix was the first to express sorrow.

"Forgive me," he said. "But there are some things I cannot hear, old chap, and remain dumb, or even cool."

"I'm a stupid ass," confessed the other, "and it is no doubt because I seem to have lost that hope, of which uncle speaks, that I utter these harsh thoughts. Frankly, I am not myself. The awful crimes that have happened to throw me into my present responsible position have robbed me for the time of hope. Look at it. You neither of you seem to see where I stand, or to guess where Felix himself may be standing before long. This deliberate, damnable thing at our heels—why should we suppose it is there no longer? There's an unknown being, or a league of them, that is hounding us out of life, and the forces of law and order continue utterly powerless to get even a sight of them. I have felt this from the first: that the enemy is out for some unknown reason, for some ultimate purpose; and since we cannot remotely guess that purpose, we move, like a flock of sheep, to the slaughter-house, unable to protect ourselves. I am the next. I know it. It is not cowardice or a fear of death. I'm not frightened; but I'm numbed and groping and wondering what God in Heaven is about to let an old, decent family, which has always stood for religion, honour, and all the rest of it, be blotted out, as though we were a hornet's nest. Providence is not playing the game, as a sportsman understands the game; and that's why I'm feeling rather as if I wished reason could get a show. Only reason will save this situation anyway. It was the same in the war; one often burned to strike, yet knew not where the enemy was lurking."

"Petronell told me you had thrown off this cloud that has been hanging upon you," said Felix.

"So I do when I'm with her. She does comfort me and cheer me a lot, though I hate her to be away much. These unknown devils may be waiting their time to murder her too."

"The fact that they have not attempted to do so may mean that the end is come and their purpose accomplished," argued Felix; but the other showed him that he was mistaken.

"The fact that they have not touched her shows just the opposite, and I thank God for it, because it transfers the danger from Petronell to me. If the vendetta, or vengeance, or whatever it is, had been directed against Matthew only, they would not have spared his daughter any more than they spared his son. But it is directed against the heir of Kingscresset in my opinion, and Petronell isn't the heir. That's what I'm positive about. And that's why I believe I shall be the next, and why I begin to feel that I should never have pressed marriage on Petronell at all."

Sir Augustine showed deep perturbation at these words. For a moment his steadfast calm faltered.

"How comes it that this power has chosen to strike at the young and spare the old? What bitterness and quintessence of evil are there!" he said.

"We remain in God's hands," answered Felix. "And I pray of Montague to put that thought foremost in his mind. Let him not fear those who can destroy the body, but those who can destroy the soul; and if this peril, still so dark over our heads, can shake

his faith, then indeed, one might suppose that it was no power of man, but the work of the Devil himself. But I will think no such thing. Everybody's faith is tried sooner or later. Who does not know that? And your trial has taken this tremendous form, Montey. But spurn this temptation to free thought, and when you have conquered it, the physical dangers, if such exist, will only make you wary, but not weak. We may yet see justice and right vindicated. We may yet learn the truth and the purpose of these cruel deeds."

But the soldier shook his head.

"It is the work of a madman, perhaps," ventured Sir Augustine. "Such things have been."

They parted presently, and while the priest spent a long time of that night on his knees, Montague found shame his portion. He told himself that he had whined before the head of the family like a whipped schoolboy, and he resolved never again to sink beneath his breed or his own character. At breakfast he was changed, and he returned to his customary confidence and self-reliance. He made generous amends. He apologised to Sir Augustine for criticising the old manners and customs of Kingscresset too sharply, and promised to bring a larger measure of sympathy to his new work; while, as he accompanied his uncle and cousin upon a motor car to the station, he expressed contrition to Felix too.

"Don't give another thought to the rot I talked last night," he commanded. "I'm a Christian all right. I sha'n't break that tradition anyway."

"It would break Petronell's heart as well, if you did, old man," answered Felix, and they parted good friends.

For the following day was planned an interview that might mean much. Bertram Midwinter promised to sup at the Brotherhood; but the anxiety of Felix respecting that interview had been relieved an hour before his return to London. Midwinter telegraphed that not a moment of needless suspense might distress the priest, and at breakfast, before setting out from Kingscresset came the message, which he kept to himself, since neither his uncle nor his cousin knew anything of that disquieting matter. Montague Templer and his friend, Ernest Wilberforce, were cleared —at any rate, so far as the death of John Gratton was concerned.

And when, on the following evening, they met, Midwinter went further and explained that, since he now felt assured the man with the black beard had no double, he regarded Montague as wholly absolved of suspicion.

"It was an extraordinary chapter of accidents that dragged him in," he declared, when their simple meal was eaten and they sat together in private. "Never, in all my experience, did I meet with such a close chain of circumstantial evidence. But, as you always thought, with your knowledge of your cousin's character, the idea was impossible, and I've since proved by personal acquaintance that it would have been equally impossible to young Mr. Wilberforce. A harmless, lazy, amiable fellow, who regards the Major as a hero."

"Had you known Montague better, you would never have implicated him. Honour takes the place of religion to some extent with him."

Felix then proceeded to tell his friend of the recent conversation with his cousin. He did not dwell upon their differences, but related at length those remarks concerning the young man's fears and premonitions.

"In anybody else it might have been natural enough," he continued, "but in Montey it was, if one may say so, quite contrary to character. In anybody else, and if your theory had still held water, we might have thought that remorse was active in him and taking this form; but, thank God, we can now dismiss such an idea. The important point to me, and the only point which can be of any use to you, seems to lie in his absolute conviction that we are not at the end of it yet. He appears as positive as man can be that this terrible attack was not confined to my cousin Matthew Templer, or to his son. He seems to see some implacable force, which may, in reality, have no more personal enmity to one of us than to another, but which, once started, will not be suspended until it has run down and destroyed all. It is as though some mechanical contrivance had been invented and wound up and started against my race, never to stop until its end is achieved. But, supposing there were in reality such a determination in some unknown fellow-creatures, to compass the complete destruction of the family, is it beyond the power and skill of other minds to discover and circumvent them? Is it possible that in the twentieth century, with all our advantages and modern methods of criminal research,

a whole race of innocent folk may be picked off, one after another, in this way, and their murderers escape again and again? And, if they are too skilled to be traced and captured, is another line of inquiry also beyond our means? I mean, is it impossible to find the motives and object of this awful scourge? There must be a reason. Somebody is seeking to gain some personal advantage. We have proved that there is no enmity or cause for malice existing against us, unless it be, in Montague's case, the result of the duel; but a man who came over here to avenge a fallen friend, or brother, would not have known of the existence of my cousin, Matthew, and still less have been concerned to murder John Gratton."

Midwinter listened with deep interest to these remarks. A measure of indignant protest rang in the voice of the speaker, and the detective shared it.

"Well you may protest," he said, "and if your protest extends from these unknown enemies to me, who am striving to reach then, I should be the last to blame you. I have failed utterly and I confess it. At this moment I am as far from any understanding of what has happened as I was three months ago. I am now going back to the beginning again, and to the link which seems to embrace all the appearances of this accursed, black-bearded shadow. There is, as you know, but one link, and that slender enough. I mean the will of Sir Augustine Templer. All the dead were in that will?"

"They were, without a doubt. And one may be equally sure he had not forgotten his grand-daughter."

"That leaves of the family only Mrs. Matthew Templer, Major Templer, and yourself."

Felix nodded.

"That would be so. Of course, a new will was made after the death of Matthew and his son; but I suppose we have to deal with the old will—the one the man came to Kingscresset to read. What was in it I cannot tell you more than you already know; but if anything is to be gained, no doubt Sir Augustine would let you see it if it is not destroyed. At any rate, he could tell you exactly how it ran, and what we may imagine the black-bearded man read. How far he had got in his studies we cannot say. The will was picked up on the floor after he escaped."

"Do you still feel your ear where he struck you?"

"I do; but it slowly mends. Dr. Bridstowe, the aurist, said that the drum was not broken, and that I should ultimately suffer no bad effects."

Midwinter relighted his cigar and returned to the will.

"I should now like to know all that was in that document. With the combination of immense wealth and immense generosity that we find in Sir Augustine, it may be that there are other beneficiaries who will reap big money some day. If any such existed, we might learn something by tracing them. Yet, were there such, they would have struck at him, not his heirs. Another consideration is the ultimate disposal of the estate. Suppose that your cousin is right, and that there is actually a secret association of men united to wipe out your family, root and branch—suppose that you and Major Montague and Sir Augustine were all

gone, where would Kingscresset stand ? There must be some collateral branches. Somebody would inherit. Who are these people ? Do you know them, or anything about them ? Or do none exist and will the settled property revert to the Crown ? "

The question was never answered, for as Felix prepared to explain, to the best of his knowledge, there came an interruption.

" Heirs there are none that I know," he replied, and then a messenger of the Brotherhood entered with a telegram, the hour then being ten o'clock.

It was brief.

" *Major Templer is dead.—Fastnet.*"

" Fastnet is the butler at Kingscresset," explained Felix, handing the telegram to his companion.

Midwinter read it and thought of Sir Augustine.

" Your uncle ? "

" He's in London. He will go home to-morrow."

" Will Fastnet have wired to him ? "

" No—I feel pretty sure that he hasn't. He'll leave that to me. He'll leave Miss Templer to me too."

" Time may be precious. Can we catch the last train ? "

But Templer stood dazed.

" My God, he was right—poor Montague ! "

" You can't be sure. Is there a time-table here ? Pull yourself together, Father Felix. I must get down to-night if I've got to motor."

" Sir Augustine—Petronell——" said the other.

"Those two—will it be in the papers to-morrow? Can we spare them till the morning?"

"We know nothing. I must get there somehow."

Something, not to be mistaken, sat on the face of the younger man. It was fear. For a few moments, he forgot those who would suffer most terribly now, and seemed to think of none but himself. He had grown very pale. His eyes glanced over his shoulder, as though an invisible messenger were already beside him.

"My turn next!" he said, and stared, almost stupidly, into the face of the other. The thought awakened Midwinter. He had never seen fear upon this face until now; and yet he knew that, during the war, Felix Templer had undertaken a thousand risks and borne himself with great physical bravery. But before the detective could speak a change came over Felix. His brief spasm of terror passed. He appeared to shake it off, as though it had been some insect or reptile that had crept upon him. His colour returned.

"Forgive me. What am I made of? It came out of the pit, Bertram—a temptation of the devil—fear. But it has gone."

He sought a railway time-table on his desk, failed to find one, and turned to the man who had brought the telegram and still waited.

"Get me a time-table, and tell the boy there's no answer," he said; then as the other hastened away, he turned to Midwinter and spoke again.

"Direct me. I am in your hands."

But it was now the detective's turn to hesitate.

"You are living; your cousin is dead," he replied slowly. "I cannot save him; but I'll save you, if one man can save another. This probably means that Major Templer was right. And, by God! I won't leave your side!"

"We'll go down together then. I'll telegraph to Sir Augustine at the first moment possible to-morrow. It would, perhaps, be better if he stopped in London; but he won't do that."

They had ample time to catch the last train, which would take them, not to Kingscresset, but the junction five miles distant. From there a local motor might convey them on the remaining stage of the journey.

Midwinter hesitated long and finally decided that this course would be the best to pursue. Fastnet's laconic telegram rendered it impossible to take any preliminary steps, for as yet they knew nothing of details.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WIRE-HAIRED TERRIER

SOON after midnight the detective and his friend reached Kingscresset without incident, to find the ground floor lighted and a dozen men waiting for them.

The local police were present, and the local physician, Dr. Forbes, with the head-keeper, Wharton, an under-keeper named Lawrence Fooke, and others. Fastnet also waited to take his place in a story now to be rehearsed for the benefit of Felix Templer and Midwinter.

Inspector Marchant—a grey-bearded, weary-looking man in uniform—took the lead.

"I guessed you'd be down," he said to the detective, "for I thought his reverence would look you up and fetch you along if he could."

"Have you communicated with Sir Augustine and Miss Petronell?" Felix asked of Fastnet, but the old man shook his head.

"No, Mr. Felix. I was in a mind to, only Dr. Forbes spoke against, and knowing how things were, he said you was the one to be told first."

"Will it be in to-morrow's papers?'

"Impossible," explained Marchant. "It was only found out about half-past eight. I've called these chaps and Dr. Forbes," he continued, "so as you can hear everything, bit by bit—all in order and without confusion. Each has got a part to tell, though I'm fearing the part that matters is what only the poor dead gentleman could tell."

"He is here?" asked Felix firmly.

"Yes, your reverence. He's here. He lies in the gun-room for the present."

Then Marchant beckoned to the under-keeper, Lawrence Fooke.

"Get on with it, my son," he said.

Fooke was a raw-boned, red-headed man, who had won the Military Medal in the war. He went lame on his right foot, for he had been wounded in the knee.

"Yesterday," he said, "I was coming along down into Gawler Bottom from up over. The time might have been somewhere round six o'clock in the evening, and suddenly, right alongside of me, I see the top half of a man. He was looking out over a rough clitter of rocks near what we call the 'Curtain,' and coming round quiet I surprised him. The moment he sees me he was off, like a rabbit, and I soon lost him in the thick of the woods, because I can't travel very fast with my game leg. Well, I catched a short and sharp glance of the chap's face through the scrub and brambles, and I saw that he was a stoutish built sort of a dark man with a black cap on his head and big, coloured spectacles over his eyes and a close black beard, like sailors wear, upon his chin. And I well

knew there was hue and cry for such a man, so I up with my gun and let go both barrels into the rough where he'd jumped. And then I tumbled in myself; but I didn't see so much as the tail of him. If I hit him, I didn't stop him, and the place being deep in rocks fallen from above, there's not much hope I got home. At best he must have been thirty yards off when I fired, for I never was nearer than five-and-twenty. You can see—on the path they call the pack-horse track—where I surprised the man and where he jumped off from; but where he went I don't know. He was gone in a moment under the Curtain and I hunted round for half-an-hour or a bit over; then, all of a sudden, I remembered I was wasting what might be valuable time, and I made for the house so quick as I could lope along and asked for Major Templer.

"He weren't in, but he came in half-an-hour later and heard what I'd got to tell; and Mr. Fastnet, as fetched him a whiskey when he came in, stood and listened to the tale. He wanted for Major Templer to wire off instanter to Sir Augustine, and also to telephone to Inspector Marchant; but the major wouldn't do none of that. He told me to get all the men I could together and post 'em round the Curtain —above and below—for the night. He'd got a fixed feeling that I might have hit and wounded the chap after all, and anyway he wasn't going to make a stir till the next day. As for him, he went off there and then with a revolver, though Mr. Fastnet prayed against it, and he was trailing the black man till dark with me beside him. Then he gave it up and told me to

send Mr. Wharton, that's the head-keeper, to the house, which I did do."

Inspector Marchant nodded.

"That's all right, Fooke. Now you, Wharton."

"There's but little I can tell," began the elder man. "I went to Major Templer at a bit after ten o'clock and he was eating his food. He was in an excited state and he'd made a plan. He told me I was to keep everybody on through the night and have relief parties for to-day. He was positive the man had a 'dug-out' in the woods, and that he'd get him to-day. Knowing the fatal family story, I hoped he weren't going to take no risks on his own, and he said to mind my own business. The watch was to be kept round the Curtain and the woods, but they were not to move from their places. He said this was a duel between him and an unknown man, and he had a sort of feeling he was going to come out top. I I argued against it very respectful and pointed out that if the murderer was hid there yet, and Major Templer went stalking about to find him, there'd be not so much as an even break, and he'd be done in before he could draw his own iron. He said, in answer to that, that he'd had a bit of experience in the trenches before he was took prisoner, and that the man wasn't born to best him in a place like our woods, which he knew as well as his own bedroom.

"What could I do but obey orders? I felt just so sure in my own mind that he was asking for trouble as he felt that he was going to get his man, and I only hoped, with all my soul, that the murderer was off and away. We'd kept a tight hand round Gawler Bottom

and the Curtain for a bit, and he couldn't have gone after we came, because our parties were posted pretty close there, but he'd had plenty of time to go afore we arrived—unless, of course, he was wounded pretty bad and lying hid. But there wasn't a drop of blood found, nor any sign to show that Fooke had put it across him. We saw where one barrel from his shot gun had landed—a lot scattered, of course—on the face of a rock.

"I did as I was told, kept everybody on, and bade 'em not move from their places. They watched all night and kept sentry go, so as a rabbit could hardly have slipped between 'em; and next morning I relieved the night watch, and Major Templer was out at dawn and spent a good part of the day there. He went through the Bottom and worked all round the Curtain, above and below; and he looked careful after himself, no doubt. But though he didn't know it, and I took mighty good care to keep out of his sight, I weren't very far off him all the morning. Then just after noon, he went home, and I thanked the Lord when he had done so, and made tracks myself to the North Lodge, where I live, I being pretty well beat by now."

"Stop, Wharton," said the Inspector. "That's all I want from you for the minute. Now, Fastnet can tell just what fell out when Major Templer came in to his food."

"You didn't go back to the Curtain after your dinner, Wharton?" asked Felix.

"No, your reverence," answered the head-keeper. "I wish to God I had; but I knew Major Templer

had been at it since six in the morning and felt positive sure he wouldn't come back himself. The common-sense was to believe the enemy weren't there, since we'd turned over every leaf, you may say, by that time."

The butler took up the story.

"The poor gentleman come in rather down on his bad luck, as he called it, but he made a good meal and, after a pint of champagne, he grew cheerful and hopeful. He confided his opinions to me more than he was used to do; but he wanted to talk and there weren't nobody at Kingscresset but me to listen. He told me a lot more about our misfortunes than what I'd heard from Sir Augustine, and he said there was either a madman or a devil on our tracks. But presently he said that he reckoned the end was in sight, and he felt something was drawing him to the woods again, and that, this time, he reckoned to have the final word.

"I advised him to let it go and call off the watchers for there was fifty men outspread in a great circle along the boundary one side of the Curtain and beside the upper lake and up through the wood. But he said they could bide where they was till dusk was down and at two o'clock, or a bit before, he was off again, but not before he'd wrote a telegram and told me to have it sent. He went out like a hunter, and I could see his nerves were strung up and he was ready for anything. It didn't seem in reason that anybody would get the better of him, for he was all awake and full of hope to conquer. I never saw him again alive."

"Tell what was in the telegram, Mr. Fastnet, please."

"It was for New Scotland Yard, Inspector, and he told 'em he was on the track of the Templer murderer and axed 'em to send down bloodhounds as soon as they could do so."

"Now you, William Thorn," said Inspector Marchant, and a middle-aged, dour-looking man with a crooked back began to speak. He was a dark, surly fellow, and he had a heavy lump on his shoulders, which threw his head forward. But he appeared strong and healthy. His daily task was that of a horseman on the home farm.

"When Mr. Wharton changed the night watchers this morning," began Thorn, "I was one of them that took up a place, and I stood between Samuel Webber and Adam Bell on the north side of the Curtain. There was a matter of seventy yards between me and Bell, and the same between me and Webber, and, according to orders, we marched slowly backwards and forwards, like sentries. It was like that all round. In some places, where there happed to be a lot of brush and cover, Mr. Wharton had the watchers closer together, and he'd had 'em all closer together through the night; but where we watched—just inside the boundary wall of the woods before they break at moor edge—all lay pretty open and we could have seen a stoat if it had tried to get past.

"We went up and down, and boys and women brought us a bit of food. Then it must have been after half-past two and I fetched up to Webber, and was just wondering how long we'd be expected to stop, when we heard a single shot. It come seemingly from Gawler Bottom, a good long ways off, and I

thought 'twas a gun, but Webber, who'd been in the war and knew the different sounds that the weapons make, said it was a revolver. Just one crack we heard and no more, and then we called t'others and found that a good few of 'em had also heard the shot and was running in where it had appeared to sound from. So Webber and Bell and me followed, keeping a sharp look-out as we closed in. We heard a dog howl; but we saw nothing at all till we got on to the pack-horse track—the path that leads up from Gawler. And then we found half a score of men, as had reached there before us. They were standing round the seat that's fixed half way up the slope, for folk to stop and look at the view; and lying on the ground alongside the seat was Major Templer. None durstn't touch him, because they saw very clear he was dead, and reckoned that the police must first be told afore the body was moved; and so they turned to me, being the eldest man among 'em, and axed what next.

"I first made sure the gentleman was quite dead; and there weren't no doubt on that point, because he'd been shot through the back of his head and must have gone in an instant. Well, I knew there was none of the family at Kingscresset and so I sent a couple of young fellows that could run—one for the police and one for the doctor—and I kept by the body with a couple more of the older men and bade the rest hunt the woods all around and look out for any sort of mark that might serve for a clue. And us bided by the body till Inspector Marchant and a couple of constables came up; and half an hour after that, Mr. Terry

arrived with Fooke; and two hours or more later on, Dr. Forbes got to us."

"Thank you, Thorn. That's all very clear. Now, Doctor, if you please."

"I examined the dead man before we moved him," explained the physician. "He had been shot from behind, apparently. The bullet went in just above the *medulla oblongata*, at the summit of the spine, and proceeded upward through his brain. There is no exit wound, and I shall extract the ball before the inquest. It was fired at pretty close quarters. I should judge that Major Templer had been sitting on the seat and perhaps grown drowsy for a moment, or, at any rate, off his guard, until it was too late to save himself."

The Inspector interrupted.

"The major's revolver was on the seat beside him. Nobody touched it till I came. It was a service revolver, such as officers use, and it was loaded in all its chambers."

"We rigged a hurdle and took the dead man down through Gawler Bottom to the lakes," proceeded Dr. Forbes. "Then somebody brought up a flat-bottomed stock cart from the home farm, and we carried the dead man to Kingscresset. Of course, I supposed that they would be prepared; but in the confusion nobody had conveyed any message to the house, and it was not until we met Fastnet, just starting to tell Wharton that the major had not returned, that the news reached him.

"Fastnet then consulted me as to what he had better do. It was now nearly nine o'clock, for much

delay had occurred in the wood before the police and myself were summoned, and still more before I could get there. I was out when the messenger came for me, and did not start until nearly six o'clock for Gawler Bottom.

"Fastnet wanted to telegraph at once to Sir Augustine and Miss Templer, as well as to you, Mr. Felix, but I convinced him that would not be wise. Painful though the duty is, I felt, and still feel, that it can only be undertaken by you."

Dr. Forbes then concluded :—

"We therefore despatched a telegram to you at the Red Lion Brotherhood, and were only just in time to get it through."

"So that's how it stands, Detective-Inspector," summed up Marchant, "and now, what next?"

"Have they sent the bloodhounds?" asked Midwinter.

"They're coming first thing in the morning."

The detective nodded.

"I'd like to go over the ground at daylight before we take 'em up," he answered. "But this is no case for hounds now. The woods are full of a hundred scents, and we've got nothing from the murderer to give them."

"They might be useful. I should wish them to be tried," said Felix.

"Have no fear, your reverence; they shall be," promised the Inspector; "but, as Mr. Midwinter tells you, there's far too many crossed trails in the woods now. When you can, give bloodhounds a bit of the right scent to nose; then, if they pick it up again,

they'll do wonders on a line. But here you'll have the brutes guessing from the start, I'm afraid."

Midwinter spoke:

"The man was seen yesterday evening, and this afternoon he was still there, with a ring of watchers not much above five hundred yards off. He kills the Major at close quarters, and the shot is heard and they close in. Did they close in all round?"

Wharton answered:

"They did, sir. And the first two men to get to the Major, reached him not much more than three minutes after they heard the explosion. They had to go through a piece of heavy under-cover, else they'd have been quicker. But the men on the other side, in the wood, was stretched out along a game drive. They were farther off, and so was them at the foot of Gawler along the lake. Some would have been half a mile away."

"And not one saw any sign of a stranger?"

"Not one."

"Has the guard been drawn off?"

"To a man, sir. We broke up when the shot was fired and never went back. It was young Webber running for the doctor who stopped at the North Lodge and told me the news. By the time I'd got there, the beaters was all collected."

"He was hidden then," declared the detective. "Some of you must have run over him, and as soon as the ring had broken, of course, he was free. A motor cycle hidden outside, no doubt."

The party now broke up and the weary company scattered to their homes. Inspector Marchant engaged

to meet Midwinter at Gawler Bottom about seven o'clock in the morning, and when all had gone upon their ways and the house was still, Felix and his friend visited the dead.

Montague Templer lay on a trestle table in the gun-room, and they brought in two light arm-chairs, for Felix decided he would remain with the body that night, and Midwinter decided to do the same.

The detective had hoped that the young man would go to his own room upstairs, where he might feel more assured concerning his safety; but this, Felix declined to do; and so they stopped with the dead, and while the priest knelt beside the corpse of his cousin, Midwinter, with Sir Augustine's valet, Westcott, a man who had served his master for twenty years, kept watch. Satisfied of Westcott and having eaten and drunk, the detective allowed himself to sleep; nor did he wake again until it was day.

Then, at six o'clock, he drank the hot coffee Fastnet brought him and made his friend share a meal. To his satisfaction, Midwinter found that Felix agreed not to accompany him to the woods.

"I cannot help and shall only hinder," he said. "You must go, for you cannot shadow me, my dear fellow, as I know you would like to do. I shall see my poor cousin taken to the Chapel, and when Doctor Forbes arrives, he can do what is needful there. I will only go and come from the Chapel—that I promise you—and, that done, I must communicate with my family."

"How do you propose to do it?" asked the detective.

"I shall write the truth to Miss Templer, breaking it as gently as I may and hoping that she and her mother will come to us. Death has not disfigured poor Montague. His face is placid and beautiful—a typical Templer's face. She can see him to-morrow if she will. As for Sir Augustine, I shall not disturb him. He speaks at a Conference to-day and returns in time for dinner to-night. I will meet him at the station. The thing won't be in the afternoon papers, because it is not yet known in London at all, except at Scotland Yard. Therefore my uncle will hear it first from me."

"I will accompany you to the station this evening, then. And in the meantime, you promise, Father Felix, to keep the house."

The detective was conducted to the woods by Wharton and Fooke, and he swiftly appreciated the difficulties of securing any active man who might choose to harbour in such a region. The old sense of helplessness crowded down upon once more and the case presented a further mystery, for, upon reaching the spot where Montague Templer had died, it was clear that no enemy could have approached within twenty yards of him unseen, unless the victim had been unconscious at the time. And yet, he had been shot at short range, as his wound testified. Had he grown weary with his exertions and slumbered on returning to the woods? Surely no man with his life set on such a hazard would have made such a fatal slip. Fastnet spoke of champagne at luncheon; but, if the wine were not drugged, its effects must have been but slight and transitory.

For an hour Midwinter worked, and gradually extended his radius of operations round the rustic seat upon the hill. Standing beside it, with his face to the south, he found heavy woods rolling close upon his left hand, Gawler Bottom opening beneath him with the lakes beyond, and upon his right, more trees and thickets and fallen boulders, above which rose the weathered peaks and cliff-faces of the Curtain. He judged that the unknown had escaped in that direction, for amid the *débris* of great and small rocks, fern, whortleberry and scrub that stretched in a rough carpet to the walls of the landslide, were doubtless crannies and holes, where the murderer might have concealed himself until night fell and escape was possible.

At seven o'clock there came Inspector Marchant with two bloodhounds and their trainer from New Scotland Yard; but the great brutes, though willing enough, were baffled from the first. They ran hither and thither upon a dozen lines, and it was obvious that they must be of no use without something to start them over the right trail. To pick out the murderer's scent, their trainer explained, would be possible, given some means of acquainting them with that scent; but nearly fifty men had moved over the starting place since the catastrophe.

Yet the bloodhounds presently proved immensely valuable. A very singular accident furnished scent for the hounds, and it was not a man, but another dog that actually provided the first definite clue ever secured by the police in the Templer tragedies.

While they continued to search over the ground

and follow every line of retreat that offered for the man who had fired and slain Sir Augustine's heir, there came from the house Fastnet, carrying a covered basket. He looked about him with melancholy interest, for it was many years since the old fellow had walked in Kingscresset woodlands; and then, ascending from Gawler Bottom, whither he had come by the new bridge between the lakes, Fastnet sat down upon the seat where Montague Templer had died and explained what had brought him.

"Have the big dogs done aught?" he asked.

"Nothing has happened. It was sure from the first that they could be no use," answered Inspector Marchant, who was glad to sit down himself and rest for a few minutes.

"We're beat here," he continued. "We've turned over every leaf in a radius of a hundred and more yards. We must look further afield than Kingscresset, and I hope them as are in the case, round about us and in London, may have some news."

Fastnet shook his head.

"Not them," he answered. "This is no man you're hunting. I've figured it out. There's a devil let loose to torment the family, same as a devil was let go on Job. But this is the end of his work, because Satan himself be powerless against the saints of God, and no devil can touch Sir Augustine, nor yet Father Templer."

Midwinter arrived and learned what business had brought the butler.

"It's this," he said, "and but for his solemn word to you, that he wouldn't leave the house till you came

back, his reverence would have fetched up this poor little dog himself. A very strange thing happened an hour ago, and the Major's wire-haired terrier crawled home, from Lord He knows where, on three legs. The poor beast was forgot altogether yesterday in our excitement, but Mr. Felix reckons that it must have went out with its master yesterday afternoon and got into trouble—very likely with the murderer himself. Because the dog's had a terrible fierce blow, and its right shoulder-blade's broke. If the creature ran after the murderer, he might have turned and tried to smash its head in, or something like that. But all we know is that the dog was certainly along with the Major. So, no doubt, it saw him shot and then ran after the escaping man. He silenced it and rolled it over, and very like thought as he'd killed it; and it must have been in some hole, or hidden spot, that he laid it out, because nobody among all them men yesterday saw anything of it. However, it weren't dead, and I hope it ain't going to die. When the coast was clear, it started to limp back; but where it started from, and which way it came, of course, we don't know. 'Chum'—that's its name—weren't smashed in any vital place, for he ate and drank hearty after Mr. Felix and me had washed the broken shoulder and cleaned the dog. And now, before I take it on to Mr. Sims, the Vet. at Kingscresset, which I'm going to do, Mr. Felix wants me to ask you policemen whether the scent of the terrier would be any good to the bloodhounds."

The houndsman shook his head.

"I'm fearing not," he said. "It's outside my

experience, and I never heard tell of bloodhounds laid on the trail of another dog."

"We can try, however," declared Midwinter, "and, after that, we may leave the woods: they aren't going to teach us anything. But if the man we want broke this dog's shoulder, and if the hounds can pick up the terrier's trail, we might find out a bit of the way he went."

They looked at the little, wire-haired fox terrier lying comfortably enough in its basket wrapped in a dog-blanket and apparently not suffering pain until it moved. But 'Chum' sniffed the air now and put up his nose and barked. In five minutes the hounds were brought to scent the terrier. Then their trainer led them to the seat where Montague Templer had perished, and to his surprise and satisfaction, the great creatures picked up the scent after a brief interval and followed it. After them ran Midwinter and the rest. Only Fastnet, speaking kindly to the little dog, shut him in and cautiously picked his way up the hill and out of the woods to the village above.

Meantime the bloodhounds, moved by their mysterious instinct to follow one scent alone amid a network of other scents, were able to proceed upon a trail many hours old. Sometimes they hesitated, then went forward. The pair had turned to the left of their starting place under the Curtain, and now proceeded towards the base of the precipices over uneven ground and broken cover. Often they vanished in the fern and boulders, then their great brown backs would again appear as they leapt forward. At last they stopped, bellowed and quartered about the ground

in a heavy patch of brake and blackberry briars, rank grass and ivy. By the time that Midwinter had reached this spot the hounds were off again ; but here he discovered a narrow cleft between two of the fern-hidden rocks by the accident of nearly slipping his leg into it. It descended vertically into a black hole, which appeared to be a badger's holt, and just outside this opening was blood upon the face of the right-hand stone. Search under the thicket proved that blood had also fallen on stone and grass beyond. It was dotted under the Curtain and the hounds had followed this line. Inspector Marchant, with the detective, traced the blood drops until they ceased ; but the houndsman had already left Kingscresset wood and was following his hounds over the open heath beyond. They proceeded into the wild moor and presently stopped at a stream, which descended from the heather-clad slopes to the lake below. Here for a time they lost the trail ; then they picked it up again on the opposite side of the rivulet and evidently finding improved scent, increased their pace and headed for the valley and the water meadows far beneath.

Midwinter and the Inspector, meantime, returned to the hole amid the boulders, and found themselves at the entrance of a natural tunnel, that sank down through piled masses of limestone into the earth beneath. It did not penetrate living rock, but fell obliquely under a wilderness of great stones, which supported each other and offered a passage for any active man. As Midwinter descended, the aperture narrowed until he was brought up by a great mass

of stone that blocked the path. Beneath it, however, still opened a way by which a man might proceed on hands and knees. Farther, however, the detective did not go at that time, for it was too dark to do so without a torch to guide them. Here, then, clearly existed the suspected hiding-place. It was of size to contain one man as far as the detective had explored it, and it might grow larger farther on and be capable of concealing a dozen. But any closer examination was impossible without light. He returned, therefore, to the upper air, related his experience to Marchant, and explained his intentions.

"There's a great deal in this," he began, excitement speeding his voice. "I figure it in this way. The man who killed Major Templer took a bee-line for here as soon as he had fired his shot, and the terrier went after him. He had, I judge, about one hundred and fifty yards to go, and we may suppose that the dog, knowing the man had done evil to his master, dashed after him. That's what a clever dog might have done. He can't do much, but he hangs on and worries the man; and here, just as his enemy is going down, the dog prepares to follow. Then the man turns and lets out. He doesn't fire, because he doesn't want another shot to be heard by anybody. He may very likely know that there's a ring of watchers drawn up close at hand. He may even hear 'em running to the place, because they would be on him, very near, by the time he got there. But the dog would be fatal, so he smashes it with one tremendous blow—from the butt of his revolver most likely. The dog rolls over, knocked out for the time, and no doubt he thinks

that he's killed it. Probably he hadn't long enough to be sure, for Thorn and the men with him must have been very near on top of him by now, as they ran in. But the dog was only knocked silly and most likely, when the watchers came along, he was under the fern here senseless and unnoticed. Not till long after, when night was down and the place still, did he get on his three legs and start to make for home. And no doubt he went very slow and often stopped to lick his smashed shoulder. Meantime, the man had sunk down into his lair, and now we must rout it out. Probably he made his way out after dark with none to stop him; but you can't be sure. He may be there yet. A lot of things might have happened. He may be stopping down there with supplies—safe, as he thinks. I'll wait here, anyway; and I'll ask you to go down to the house for a torch and a revolver. The Major's will do all right. Then I'll tackle the tunnel."

Inspector Marchant was doubtful of this course, however.

"Go down you will, of course, but you oughtn't to do no such thing single-handed," he said.

"There's no other way," he answered. "Only one man can go at a time, and I wouldn't give over this job to the King of England."

"Well, I guess His Majesty's about the last chap that will want it. But you ain't going to stop here unarmed, or take any chances whatsoever, alone."

"There are no chances here—wish there were. If he's down there, he'll not come up just at present—

that's as sure as anything can be, and if he was fool enough——"

"He's got a gun and you have not."

"He won't have anything to fire at. If he comes up, he won't see me, I promise you."

But Midwinter was not left alone for more than ten minutes. On his way to the seat where Montague Templer had fallen, Inspector Marchant found Lawrence Fooke, who soon shared the detective's watch. They examined the narrow aperture with great interest, and Fooke declared that he had long known of its existence. He supposed that it was a badger's hole, and had never imagined that it was large enough to allow the entrance of a man.

CHAPTER IX

THE PACK-HORSE TRACK

AN hour later the Police-Inspector returned, and with him arrived two constables and Felix Templer accompanied by the bailiff and the head-keeper, Wharton. The priest explained to Midwinter that circumstances had absolved him of his promise. He had come up well guarded, and he believed it was possible that he might prove of immediate service in identifying the murderer, if he were now to be captured.

"I am the only living member of my family who has seen him," he exclaimed. "It is, of course, a thousand to one against his being here, but he might be."

"And for that very reason I wish to God you had stopped below, Father Felix," answered Midwinter. "You make the thing harder and increase my responsibility. We can form no opinion whatever as to whether this hiding-place is going to be useful to us or not; but I think that it is. I'll beg you, at any rate, to stop outside with the keepers."

"I will do so—until we know more. It is your life, not mine, that is in danger now."

"I wish it were," answered his friend seriously

enough, "if, through any such danger, it might be my good fortune to win security for you. But not for a moment do I think it is. The man, or men, we are after would not give us such an easy part to play as this. Such men would have at least two exits to any burrow they might use. It's for us to find what this place means and, if we can, explore it without disturbing it. The thing may be useful presently. I turned a funk-hole into a trap once, and may again."

He took his torch and a revolver. Then he descended, while the younger of Inspector Marchant's constables, similarly equipped, went down after him. Both proceeded cautiously, and at the great boulder, Midwinter sprang his torch and perceived that there was ample room to proceed. He crept beneath it, therefore, and then found the path gradually become easier. The ceiling rose, and though he and his companion were now in darkness the air was pure. Underfoot and on either hand the passage was all of stone so that no track offered a clue. Here and there, etiolated ferns lolled from the crevices of the rocks, and from time to time a faint, blue ray of daylight winnowed from above. The channel grew steadily wider until sometimes Midwinter and his companion could walk abreast. It appeared to be a natural fissure in the rock, and yet the place offered evidence of more than wild animal occupation, for although no footmark rewarded scrutiny, the stone under their feet was clearly worn by many feet shod with something harder than horn or leather. Now all became absolutely dark, and both men flung their torch light about them, step by step, as they proceeded. Here

and there a cleft broke the stone sides of the passage-way, and each, as it occurred, was explored and found empty before the explorers proceeded. For a time the track tended downward at a gentle gradient, and they had gone forward for about half-an-hour, but at so varied a pace that it was impossible to say how far, when Midwinter made a discovery. A rock, at what proved to be the lowest point of the track, offered a seat beside the narrow pathway, and here the torch revealed objects of infinite importance. From this lifted ledge a heavy revolver glimmered up at Midwinter as the electric eye flashed upon its steel, and beside it lay half a dozen objects in a piece of newspaper, which at first glance he took to be cartridges, but which presently proved to be cigarettes. Underfoot, though the stone causeway offered no trace of any foot-marks, lay some thin scraps of burned paper, each an inch long, and the fragments of two or three smoked cigarettes. Midwinter did not touch the revolver, but examined it closely with his torch, and saw it was of German make.

A careful search revealed no other clues of the vanished visitant, and leaving these things where they had found them, the men went forward. They had now been in the tunnel an hour, and still Midwinter puzzled to account for its existence. Then the floor began to rise, and he was conscious of going up hill again. Ten minutes later a disc of light fell upon the way from above and, approaching it, they discovered a small, jagged rift in the rocks overhead, through which fitfully flashed glimpses of the sky. The police-man was for climbing this chimney in the rocks, if it

proved possible to do so, but Midwinter forbade it and chose to push forward a little longer, that he might learn where the subterranean passage ceased. The way had now ascended steadily by a gradual gradient for a quarter of a mile or more as he judged. They proceeded, and came suddenly to the end, where a wall of stone blocked farther progress. From start to finish, the track had constantly been barred and broken by heavy slabs and boulders of the local limestone; but now a mass of rock cut off this singular path abruptly. It was suddenly swallowed and obliterated. Light percolated through to them and showed that no creature bigger than a rabbit could advance beyond the point Midwinter and the constable had attained.

They turned and set off for the entrance, staying for one moment under the opening above them, where the sky appeared.

"If that's not the exit, then there is none," said Midwinter. "It looks impossible to climb, but it may not be as difficult as it looks. We'll try later. I want to get back now and see if Father Felix, or the head-keeper, knows anything about this place."

They had been an hour absent from the earth above them and took another hour to return. Their progress might have been swifter, but they operated with equal care on the way back and left no corner or nook unexplored. Nothing more appeared and the electric torches began to fade as they returned to the upper air.

Felix Templer greeted his friend with satisfaction, and showed deep interest to learn of the discoveries. His first desire was to descend himself; but the torches

were exhausted and it would be necessary to recharge them at the house. They were sent back accordingly, and while the men waited for their return, Midwinter told of his adventure and indicated that the important matter lay ahead.

" I'm not going to touch a clue," he said, " but what I am going to do is to set watch over this place. If we prove presently that the hole in the roof can be scaled and that it is possible for a man to go and come that way, then it probably means that the murderer entered there. Where it actually opens, we have yet to find out, but it must be a considerable distance from here. When we have discovered if it is practicable, I will set a secret watch at both ends and arrange a means of swift connection between the watchers. The vital thing is to leave this place quite undisturbed, so that it will not be suspected we have discovered it when he, or they, return. They will probably come again if you stop at Kingscresset, Father Felix, as I want you to do ; but they must find nothing to show that the hiding-place is known. If you are at Kingscresset, then the enemy will come back, for we have proved that they possess sure means of knowing where their victims happen to be and what they are doing. But that cuts both ways now, because it may be possible to avail ourselves of it. What we must do is to take the initiative from them. So far, they have had it all their own way ; but with the knowledge of this tunnel in our hands, it ought to be possible to have the last word pretty soon. The hiding-place is now quite empty, and the enemy will not return until this affair is a thing of the past. I believe we have actually

to do with one man alone, though I speak of more than one, because the individual is probably representing others ; but these awful things themselves are the work of one man, and, by the evidence of this secret passage, he is apparently proved again to be a German. For the rest, I suggest that you and Inspector Marchant come through it now. Constable Bassett will go down again with us, and the keepers had better stay here till we return. But they must go farther off. Already we have knocked the grass about, and sharp eyes would guess the place has been frequented."

Midwinter asked after the bloodhounds, and heard that they had followed the terrier's trail to Kingscresset, and were now shut up awaiting his directions.

"Let them go back. They have done their bit," he said.

With the return of the torches a second investigation began, and in less than five minutes Felix was able to throw light on the mysterious tunnel.

He stopped presently, and offered his opinion concerning it.

"You have solved one mystery," he said. "My poor cousin's murder has explained a puzzle of long standing. Antiquaries who come to see Sir Augustine and his father before him, always recognised a single pack-horse track up from Gawler Bottom ; but they never understood why it suddenly disappeared. Now we know. It was supposed that the track kept straight forward and struck Kingscresset Heath a mile ahead beyond the limit of the estate ; but now we get at the truth. In Tudor times the track must have turned

to the left through the woods and emerged at a much lower level of the Heath than we ever looked for it. Along this stone-paved way pack-horses went in single file, when Shakespeare wrote and Elizabeth defeated the Armada. Then came the great landslide. The Curtain was created by nature, and the trackway first slipped some hundred feet down the hill, together with the walls, between which it passed, and then was concealed from all eyes by the masses of rock shot down when the cliffs above us were first created."

The discovery interested the priest far more than his companions. He stopped that he might examine the stones of the floor beneath his feet, suspecting that an ancient trackway thus suddenly preserved and, as it were, embalmed for future investigation, as the buried civilisations of the past, might yield many details of great archaeological interest when explored to the full. But Midwinter brought his friend back to the matter in hand, and they proceeded through the intricacies of the passage, here creeping under, and here climbing over the intruding masses of stone until the flat boulder by the wayside was again reached and the objects reposing upon it examined for the second time.

Felix was able to explain certain things that Midwinter had not understood. The fragments of stiff paper burned at one end were foreign matches.

"You get them in cards all in one piece," he explained, "and as you need them you tear them off and light them."

He next examined a torn piece of newspaper on which lay half a dozen cigarettes. It was a fragment

of a German publication, but not possible to identify without more knowledge than they possessed.

"I believe it may be a daily paper," said Felix, "though of that one cannot be sure. It might be part of a leaf from a book."

He scanned it, but could not translate the broken pagagraphs on either side.

Midwinter held this to be unimportant.

"All that matters for the moment is that it is German," he said, "and it must be left exactly where we found it anyway. Nothing can be moved."

Marchant was looking at a cigarette.

"These are German too," he declared. "The tips are made of fine cork and they have a German name stamped upon the paper in gold. They are choice, and would hardly be in the hands of a very common man."

Midwinter inspected the revolver, but he had not touched it.

"There would be finger-prints on this that might find the owner in a week if he belongs to the criminal class of this country or Germany," he said. "It's a great temptation to take it. My own feeling, however, is that he will come back and——"

But Felix interrupted.

"My dear Bertram, what does it matter what he finds if he does come back? Once he is back, then, if your preliminaries are worked out right, he's doomed. Suppose we take these things. The man, informed by some unknown source that I am at Kingscresset, will presently return here, and when he does, you have the place guarded. The fact that he finds his lair is

discovered and his revolver gone doesn't matter in the least. He's got to get out again, if he doesn't want to starve to death, and so, if we don't go in for him, he must emerge and be caught. The point is to let it be known that I am at Kingscresset; and this will soon tempt him back. That's how I see it. As long as there is nothing to frighten him outside, it doesn't matter at all how much he's frightened when he's inside."

Inspector Marchant applauded this view and the detective, who might have resented any difference of opinion from another, felt no annoyance to hear his friend make suggestions. None was now more involved than Felix Templer himself, and from him, if from any man, inspiration might be expected. Midwinter, therefore, agreed at once.

"I see your point, Father. It is a good one, and you are obviously right. Once be sure of our exits and entrances, and we can let him come in without fear. But there is no particular reason why he should come in. We may stop him on the outside. But if he came and descended, unarmed, trusting to find his weapon beneath, then he'd be so much easier to settle with afterwards with his revolver gone. On all counts it seems better away. But we'll go forward. I want you and Inspector Marchant to see all that we have seen."

They proceeded, again probed every yard of the tunnel into which the track-way had been turned by nature, and having reached the end and found no aperture or exit, save at the point where the sky showed through a natural chimney over their heads,

stood there in the narrow and broken shaft of daylight thrown down upon them. It had mellowed, and the clouds were flushed with sunset.

"I want now to prove if this is a place that can be climbed," said Midwinter. "Of course, he might have a rope ladder, which would make it easy enough. If so, that's probably hid overhead somewhere. But Basset can try. It's all hard rock and he won't leave any tell-tale marks whether he succeeds or fails."

The young constable, who was of athletic build, set out upon his task, and very soon found it exceedingly difficult. Twice he failed and came down with a run, proving thereby that only a man with exceptional agility could make the chimney without artificial help; but, at the third attempt, he risked a fall, reached a tongue of stone over his head by jumping for it, and then swiftly blocked the light from those below and emerged into the air above. Almost immediately afterwards they heard a laugh over their heads.

"Why, where do you think I am?" shouted down the constable.

"That's what I want to know," answered Midwinter.

"Right clear of the woods and half a mile out in Kingscresset Heath!"

"How far out?" asked Felix.

"Two hundred yards clear of the woods, I should think, Mr. Templer. The stone boundary wall lies far back behind us. The hole where I am now you can just get through. It opens in the edge of a little hillock in the heath hid deep 'mid stones and fern

and heather. 'Tis in one of the ruins of the old lime-kilns that used to be here, and you might pass a thousand times and not see it. The broken light is caused by heavy fern that covers it and moves to the wind. There's a rowan tree five yards off."

"Stop where you are till we come round," directed Midwinter. "And look about. It's pretty clear they come and go by a rope-ladder, and you'll possibly find it hid somewhere at hand. But don't disturb the place or break down the fern."

The three men started on their way back, and Felix looked at the time.

"I must be meeting Dr. Forbes in an hour," he said. "We drive to the station for Sir Augustine. I begged him to join us, for this is going to be an awful shock. When you've done, Bertram, come down to the house."

"The watchers must be set immediately," declared Midwinter, and Inspector Marchant answered.

"I'll see to that. This can be left with me," he said.

"It will be best so," decided Felix. "For more reasons than one. Only we three, with Basset, Mr. Terry, and the two keepers, know all there is to know. So much the better. Let absolute silence be impressed upon them, and if we can keep the fact of the police watch a secret too, it would be a good thing. But probably that's impossible."

He left them with the bailiff when they had returned to the entrance, while Midwinter, Inspector Marchant, and the keepers, proceeded above the Curtain, until the forest boundaries were reached and Kingscresset

Heath, rosy in setting sunshine and touched with the first gold of autumn, swept before them to the sky-line.

The black figure of Bassett was quickly visible far out on the heather, and by a sheep-path they presently descended to him. The constable had found no rope ladder, but discovered testimony that such a thing was in use for the rowan tree was abraded at the bottom of its bole, and a notch in the close integument of the herbage had browned upon the wounded grasses. The marks were trifling and would not have yielded to any casual search.

"The thing itself—the rope ladder, I mean—would be mighty valuable, however," declared Marchant. "We might learn a lot from it."

"It's hid pretty near, no doubt; and not very careful neither. For he'd have no reason to fear a search," answered Midwinter.

For the present their work was done, and leaving the young policeman to keep watch at a spot concealed from the rowan tree, but overlooking it, the two elder men prepared to separate.

"You'll be relieved in two hours or thereabout," said the inspector to Bassett before they departed. "But you'll stop till dark. And keep out of sight. I don't want no policeman to be reported here by idle tongues. For to-night we'll just set our watch at both ends, and I'll turn Thompson on here and come down later myself. Keep out of sight before everything. The train that's bringing Sir Augustine might bring him. We can't tell. To-morrow we'll get things more professional and have a man or two between,

so as we can signal by night as well as by day from one end to the other."

Midwinter then descended to Kingscresset, and Inspector Marchant returned to the police station.

On the morrow the detective proposed to pay another visit to the tunnel for final examination. Then he designed to return to London; but he had much to say to Sir Augustine and his nephew before he did so.

The morrow brought another care, however, for shock partially prostrated Sir Augustine. The death of Montague Templer was broken with the best skill and sympathy that his nephew and physician could bring to their painful task, and since he mourned very bitterly himself, for more reasons than one, the sorrow of Felix served to distract his uncle in some measure.

"Our last talk on earth was marred by high words," explained the younger. "Thank God, you saw that we were friends again before we parted, uncle; nevertheless, I shall feel remorse for the rest of my life, for I was harsh and bitter to him."

"He was a good Christian and a good man," declared Sir Augustine.

He listened to all particulars of the soldier's death and, thinking that details might serve to lessen sorrow, Felix narrated the sequence of events, and Midwinter also spoke very fully of his opinions and hopes. But the detective was now more concerned with the future than the past. He fully shared the deep anxiety which gradually awakened in Sir Augustine, after he grasped the sitaution and turned his old and tortured mind to what might now be feared.

Felix endeavoured to keep his uncle and his friend away from the subject himself; but his efforts failed, for Bertram Midwinter had no intention of leaving his friend's future doubtful. The priest was dear to him, and while it was possible that all had now actually ended and the object of the unknown become accomplished, there existed no sure grounds for any such assumption. A conclusion was only reached after Felix had begged both careworn and anxious men to depart and seek sleep and temporary refuge from their anxieties. As the hour grew late after their evening meal, Sir Augustine uttered vague, general expressions on the insecurity of life, and the futility of supposing that either wealth or poverty could ensure or deny the things that mattered. For a time he seemed incapable of realising the moment.

"Consider the fate that has overtaken me after I have exceeded man's allotted span" he said. "I possess riches, devoted friends, a faithful staff—men and women who love me and would sacrifice much to ensure my content; and yet where do I now stand? In the extremity of bewilderment, confusion and grief, stricken to the heart again and again by unknown enemies to whom I have done no wrong. My blessings have indeed brought entail of trouble, until it needs an act of brave faith to believe in that Spirit Guide who leads us through life's mysteries."

"Never shall we hear you doubt of that Guide, Uncle Augustine," declared Felix. And he tried to comfort the old man.

"I will employ your excellent habit and quote," he said earnestly. "I will quote to you one of the

wisest writers that I know ; and his words are precious words to remember while we grow faint before the villainy, inhumanity and craft of our fellowmen. It is a passage from Henry Nevinson, which I long ago learned by heart, for it echoes what I have always felt but never more than since this fatal year. 'It was never the abominations of mankind that astonished me,' he says. 'They were to be expected in a creature of such origin and such inherited instincts. The surprise lay in the instances of kindliness, of generosity, of devotion to some person or idea, whence no private advantage could possibly come, but rather loss. And on the top of these revelations were felt the widespread joys of laughter and irony, the affections of men and women, the love of beauty and the friendship springing from spiritual or bodily adventure shared in common.'

"How glorious are those spiritual adventures! How one longs to lift love and friendship on to that plane—higher and more heavenly than even love and friendship themselves!"

"A hopeful picture, and true enough, as Christians cannot but feel," answered the elder. "Offences must come, and the higher wisdom is to accept them. But this tragedy is outside all experience. One would think that fiends, rather than men, were leagued against my tottering house. You may feel no fear under the dark shadow hanging over you, Felix ; but I do fear for you, and so does your friend."

"So much so that I shall not leave him, Sir Augustine, until his future actions are definitely determined to the least particular," answered Midwinter.

"My future actions will be simple enough," answered the priest. "I shall go on trying to do my duty as long as it lies in my power to do it. Physical fear I do feel. I will not pretend to deny that. When we know that soul may be called to separate from body at an instant's notice, and without a shadow of preliminary warning, such a man as I am finds the body protest and the heart sink a little. The thing is horrible and unprecedented, as my uncle says. To be faced with a power of evil in human form, that evades human intelligence and triumphs against all the resources of experience, is terrifying. But my faith bids my frightened heart be calm. If I am to die, there is a reason for it which God knows though I do not. If the hand that has taken precious life after life from us, is permitted to destroy mine also, then I, too, die by the will of my Creator, Who, for His own purpose, has used this man, or men, from another country, to destroy our race. It may happen—it probably will happen; but——"

"It shall not happen," cried Midwinter fiercely. "God helps those who help themselves, Father Felix, and you must help yourself. We have done much to-day, and it will be a discredit and shame to me if we do no more. I implore you to listen to certain facts. The position, however, and the obvious next move, are greatly complicated by them. I have already abandoned my first plan. We know that those who killed your cousin hid in the old track-way, and we know that on the evening before, the underkeeper, Fooke, saw the black-bearded man, now familiar to us. But there is a hideous difficulty that

I have not yet solved, and, because I have not solved it, I cannot ask you to do what I should best like.

"Your cousin was shot through the back of the head at close quarters—so close that his enemy might have been sitting on the seat in the woods not five feet from him. That is a tremendous fact we must consider. For, if we are right, it cannot have been the black-bearded man who slew him, but somebody else acting under the unknown's direction."

"Somebody else, Bertram?"

"Obviously. Unless he was unconscious, or half asleep, he would never have let that man approach him. Indeed, more than merely somebody else must it have been. And this is why I do not ask you to enter the woods, as part of the trap I am now setting to catch the man. Your cousin set a similar trap and fell into it himself. Had this black-bearded face, which Montague Templer saw after Tom Templer was drowned, appeared to him yesterday, he would certainly not have allowed that face to come within five feet of him, or twenty-five. He would have used his revolver at sight and at least exchanged shots. Had he fallen under those circumstances, his wounds would have been on the front of his head, or body, not at the back. Therefore the man who murdered him was one who had a right to be in Gawler Bottom, who might be expected there under existing circumstances, or anywhere round about, and who could approach Major Templer at close quarters without awakening the least suspicion or surprise. He died at a moment when his revolver was out of his hand, actually lying on the seat beside him."

Felix stared and turned pale.

"Good God, Bertram, what does that mean?" he asked.

"It means the truth of what I have always held: an enemy at our elbow. I have always feared there must be somebody of your household who is familiar with the family's movements and informs the unknown respecting them. But——"

"No—no—nothing would ever make me believe we have a traitor in our camp, Midwinter," interrupted Sir Augustine. "That is absolutely out of the question, my friend."

"And beyond proof either," said Felix.

"Do not say so. The facts are the proofs. If it were not so, how did the unknown know Tom Templer would be first over the bridge that morning and take measures to destroy it overnight? How did he know that Captain Matthew Templer was on the Dart? How did he know that Major Templer was going to be in the woods, where he died the day before yesterday? I say that if Father Felix stops here, the unknown will at once hear of it; and that was my first idea—to bring him back to his hiding-place and so capture him. But that we cannot do, for the terrible reason that we would probably defeat our own object and give him into the hand of an enemy, who would approach him as a friend. The unknown may already have heard that the secret in the rocks is discovered. We can trust nobody."

"That is to bring an awful indictment against every keeper and woodman on Kingscresset," said Sir Augustine.

"I know it. I charge no one—within the house or outside it. I only say that it is quite possible that one of your men—your farm hands or your gardeners, your stable men, your woodmen, or your gamekeepers and beaters, may have done this. I accuse nobody, but I do say and believe that the man who killed Major Templer did not appear to him in the likeness of an enemy, *or even of a stranger*. It follows that Father Felix is safer away from here, and while we give out that he is in residence with Sir Augustine, we must in reality get him to London, unknown to anybody but ourselves. The point is that we must deceive Kingscresset, and the problem is how to do it."

Felix shook his head.

"Why, Bertram," he said, "this would be to poison every breath I breathe for evermore! To tell me that any man's hand may be lifted against me, that the Kingscresset people, with whom I have lived, off and on, since I was a youngster, harbour among them my would-be murderer! No, friend, I will not believe that. If they wanted to kill me, why have they not taken the opportunity a thousand times?"

"Do not entertain any such idea, Midwinter," urged Sir Augustine. "Indeed, you let your ingenuity outrun commonsense when you talk thus. Pretermit no inquiry and precaution, and urge upon Felix every possible suggestion that your skill suggests for his salvation; but do not think there is a hand—old or young—among us here that would be lifted save to do my nephew good and willing service. It is with him alone that we must be concerned. We cannot regard this fear of yours as even probable or credible.

I decline for an instant to share your suspicions. Dismiss them from your mind. I am concerned with Felix. He is such a noticeable figure, so easily marked down. You, in your trade, are skilled in the art of disguises. Do you not think in his case that the danger might be greatly lessened for him were he to consent to a disguise ? "

Midwinter rose, worn out in mind and body.

" It is an idea well worth considering, Sir Augustine," he answered mildly. " And, on my side, I pray you both to give due weight to all I have said. Do not dismiss my words as of no account or importance. This is not a moment for trusting anybody, and I have known a lifetime of faithful service to end in treachery under sudden temptation and inducement. You say that neither temptation nor inducement could exist, but remember money is always the greatest temptation and inducement to those who want it. By your leave I will go to bed now, and we will resume the all-important problem after the inquest to-morrow. Lock your bedroom door, Father."

He bade them " good-night " and his friend patted him on the shoulder with affection.

" Do not fear, Bertram," he said. " I am as sure as I can be sure of anything that your steadfast genius will solve this problem sooner or later. I am going to be perfectly sensible about it. I am, in fact, in your hands and intend to remain so. I trust you and undervalue nothing you have said. I shall do what you wish and go back to London secretly if you desire it."

" Thank you gratefully," answered the elder. Then

he retired, while uncle and nephew sat a little longer together. They agreed that the detective's idea was ingenious rather than helpful. They ran over fifty local names and found not a shadow of suspicion attaching to one of them. Then Felix insisted that the elder should retire and rang for Westcott, his man. They grasped hands as Sir Augustine bade his nephew good-night.

"God guard you, Felix," he said. "Meantime, we remain unconquered, unflinching, for 'the nobly born must nobly bear those stabs of fortune for which character is not responsible.'"

CHAPTER X

THE FOURTH STROKE

FOR a season both Sir Augustine and his nephew forgot a measure of their tribulation in ministering to one who concentrated, as was natural, on her own loss—a greater loss than theirs. Petronell and her mother had heard duly the evil news, and they arrived at Kingscresset on the following afternoon. The inquest was held and the verdict given. Montague Templer's betrothed did not see her sweetheart again; but she knelt beside his coffin, while her cousin talked with her and comforted her to the best of his power. She endured her trial in tears and silence. All were gone now—father, brother, lover. There only remained the cousin whom she also loved, but for his character rather than for himself; and happily his influence was valuable in this destruction of her hopes and plans.

Everything had gone but religion; and now it seemed that she turned, as the dove to the ark, toward her only refuge in the storm of life. It was the priest's wisdom to interest her now in this supreme thing, and he did so by talking of himself and his own trials and temptations to take a new course, while time and opportunity remained to do so. He dwelt lightly

enough on his present position, but at length upon the inspiration won from it to instant action along a path both he and Petronell had contemplated in past time, when talking together. Beside the closed coffin of Montague Templer, where it lay in the chapel, they debated their vital theme, and its gravity and significance were such that the presence of the dead man, whom they both had loved, seemed no improper place for such solemn interchange of confidence. The majesty of death was not greater than the majesty of eternal life, which occupied their whispered conference.

They sat together there amid a hundred wreaths; for not the least flower that came as a mark of friendship or sympathy but found its place; and as the dark descended upon them and the great candles at head and foot of the coffin flung their gleam upon the chapel walls, Felix and Petronell reached a conclusion, yet kept it secret a little longer for the sake of one living man alone.

"'Read the writing on your heart and you will understand all your desire,' Petronell, 'for in the day He kneaded the clay, he wrote on your heart by grace the Faith,'" said her cousin. "It is in every heart, if only all could read the writing. To you it has come by cruel and bitter stages, my dear. It was a hard way that you were led—the way of renunciation and loss. You have seen all who made the music and happiness of your life taken from you, and now you stand alone—save for His Rod and Staff. It was not His will that you should be the bride of anybody but Himself."

"That is so, Felix. The old life is ended: the new

one must soon begin now. My happiness must take a new shape, for I shall dedicate myself to God."

"That is the only unalloyed happiness and freedom that man can attain to," he declared. "To give up all."

"I shall join an Order, and, through years of prayer and patience, win peace perhaps. But do not talk of happiness."

"Let time pass. I think you are right to dedicate yourself, and my own instinct and inclination point the same way. But you must begin the new life with a mind at rest on the Master—obedient, suspended, yielding all. Then your sleeping and waking will be dreamless alike and 'your consciousness bring you no care.' Just consider the implication of that lesser promise! It is consciousness that brings all our cares, yet, if we repose upon the breast of God, consciousness itself is powerless to distress us, or add another pang to life, another billow to its stormy waters."

"You comfort me," she said. "I shall see them again—I know that. I shall see them under conditions where this life, looking backward, will seem of small account, a short stage of the journey, a place of eternal, cruel partings before the final home-coming, where partings are at an end. I know that now—you have made me feel it. But will our creed do all this for me, Felix? You know that we have often talked of Rome, and before I go on without my dear Montague—now, oh, Felix, it draws me; it beckons me. I seem to hear a voice—but then I think of grandfather. He has suffered so much and we know

what he would feel. Can I—can you—ask him to bear it ? "

"This is a vital matter, Petronell, and I may tell you, in sacred confidence, that I stand in exactly the same position as yourself. I am at the parting of the ways and, in one sense, there is a terrible conflict for me—a battle that keeps me waking and suspends every function and faculty. For now I am threatened with what we call death, and must act, if I am to act, very swiftly. People might think, to hear us discussing our own souls here, by the dear dust of one we loved so well, that that was a selfish and a callous thing to do. They might say that it would better become us to pray for his soul than fret for our own. But we know that his soul is with his Maker and Father. He was a good man, fearless, honourable and just. I do not fear for him. He will know better in the new life and be brought to reality in a purer school than this. Therefore we may think of ourselves, and I say from my heart that you will do well and wisely to join the Church. I recognise more fully as I grow older that there is only one Church, and these offsets and sects and schisms are only signs of human frailty. They spring from the vanity of man, his obstinacy and contumacy, weak faith and strong pride. In time they will vanish with the lumber of the past, as clouds before the face of the patient and eternal sun."

"But for you it is more difficult—I know that," she said. "Grandfather will soon forgive me, for he knows I have suffered and will not grudge me peace where alone I can find it now ; but you—the last of the line—it is different. He was speaking to me

yesterday. He has a passionate regard for you, a fervent admiration for your unflinching principles; but he loves the race better than any individual. To think of a world without the Templers distresses him inconceivably. Everything else goes down before that awful threat. Even in the shadow of this death he cannot shut out the future. A great ordeal awaits you, Felix, for grandfather has told my mother plainly that, in his opinion, the situation created by dear Montague's death must radically alter your outlook on life. He said that your destiny had been hidden from you, but was now revealed. He declared that with you lies the future of the race. He honestly believes that you will presently find it your duty, out of regard for Kingscresset and its many calls, to marry and carry on the family and its traditions. Mother, who has no sentiment, reminded him that you had long ago decided that you could not marry, but must devote your life to your calling; and he said that circumstances completely alter the cause. 'The first duty of Felix is to preserve his priceless life against the dangers that threaten it,' said grandfather, 'and the next duty will be to hand on that life for the great and precious cause of his family.' So he honestly feels. Of course, he only sees it from his point of view. But I tell you what awaits you from him, because, when you break to grandfather that you mean to join the great Mother Church and hope to join it quickly, since you fear your own life may be short——though God forbid that, dear Felix—then you must be prepared to inflict new and terrible suffering on him. You are all he has left now."

"Suffering is our portion here," answered the other, "and Uncle Augustine has not only been called to a mighty trial, but faced it with rare patience and fortitude. His religion rings true, yet behind it he has a strange and foolish pride of race, which I cannot understand or share, but which to him has certainly proved a strong second line of defence against the onset of these troubles. It is only too certain that this last hope must be taken from him. We will leave it for a little while. He has had enough to suffer. We will wait, Petronell—both of us—until dear Montague's death and burial are a thing of the past. Even a week may be a long time under certain circumstances. I hesitate, because my own life——"

He broke off and reflected.

"I might take the step instantly and so secure my soul's safety, as I feel it; then tell Sir Augustine when the deed was done. All this is to be considered. Under the circumstances and in the peril that encompasses me, a dispensation might possibly be granted. I have to look into these things. At any rate, your grandfather can be spared for a little while. Leave it. Let us forget ourselves and only think of Montague now."

They prayed together and when Petronell, an hour later, left the chapel, very weary in body and soul, her cousin still knelt on and she moved without disturbing him.

Then Montague Templer was laid beside those so recently cut off from life, Helen and her daughter returned to their home, and Felix, having remained at Kingscresset a week, in strictest seclusion and with

a sleepless nocturnal guard unknown to himself, declared that he must return to London—for his own reasons—to keep his promise to Midwinter. He had exercised all caution within doors, and never gone out without companions. Now the bailiff, Mr. Terry, now Wharton, or an under-keeper accompanied him upon his brief constitutionals; and Sir Augustine, suffering his wish to conform to his hope, grew in a conviction that the danger was past. A watch continued to be kept night and day upon the concealed pack-horse track; but nothing had so far resulted from it.

On one or two occasions Sir Augustine showed an inclination to touch the matter now paramount in his mind; but Felix always contrived to turn his attention elsewhere. He had written at length to his own spiritual counsellor and guide, Father Champernowne, of the Red Lion Brotherhood, and now he found it necessary to see the elder priest and proceed with his own inquiries.

Without Midwinter he took no step and, at the detective's direction, avoided public travel and returned to London in a Kingscresset motor car—two men outside, and Wharton, armed, within. So the journey passed, and upon completion, at his uncle's wish, Felix telegraphed safe arrival. He experienced a feeling of something like elation to be in the theatre of his own work again, amid personal friends and colleagues; but his intentions none yet knew save the head of the Brotherhood.

On the following day, the Reverend Harold Champernowne declared himself not much astonished by the determination of his fellow-worker.

"There is a reverberation, or echo, that runs through all history, Templer," he said, "and you are but taking the course that I have lived to see followed by many others before you. Not a few hard-working and well-meaning churchmen have seen member after member of their flocks break the sheepfold and seek other shepherds. Let us be honest and preserve our intellectual integrity. We Anglo-Catholic priests know that we have sent thousands of men and women to Rome by our teaching; and we also know that many of us have ended by following where our children have led, and enrolling under that world-wide Banner. I do not quarrel with you for doing so. I have long expected it in your case. As to your uncle's hopes and wishes, they must, I fear, weigh but as a feather in these scales. It is impossible to consider them for a moment."

They parted after long speech together, and it happened that not half an hour later, at the north corner of Red Lion Square, Father Champernowne overtook Felix again. The younger had just been laughing with a street boy who trotted away after a coin had passed as the head of the Brotherhood approached. Felix waited for his fellow-priest.

"I've just met the grandson of Mike Cassidy, one of my wickedest old pals in Luke Street," he explained. "Cassidy's health is a good deal worse, I hear. He has learned that I am back and prays me to go to see him."

"You must exercise all sane care here, as at Kingscresset," answered the elder. "These horrible things have troubled us for you not a little. You know wha.

you have been to me, my dear fellow. I haven't dwelt on all it means to me to lose you ; but let it by by way of the Church of Rome, not by death. There is surely much good work for you to do in this world before you go out of it."

" I hope so, Father."

" Midwinter called on me a few days ago," continued Champernowne, as they proceeded together.

" He's coming to see me to-night."

" He is terribly depressed by this awful mystery. It has aged the man. I never saw him looking so haggard."

" He has no news, then ? "

" Apparently none of real importance. However, he'll tell you more than he told me, of course. My heart goes out to you and the poor girl under this affliction. It is hidden from our human understanding why such things should be. But this world is full of darkness that will only be illuminated in the next. Then we shall know the real meaning of much that appears to be contrary to our highest sense of right. I often think that what is matter for tears on earth, Felix, will provoke to wondering laughter in heaven—just as we have often much ado to keep from expressing our amusement here before a little child's absurd griefs and fears."

On the evening of the day came Bertram Midwinter to his friend, and Felix saw that Father Champernowne had not been mistaken. Midwinter looked ill and worn with his fruitless toil.

" I'm beat," he said, " and not only I. We've had a dozen men on this case—a dozen, the very cream of

the Yard. I don't believe that we've missed anything, or left any possibility unsearched. Nothing comes our way. We might just as well never have found the pack-horse track and the clues it contained, for any light they have thrown upon your cousin's murder. Certain deductions are all that are left to me, and they only make the field of inquiry larger. We want to narrow things, instead of which the little we know leads to the void."

"We must be patient, my friend. Where do we now stand?"

"We stand exactly where we did. Our discovery doubtless reached the criminals through some local channel. Not a soul ever approached the hiding place after we had found it. Of course, in a little spot like Kingscresset, the truth couldn't be hid. The watchers were sure to give it away. But they are called off now that you have left Kingscresset. The unknown man was probably informed at once that his hiding place had been found. Either that, or he discarded it intentionally, feeling that his work at Kingscresset was finished. In that case, he would hardly have left the revolver, in my opinion, though, there again, he might have done so, for he could have found no better spot in which to hide it."

"If that is so, then surely my uncle's hope is strengthened, Bertram?"

"What hope, Father?"

"That we have seen the last of this horror."

"Don't assume it for an instant," answered the detective with new concern in his voice. "Do not relax your care, but continue to take every possible

precaution. It is far too soon to dream of safety. The enemy may be waiting for just that impression to be created. He may be watching here—now—or biding his time until you return to the country."

"And what do you conclude yourself?"

"Merely that we have never seen the real man responsible for these things. We have made such close and extended inquiries that it is practically impossible a black-bearded man with big, dark spectacles would not have been reported somewhere, had such a man been seen. He has never been seen since he stopped at the inn by the Dart, except by Montague Templer and the keeper at Kingscresset. Neither at Kingscresset railway station nor anywhere in the neighbourhood has such a man been observed. He used a motor-bicycle in my opinion, and he might have run past you or me, or anybody interested in him, because I'll wager that he was disguised and that the black beard and spectacles, probably also the black cap and black knickerbockers and stockings, are all a sham."

"Do you still think there are more than one?"

"I am positive of that now. How, otherwise, could the hidden man know every movement and mature each plan in turn?"

"What of the revolver and cigarettes?"

"The revolver revealed no finger-prints. The man who used it was not a beginner. He evidently wore gloves. As for the cigarettes, they come from a well-known German firm in Berlin. They are of the very highest class manufactured."

"That doesn't help?"

"It means only what is clear already, that the leader of the gang is a German. The piece of newspaper was from a German daily—the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*—a Junker paper, eight or nine days old. I suspect a false clue there, for the man who smoked cigarettes like those would have a silver or gold case for them. He wouldn't wrap them in a piece of old newspaper."

"Yet the revolver was genuine? You don't doubt that Montague was shot with that?"

"Probably; but of course we can't be positive. The bullet found by Dr. Forbes was of the right calibre and one chamber of the revolver had been emptied. That's all we know for certain."

"You say that the watch is taken off the packhorse track?"

"Yes."

"Strange to think that mystery is solved at last, Bertram. For generations the disappearance of the old Tudor road has puzzled experts. Now the secret is out, and they will wonder how they could have missed it. It will continue to be an antiquarian pleasure and no doubt, for a generation at least, possess this sinister interest also."

"Never relax your guard. Don't forget your danger for a moment. We are hard at work still. You know that. But pray continue to be as cautious as at Kingscresset."

"You can trust me. I have ceased to feel any physical fear now. I have conquered it by simply force of will supported by Faith. The faith that

leaves room for fear is weak indeed ; and on the physical side, too, I have won comfort from Father Champernowne. You know that he is a bit of a metaphysician and can prove to my understanding, at any rate, that death is the most unreal of all things. For are not consciousness and death direct opposites ? So long as we are conscious, therefore, death cannot touch us ; we are armed against it ; while when we cease to be conscious, terror, or any other emotion, cannot touch us. In a word, death only takes those who are already dead. It is a bugbear to frighten children—a mere link between time and eternity, a bridge over which we must cross blindfolded—that is all."

"It may be," answered Midwinter, "but, God willing, it's not a bridge that you are going to cross, Father."

"I do not want to yet. Life is deeply interesting, and its possibilities, to the greatest and the least of us alike, enormous still. But to live in my case is also to give pain to another. I am now faced with a far more momentous matter than physical life or death."

He related at length his determination to enter the Roman Catholic Church, and Midwinter was deeply interested.

"If you do, I do too," he said simply.

An hour later they parted, and when his friend was gone, the priest also went out, that he might see again his aged and bed-ridden parishioner, Mr. Mike Cassidy, of Luke Street. The old Irishman's life had been darkened by a long penal sentence for burglary ; but

he was passing in peace, and he regarded Felix as the good spirit who had saved his soul alive.

And then the hour being still short of midnight, a single shot rang out from an alley within fifty yards of Luke Street. It was a little cut whence the sound proceeded, and it lay on the direct road to Luke Street from the Hostel of the Red Lion Brotherhood. Anybody passing from the one to the other would use Blind Alley, as this lane was called. Intended for foot passengers only, it proved no *cul-de-sac* in reality ; for the passage joined two thoroughfares and represented a distance of thirty yards from end to end. The walls of houses rose on either side, and a solitary electric lamp burned midway upon an arch that spanned the lane. No windows gave upon the alley, but a dozen back doors opened into it.

And here the shot echoed and the sound was heard. Then whistle answered whistle and police simultaneously invaded the little thoroughfare from either end —to find it apparently empty. Light, however, revealed a fallen man and presently they raised the body of a priest. But Felix Templer was still alive when they examined him. He had evidently fainted from terror or shock, and his left arm was shattered above the elbow. A bullet, meant for his heart, and fired at close quarters, had, thanks to some swift action on his own part, missed his life ; but nearly separated his arm from his body.

While some fetched an ambulance and a doctor, the police hunted the passage for any clue ; but no mark of the assailant rewarded them, and Felix, still unconscious, was powerless to help. The constables

knew him well enough, and personal indignation quickened their activities. They were also aware that Bertram Midwinter lived near at hand in Holborn, and he had hardly returned home again from his visit to his friend when he was called.

But the wounded man had already been conveyed to St. Bartholomew's Hospital before he reached Blind Alley.

Midwinter spoke with the police and marked a wide stain of blood on the pavement. He learned that Felix was insensible when removed, but not fatally wounded; and then, first calling at the Hostel and reporting what had happened, he hastened to know all that a house surgeon at the hospital could tell him. He sent in his name and a young man soon appeared.

"It is Father Templer from the Red Lion Hostel," he explained. "He's recovered consciousness; but he has evidently had a devil of a shock and I doubt if he could give you a coherent account of what has happened. He mustn't be disturbed yet awhile."

"There is no danger?"

"Humanly speaking, none. After such a gunshot wound and a broken bone, you must speak with a little reserve. Father Templer's heart is tired. But I think that after sleep he will be clear enough."

"Is it a severe injury?"

"Very. His arm was nearly shot off. I'm doubtful if we can save it. Our senior surgeon will see him the first thing to-morrow."

"He voluntereed no description of what happened to him?"

"Yes; he told me a few things. He seemed only anxious to know at first whether he was going to die. He didn't realise in the least where he'd been hit. But a gunshot wound often numbs a man all over, so that he can't locate the injured spot for the time. I told him that he was all right and not in any danger. That seemed to buck him up. He begged that no strange person should be allowed to come near him, and I promised nobody should. He then asked for you, Midwinter, and I said he should see you to-morrow. That contented him. He said that he'd only just left you. He rambled rather then, till the sleeping draught quieted him; but I gathered that he was on the way to see a sick man. Then he broke off and talked about 'the bearded man.'"

"I only left him an hour since. I had no idea that he was going out again, or should have tried to prevent it. But he didn't tell me."

Father Champernowne arrived as the detective spoke, and the surgeon saluted him.

"He's all right, sir," he said. "He's just getting to sleep. There's no immediate danger—in fact, humanly speaking, no danger to life. But he's had a fearful jar. Perhaps I may tell him to-morrow morning that you gentlemen will call on him when the visiting hour comes round."

"I must see him earlier than that," said Midwinter. "I shall be here at half-past eight to-morrow, and if, in your judgment, the patient can talk to me for not more than two minutes, I'll see him. There are one

or two questions nobody can answer but Father Felix himself, and we want the answers badly."

Priest and detective left the hospital together, both relieved to learn that no danger to life threatened. Father Champernowne soon went back to bed, while Midwinter joined half a dozen police in Blind Alley. Careful search had furnished a pair of large spectacles with horn or tortoise-shell rims. They were broken to pieces and the glass ground under many running feet. But Midwinter connected them with the apparition of the black-bearded man so often recorded. He instigated further and close research, only to prove that the lane yielded no other clues.

There had been barely time for the gun-man to leave the gloom of Blind Alley and escape into the lighted thoroughfare beyond, before those who had heard the shot hastened to block either end of it. Midwinter therefore devoted his attention to the back doors, of which six gave on either side of the alley. All were locked from the inside, and since they opened in the brick faces of the houses themselves, there was no cover of any back yards where a strange man might have hidden. He then inspected the front of the houses and found, in one street, a row of mean shops, in the other, tenement dwellings.

Upon the strength of the fact that Felix had mentioned a black-bearded man, the detective made a statement to the police, and, as a result, two suspected persons were arrested, one soon after midnight, the second on the following morning. One proved to be a Jew, the seond a Pole, and both were quickly found innocent of any offence ; for the latter had just come

off his ship, while the Jew, though he lived in one of the tenements that backed upon Blind Alley, was a well-known and respectable citizen. As for the scene of the outrage, it yielded no further evidence.

CHAPTER XI

A CALL TO KINGSCRESSET

BERTRAM MIDWINTER'S interest for a time centred on the ancient housebreaker who had engaged Felix Templer's attention upon the night of the assault. The old man's record was such that suspicion seemed natural, but a visit to Mr. Cassidy convinced the detective that no temptation would have led him to any evil action against his friend. His devotion to the priest was very real. As for Felix, what he had to tell proved little.

"Just before Father Champernowne overtook me," explained the wounded man, when Midwinter visited him, "just before we spoke together, at the corner of the Square, I had been accosted by a strange boy. He was a civil-spoken youngster, who said that Mike Cassidy was his grandfather. The old man had heard of my return and prayed that I would see him that very day. The lad was not familiar to me, though most of them in our parish are, for my chief interest lies with the boys. I asked him why I had never seen him before, and he explained that he didn't live with Cassidy, but was only here for a time looking after

the old man, while his brother, Neddy, whom I knew, was away with the Church Lads' Brigade on holiday. There seemed no reason to doubt the story, though I had not heard Neddy speak of a brother. So I promised to come, and, knowing the old fellow never turned in till three in the morning, said that he might expect me about eleven o'clock. I remember, now, the boy asked me to say when I would be there."

"The facts," explained Midwinter, "are these: Father Champernowne knew of the reported summons to Luke Street because you told him. Old Cassidy has but one grandson and it is true that he is away with the Church Lads' Brigade. But he never sent the boy you saw, and knows nothing about him. He had not heard you were back. Now tell me what happened when you reached Blind Alley, Father."

"I was half way down it and had passed the lamp, when somebody, who had pressed himself into one of the doorways, or may have actually come out of a doorway, stood in front of me and lifted a revolver. I had one glance of the stout, black-bearded man with dark glasses—the familiar figure—and in an instant, as I dashed at him, he fired. But my sudden rush must have swerved me to the right and spoiled his aim. As I jumped, however, I felt a pang of unspeakable agony, and knew that I was falling. No doubt he thought he had shot me through the heart and then ran in the other direction, or got back through the door, before people came to the scene of the shot. As for me, I remember nothing more. If he had actually struck me in a vital place, I could hardly have succumbed more utterly. I was probably un-

conscious before I struck the ground with my forehead; but it is a mystery to me that I should have been, seeing that the bullet only smashed my arm. There must have been some psychological condition created by the sudden sight of the wretch when he was so far from my mind."

"If you had only told me you were going out again, Father, I would have insisted on going with you."

"I knew it, Bertram. I knew that if I had told you, you would have made a fuss and tried to stop my going at all."

"Do you remember the doorway in which the man appeared to be stationed, or from which he seemed to emerge?"

"I do. It was the first on the left past the lamp. I was heading for Holborn."

Midwinter shook his head.

"A young widow and three children live there with a very old man—the woman's uncle. They are all right. I interviewed them. They know you and go to St. Faith's—the Robertsons."

Felix smiled.

"They certainly would harbour no enemy of mine," he said.

"You see, of course," continued the detective, "what all this implies?"

"I only see that I am a doomed man and must make my confession of faith as soon as possible—in fact, before danger again threatens."

"It implies a perfect and close knowledge of you, of your work here, and of your acquaintances even. The people who set this trap must have known you are

good to Cassidy and would surely go to him if he sent for you. They must have schooled this boy with his lies to wait in your haunts until you appeared. They must have known that you would fall to his bluff, despite the danger in which you stood. They must have guessed that by no possibility would you associate his appeal with your own affairs. And knowing from experience, or information, the road you would take to get to Cassidy, they saw that it would lead you where you could have no chance of escape. That's why they chose Cassidy of all who might have wanted you. It is a miracle, if ever there was a miracle, that your life is spared, and your terror and its instant effect in robbing you of consciousness, alone saved you. Had you stood your ground for a second, or attempted to run, the man would have fired again."

"How did he get clear?" asked Felix. "Surely that terrific report must have been heard in both streets?"

"It was; but my theory, since it seems plain he used none of the doors, is this: He kept his nerve and was at the south entrance of the alley before anybody entered it. He may then have turned with the rest and hastened to where you lay. Only those who knew the whole story would have suspected him, even if he had not already removed his disguise. But probably his beard was in his pocket before anybody entered 'Blind' Alley, and he thought, no doubt, that the glasses were there also until he reached safety and found that he had dropped them. They were found near the Holborn end of the passage."

"Do they tell you anything?"

"Nothing. The broken fittings are of tortoise-shell, so dark as to be almost black; the dark blue glasses were smashed into fragments, so small that no optician can glean any information from them. I have got men inquiring at every spectacle-shop in London, and nobody who buys spectacles to-day will do so without being looked after. But I anticipate no result from that. The spectacles were almost certainly only a part of a disguise."

Felix considered.

"Why do you feel that? To me the most extraordinary feature of the affair is that the murderer always appears as the same man. That points to the fact, surely, that he does not trouble to disguise himself? At Kingscresset, in Derbyshire, in Devon—always the black beard and big spectacles, so that everybody connected with this horrible extermination knows and expects one thing. Why did he dress himself up in this conspicuous way to challenge and destroy me? If it were a disguise, surely it has more than served its turn? Had a strange man passed me in the Alley, or suddenly emerged from one of those doors, he might have come to my side, said 'Good evening,' and blown my brains out, as he killed poor Montague. Instead, the one sinister figure in the world—the one human being I have most to dread and avoid—suddenly starts up in front of me—with the result that he defeats his own object. I take instant fright and leap forward as he fires. I also faint from shock, and fall in such a way that he believes he has done what he attempted. If you consider it so, the man,

by adopting this particular disguise, has for once spoiled his own game. They say murderers, however subtle and skilled, always have a blind spot. Perhaps you are right, and this clinging to one disguise, if it be a disguise, is his weakness. He may be superstitious and think that it brings him luck. On the other hand, I don't believe it for a moment. I believe we see the real man, and that he is acting with complete indifference to his own safety. Thus his very foolhardy courage keeps him safe and helps him to defy the horde of men now seeking to catch him."

Midwinter shook his head.

"There is hardly a man in England answering to this description now who would not be held up. The Templer mystery is known far and wide. Hundreds of persons even remotely suggesting this unknown assassin have been stopped and questioned."

A silence fell between them and then Midwinter inquired for his friend's health.

"I hope all goes well with the arm, Father Felix," he asked; but the priest smiled and shook his head.

"I did not tell you, because it was sure to distress you," he answered. "But I must lose my faithful left arm at noon to-day. There are bad symptons, and this is to be done quickly that worse may not happen. My hand is already dead. Do not mourn for me, Bertram. The operation itself will be no great matter. I shall not be quite so useful to others, or to myself henceforth; but I shall be just as useful to God Almighty—though a priest no more. It is a great thought that nothing which can happen to us—not

death itself—lessens our power to be useful to our Creator."

Even as he spoke the nurses entered and Midwinter went his way, marvelling that this man, in the shadow of such an ordeal, could leave himself so completely out of his calculations.

He returned in the evening, to hear that Felix Templer had come well through the operation and was now likely to improve in strength, though return of health must be a slow matter.

A week later, Petronell came to see her cousin and spent an hour beside him. He was already better and making steady progress.

"They are very pleased with me," he told her. "As a patient I am a success, Petronell. But never mind about my tribulations. Tell me all about yourself and your grandfather. He himself is coming to see me next week if the weather allows. I am glad you are stopping with him."

"I made myself stop, because he cried out to me to do so," she answered. "You know what Kingscresset is to me now—a place of precious ghosts—a haunted world that once held all the happiness I shall have in this life. I want—oh, how I want to give it up and go into peace for the rest of my days. But I must think of grandfather first. He is failing; yet he can always cheer up a little when he thinks of you. Still he weaves a last hope out of your future. Still he most honestly believes that your duty to the race transcends any other obligation. 'When he is strong again and his conscience tackles the problem, I have no doubt of his answer,' the dear old man said last

night. One forgets one's own sorrows, almost, before the pathetic way in which he clings to you—especially seeing that all his dreams must dissolve when he hears the truth."

Felix sighed.

"Do I look like a man to wed and raise a family? Does he not realise that I am maimed—deprived of a limb? Perhaps dear Uncle Augustine will understand better when he sees me. As to my final purpose, that is assured. I have taken the needful steps and am to be received into the one Church. But I cannot be a priest in it: a maimed man is denied that privilege. Then your turn will come, Petronell, but say nothing as yet. I will break it to him myself presently, and as gently as I can."

"This is the only subject left in the world that interests him now. He was terribly distressed about the loss of your arm; but even that, viewed from one point of view, increased his hopes. Far from thinking it a disability, he said that now, more than ever, you would need a woman to minister to you and take the place of your dear lost fingers."

"It is a great mystery that such grief should have fallen on his fine, faithful old spirit."

"All is mystery. One's life has been only a mystery of suffering from last Spring. What is real about it but the ceaseless pain?"

"Do not worry for yourself, Petronell. Let nothing ever waken self-sorrow. Remember Lao Tse's immanent, all-informing Reality, without beginning or end. That is the only reality that matters. Nothing and yet Everything. But the nearer to God, the

farther from yourself—that is also a great mystical truth."

"It is difficult to get away from yourself if you are in agony," she said.

"Yes, yes. The flesh and the mind are hard to discipline, when they throb with torture. I know that."

"We are only human, Felix. We cannot help asking 'Why?'"

"A question to avoid, like many other questions, for the sound reason that if we are to know the answer we shall know it without asking; but if it is to be kept from us, then asking is vain."

"These thoughts will comfort me when I suffer less," she said. "There is one problem that weighs most now. Ought I to leave my grandfather as long as he lives? He dearly wants me to make my home with him. He begs it very earnestly and points out that next year I shall have no other home of my own. Then it is a choice for me between going into a religious house and throwing in my lot with the Church, or stopping at Kingscresset while he lives."

Her cousin was interested.

"It is a problem, and one which you must not decide in haste. I, too, have tremendous questions confronting me, though they certainly cannot be answered as Uncle Augustine would wish. The future of Kingscresset is a gigantic puzzle, and the most melancholy thought about it is that the hope of ever seeing with Sir Augustine's eyes, or guiding his to see with mine, must be vain."

"What is your idea?"

"I have none of any sort as yet. So many look to us for their livelihood and home. As I say, the question is so gigantic that it may be beyond my power to answer without council and advice from wiser men than myself."

She took his hand and pressed it.

"For Kingscresset you have been saved—I'm sure of it," she said.

"I wish I could think that you were right," he answered; "but I cannot. With my arm, there has gone a part of my brain also—or so I feel at present."

"Get strong and well first. You may not be called to face these difficulties for years yet; but you will be called to face grandfather."

She laughed at a recollection.

"He was smoking one of those little cigars he calls his 'night-caps' in the library last night and sipping his whiskey and soda and reading Menander. Suddenly he looked up and spoke: 'How true—how essentially true! Listen, Petronell.' Then he read me a passsage. Somebody in a play says, 'There's no such cosy combination as man and wife.' He was much delighted. I ventured to answer that this generation of young people were not finding marriage a very 'cosy combination,' if we could judge by the activity of the Divorce Court; but that annoyed him, and I ought not to have said it."

She broke off.

"Mr. Midwinter has found out nothing, I suppose?"

"Nothing at all."

"It does seem contrary to reason that all these clever men should fail so utterly."

"Reason is a very faulty guide, even in temporal affairs."

They talked until there came a meal for Felix. Then his cousin left him, to bear messages for her grandfather and her mother.

"I hope to be sitting up in a week or so," he said, "then they must both come to see me. Thank your mother for the flowers and say that all goes well."

She left him heartened and hopeful. Indeed, her news cheered Sir Augustine, to whom his granddaughter brought it that evening. He clung to his dream, and now asked Petronell whether it would be well to hint at the great matter in his mind and pave the way by a letter. But she advised against it.

"The time is not ripe, dear grandfather," she said. "We can hardly realise what awful things have happened to Felix. He is still, mentally, far from his old self. His very voice is changed, and you see the shadow of fear in his face. I should wait until you have visited him and spoken with him more than once. You may find that he has much to tell you that will alter your own ideas."

Thus she cast her grandfather down, yet only out of kindness, and it grieved her much to see his old, bloodshot eyes grow sad and anxious. A great final trial lay in the future for all of them, and that the head of their house, weakened by such mighty sorrows, must live to see his last poor lamp of hope blown out, distressed the gentle Petronell.

But her grandfather none the less took the girl's advice to heart. Pondering upon it, at first impatiently, but afterwards with more open mind, he perceived

its wisdom, and when, at last, he visited Felix in his private room at the hospital, Sir Augustine appeared with a secret determination to say nothing as yet concerning his own ambitions for his nephew. Before they parted, however, he had failed of his resolution.

The veteran was much moved at this meeting, and Felix strove to talk lightly before Sir Augustine recovered from his emotion. Presently they spoke of the future.

"God knows best; and that's the only answer to every inscrutable problem existence sets us," said the old man. "How shall we keep sane in the face of life if we cannot believe that much?"

"It is an article of faith," declared Felix.

"I daily thank God for giving me the great riches of your love, Felix. You always understood me—perhaps better than did Matthew himself. You, by a sort of intuition, were able to look at life as it presented itself to my elderly eyes; and thus you revealed an understanding that others never reached."

"I am very proud to hear you say so. I have learned so much of dignity and patience from you. I have seen you bear your cross without flinching and stand the lash without a groan."

"Life was sweet among the persons of my choice," confessed the elder. "A rich man, if he possesses judgment, may win the immense privilege of gathering about him the wise, or if they are too wise to accept his hospitality, he may go to them in the likeness of a learner. Not that I availed myself of such advantages. I did not begin to use my little brains as soon as I should. But my own family always meant

so very much to me. Your case is different; but I hope among those great human interests you espouse——"

He stopped a moment, knowing himself on delicate ground that he had vowed to avoid. But it was too late. The last ambition of his heart escaped him.

"—— that there may yet be an espousal of a nearer and dearer and more personal sort."

Felix remained silent, and the old man feared he had said too much at this time; but it seemed presently that his nephew failed to note the end of his sentence. When he replied he was only concerned with the middle of it.

"Yes, there are indeed vast human interests belonging to every rich man of good will. But the rich man has so little time. Riches eat up precious time, Uncle Augustine."

"That is more true of the new rich than of such as myself, who have been born and educated to wealth. 'The master is the one slave of the household.' And the honest man accepts his slavery—as you will when the time comes. But custom is everything, and you must not let enthusiasm for humanity blind you to one super-eminent enthusiasm: I mean your duty to your family and your obligation to your race."

"You must teach me what all that means, Uncle."

"I shall do so when you return to me. And after I have got you, I keep you through the winter, Felix. There shall be no evasion and no escape. You are evidently no safer in London than at Kingscresset—that is my honest conviction, and you will be guarded

henceforth as a prince of the blood. You must reconcile yourself to that necessity."

"I can imagine no discipline so dreadful," declared the priest. "Who am I that any fellow-man should waste his time in watching over me? And to what purpose? If it is willed that I live, invisible guardians will see that all is well with me; if I am to go, then not principalities or powers can prevent it."

"God helps those who help themselves, my dear boy. When do you return to me? That is the all-important question. And when you do, you must submit to my rule and my opinions. The race, Felix—not the race of man, but the race of Templer—is a duty—yes, a duty that you have yet to approach in the right spirit. I have pleasured you in the temporal matters of which you spoke—concerning the estates—and you must pleasure me in my turn."

They talked a little longer and then Sir Augustine went his way.

The confusion of events that followed within six weeks of this occasion needs to be clearly stated.

At the end of this time, Felix Templer was restored to health and strong enough to return to Kingscresset. Meanwhile, the preliminaries of his reception into the Roman Church were completed, but owing to the fact that a letter had gone astray, the convert was ignorant of certain facts which, had he learned them, had prevented him from leaving London until all was accomplished. The missing information immediately followed him to the country, for there came a communication inviting his reply to questions which he not received,

and, as soon as a return of post had cleared the matter, it was necessary for him to go back at once to London. Thus he had not been at Kingscresset above three days before he left it again for the all-important event. And he found himself exceedingly relieved to go, since Sir Augustine now opened his batteries and Felix was called to face a dogged and persistent appeal. He had broken off the argument once or twice; but he perceived now clearly enough that he must convince Sir Augustine his dream of a marriage was vain. Indeed Felix saw in this sudden call to London a Providence destined to put an end to the very painful situation now created.

He spoke with Petronell before he left her, and explained that the blow must fall on his return within a day or two.

"My heart bleeds for him," he said. "But he has now become possessed of this idea, and I do believe that if I continue to deny him what he regards as the only vital thing on earth, we might yet live to be estranged. But when I return, he must hear the truth."

"It will crush the last glimmer of hope out of him. It will mean the death-knell of the family—the end of the race," said his cousin.

"Is there any way to make the blow lighter?"

Petronell shook her head.

So Felix went back to London as he had come, by motor car, with Kingscresset men in attendance, He arrived at the Red Lion Brotherhood before noon, and twelve hours had not passed before his plans were again broken and an urgent summons from Kingscresset demanded his instant presence.

Everything was in readiness for the ceremony of the following day, and he had spoken with his old colleagues, and prophesied in the common-room that not a few of the younger workers would presently follow him. He had then withdrawn for the last time to his old study, from which his bedroom opened, and was busy directing a young helper to pack his books and dismantle the chambers that had been his only real home since he left the University. He remained still very helpless with a solitary hand, for the experiment of fitting a false one to the short stump could not yet be attempted.

Then came a message that Felix was wanted at the telephone. Expressing wonder as to who might seek him at that late hour, he went to ascertain.

To his astonishment it was Petronell who called him.

"Is that you, Felix?" she asked, and he recognised the agitation of her voice.

"Yes. Whatever do you want at this time of night?"

"Grandfather. He is dead. Fastnet has just told me. I left him at half-past ten in the library, and when he did not come to bed, Westcott went down to look after him. He was quite dead in his chair. I have telephoned to Dr. Forbes. Fastnet says it was a natural death, he thinks. But we cannot be sure of that. Will you come quickly to-morrow?"

"I'll come to-night," he answered. "Expect me in a few hours."

"Then be sure not to come alone. Everybody in the house has heard what has happened, and it may be

guessed that you will motor down. Take every precaution."

"I'll get Midwinter if I can. Keep the doctor, if possible, till I arrive."

"He was taken from the grief to come, Felix."

But no reply reached Petronell, for her cousin had already left the telephone and set about his needful preparation. He proceeded with despatch, and this time feared no trap set for himself, since the girl's voice was unmistakable.

He first wrote a letter and sent a messenger with it to Midwinter's rooms, not half a mile distant. He took no further steps until a reply reached him. Then, after three parts of an hour were past, Midwinter himself arrived in a big touring car. Ten minutes later, having convinced the detective that his cousin herself had spoken the message, they set out; but Midwinter's suspicions were not wholly allayed. He had studied the map and planned an approach to Kingscresset which lengthened the journey by ten miles, but ensured travel on a different route from that to have been expected by anybody awaiting the nightly passage of the car.

"The man who flung John Gratton off his motor bicycle might very likely queer the pitch of a car running through the dark between here and your home," he said.

Felix nodded, but only the last words seemed to hold his attention.

"You are right. Kingscresset is my home now."

"A tremendous inheritance, Father."

"Tremendous, Bertram, and it comes burdened

with terrible problems. I little thought I should ever be called to face it."

They spoke of Sir Augustine, and Midwinter suspected that a natural death had ended his tribulations; while upon that point the younger ventured no opinion.

"It seems reasonable to hope so," he said; "but we must not leave any element of doubt."

CHAPTER XII

THE FIFTH STROKE

THROUGH the darkness of a November night Felix Templer and his friend hastened back to the dead man, whose reign has ended in mystery and sorrow.

They spoke little during the journey and safely reached the stricken house, to find that no false report had summoned them upon their journey. Sir Augustine was dead, and Petronell and Dr. Forbes were waiting to furnish all particulars concerning his sudden end.

The girl told her story in few words ; but before she did so, Felix put a question to her companion.

"Is it natural death, Forbes ?" he inquired.

"Most emphatically I believe it to be so," the doctor answered. "Taking into consideration the unnatural sorrows that have poured down upon your uncle of late, nothing was more likely than that his old heart should give out at last. I will tell you what there is to tell when your cousin has spoken."

Fastnet appeared. He was very pale and had been weeping an old man's painful tears. He brought a tray with soup, sandwiches, spirits and a syphon.

"I beg you'll take refreshment, Sir Felix," he said calmly.

"Don't—don't, Fastnet, my good fellow. Please!"

The butler regarded him drearily.

"Nature's nature," he answered, "and the laws of nature can't be got over. Sir Felix you must be, because you can't be anything else now the dear old master has gone home."

He left them, and Petronell spoke.

"Grandfather had been happy to-day, weaving castles in the air about you, Felix. He found a small book that you wrote long ago, called *Suffer the Little Children*. He read it through as we sat in the library after dinner, and he said that he believed it was the will of God that one who loved children as you do should raise up children of your own. He assured me that when you returned, you would presently see eye to eye with him. Fastnet came in at the usual time with the whiskey and syphon, and Sir Augustine lighted one of the little cigars that he finishes the day with. Fastnet then asked him if there was anything else, and he said, 'No; good-night, my friend,' as he always did to Fastnet. Then he sipped his whiskey and soda and continued to talk of you. He said that you always reminded him of Menander's words: 'Uprightness is a blessed viaticum to life.'"

"So indeed he found it," declared Felix.

"Being very tired," continued Petronell, "I told him presently I must go to bed, though it was not late. I kissed him as usual and left him. I had been asleep some time before Mrs. Rice—the housekeeper, Mr. Midwinter—called me. Fastnet had directed her to

do so, and it was Westcott, Sir Augustine's valet, who had come to Fastnet just as he was going to bed. Sir Augustine was pretty early at night as a rule, and when eleven o'clock came and he had not appeared, Westcott went down to know if there was anything his master needed. For both Westcott and Fastnet are nearly as old as my grandfather and were friends as well as servants. Once or twice lately Sir Augustine had gone to sleep downstairs and had to be awakened. But when Westcott entered the library, he found that his master had slipped out of his chair to the ground. He was alive then and breathing heavily, but he appeared to be quite unconscious. Westcott ran for Fastnet and, together, they picked him up and laid him on the couch. Then Fastnet told Mrs. Rice to call me at once. I came as quickly as it was possible to come, and I was kneeling beside him, holding up his head, when he ceased to breathe. I must have been with him for five minutes when his breathing stopped, and he did not recover consciousness during that time. Meanwhile, Fastnet had telephoned to Dr. Forbes and, after some delay, I succeeded in getting through to you and telling you what had happened."

"Poor Petronell. I am sorry you should have had to suffer this," said Felix. "Let us go to him," he added, and when Midwinter and the doctor had proceeded, he begged the girl to return to bed.

A few moments later he stood by the veteran, now at peace. Then Forbes spoke.

"It was syncope, Father Templer. Probably some little mental excitement upset the tottering balance.

It may merely have been thinking about you. His life began to hang on a razor edge. He might have lived a year or two had life and events combined to remove agitation and calm his brain; but it is improbable. Nothing surprises me less than his sudden death. I have seen premonitory symptoms of the danger. He had lost his old, clear enunciation, and the old way of seeing round a subject and following an argument. You may say that both heart and head have been knocked to pieces by this last year."

Midwinter spoke.

"Have you examined the body, doctor?"

"Very carefully. There is no outward evidence of any foul play. He was not injured from the outside. The 'stroke,' so to call it, came from within and was, as I say, probably precipitated by his own thoughts."

"There was no sign of dread or horror in his face when you first came to him?"

"On the contrary, he appeared as placid as you see him now."

"You can report no sinister symptom whatever then?" asked Felix.

"None. If there were any evil committed, it was in one way and in one way alone."

"You mean poison?" asked Midwinter.

"Yes."

Sir Augustine's nephew gazed down at the great, placid countenance.

"You see no evidence of poison, however?" he asked.

"There is none."

"But poisons exist which leave no outward sign," said Midwinter.

"That is true. With hyoscine, for example, there is little or no delirium, as we find in atropine and other vegetable poisons. It merely induces swift insensibility and, in case of a man as old and shaken as Sir Augustine, loss of consciousness ending in death would swiftly follow a lethal dose."

Felix was looking at the Venetian goblet, which still stood beside Sir Augustine's arm-chair.

"I examined that," explained the doctor, "but it was emptied to the bottom."

Felix again referred to Midwinter.

"On the one hand," he said, "we have Doctor Forbes' opinion, that death is apparently natural in every detail; on the other, there appear to be poisons that might have caused it and yet leave the dead as we see him now. What do you feel, Midwinter?"

"Do not think I am dogmatising, or in the least disposed to differ from any conclusion you may come to," explained Forbes. "I think, personally, that there never was a more natural and peaceful death than that which must have overtaken Sir Augustine. Everything points to it; but having regard for the awful story which so recently ended in your attempted murder, Father Templer, I should not for a moment question the wisdom of an autopsy."

"My own feeling is that I most strongly wish it," declared Felix, and then his friend spoke.

"Emphatically, it must be held," said Midwinter. "For many reasons the law would insist upon it, and, as you know, Father, I have always feared, despite your conviction to the contrary, that a member of

this household has been in league against the family from the beginning."

"If my uncle has been poisoned," answered Felix, "then your suspicion can no longer be questioned. We know that he was well after he dined. Yet, less than three hours later, he was dead. In any case, expert examination must be made, though, until I actually know that murder overtook him under his own roof, I shall never believe it."

He then turned to Forbes.

"What is hyoscine?" he asked.

"A product of henbane," answered the physician. "Chemically, hyoscine is a preparation of henbane—a hypnotic isomeric with hyoscyamine. It leaves no very characteristic post-mortem evidence to create suspicion save a slight dilatation of the pupil, as in the case of hyoscyamine, or atropine."

"Do you find any suggestion of dilatation?"

"No, I looked for it; but Sir Augustine's eyes do not appear to me dilated, but the artificial light here is not good. I might judge better in the morning."

"Hyoscine is a famous poison in a way," explained Midwinter. "With some vegetable poisons, I believe it is practically impossible to find chemical evidence after death; but, in the case of hyoscine, it can be done. Chemical analysis would pretty certainly find it if it were in the internal organs, and that even after considerable decomposition—as in the Crippen case. Therefore, since Sir Augustine's quiet death might have resulted from this particular drug, or another, we must at least make sure. I do not say this for my own satisfaction only. It is obviously the only course."

Time passed and the dreary formalities of a coroner's inquest were repeated for the third time within a year at Kingscresset. The needful steps were taken to ascertain if any violent death had ended Sir Augustine Templer's life, and the inquest was suspended meantime until the doubt had been cleared. But, within twenty-four hours, it was possible for the coroner's jury to meet again; and then they learned that a Government analyst had discovered definite and indisputable evidence of poison. Dr. Forbes had actually indicated the correct drug. Within his limited knowledge, hyoscine alone was calculated to produce the phenomena of Sir Augustine's death; and hyoscine it was that had been discovered in appreciable quantity. The representative of Government himself returned with the information, since the case afforded unusual points of interest, and he testified before the resummoned jury. Once more, therefore, was echoed a verdict of "Murder by a person or persons unknown"; while new and terrible interest awakened at Kingscresset, seeing that those of his household most closely associated with the dead man were now involved.

Sir Augustine had been either deliberately poisoned by someone familiar with him—one free to approach his person and wait daily upon him—or he had taken his own life; and while the Coroner pointed out this alternative in his summing up upon the evidence and the proven cause of death, not one man among those assembled to determine a verdict entertained the thought of suicide for a moment. The possibility was foreign to any estimate of Sir Augustine, his life and character; and though, by admitting such a pos-

sibility, they might have lessened the cloud that now hung over the heads of his household, the jury found no temptation to do so, nor did any question them. Even those now in the shadow of suspicion admitted that Sir Augustine, under no circumstances, would have committed self-destruction. He had been murdered, as his kinsfolk before him, and Bertram Midwinter's contention was proved; that one at least of the Templer's bitter and unsleeping foes still dwelt under their own roof.

The detective concentrated upon those whose duties brought them into closest contact with their master, and ironic chance, presently eliminating, first this man and then that, finally left for his closer consideration two only—Westcott, Sir Augustine's valet, and Jacob Fastnet, the butler. These were the twain who, of all his staff, had been longest in the employment of the dead, and who now mourned him with deepest sorrow and most unaffected grief. It appeared impossible to question the devotion of either, but while close examination presently convinced Midwinter that Westcott could not be involved, with Fastnet the case was otherwise. Midwinter had relied upon Petronell for an exact description of all that happened on the night of Sir Augustine's death, and she was able to furnish minute particulars from the hour when she joined her grandfather before going in to dinner, until the moment when she left him in the library and retired. It was impossible that the poison could have been taken until some hours after his evening meal, and he had consumed nothing in Petronell's presence after leaving the dining-room, save his usual whiskey

and soda. This he had drunk just before she had bade him good-night, and Fastnet had poured it out on the way to Sir Augustine's hand.

Upon the day before the funeral, Bertram Midwinter explained to his friend the theory which now occupied his mind; but even while so doing, he indicated by his manner that it possessed no very great attraction or significance for him. Around the old butler his suspicion turned, even while reason pulled in the contrary direction and flouted such a fear. Yet circumstances supported him, and, as on a former occasion, the detective had brought the theory of Montague Templer's guilt to Felix, so now he placed before him an aspect of his uncle's death involving Jacob Fastnet.

The priest was tormented with much business, and the discovery that Sir Augustine had died no natural death at first caused him to suffer from new personal terror. But now his great desire had been accomplished: he had returned to London for a few hours and been received into the Roman Catholic Church. Henceforth no personal fear was exhibited by him, and when Midwinter brought his conclusions and doubts to the younger man, he found Felix collected and well able to consider every point. Indeed, he lent all weight to the curious evidence for Fastnet's inculpation; but, as he had swept away his friend's fears in the past, so now he did again.

The detective spoke first.

"After exhausting every shadow of evidence against those who could be possibly involved, I have reduced them, indoors, to two," he began, "and of these two

I am convinced that Westcott may be disregarded. The man's distress is genuine, and he would have sacrificed his life for Sir Augustine. Forbes says the old boy is really ill. Nobody could pretend to suffer as he is suffering. There remains, then, Fastnet, and you will say that he, too, is exonerated by his age and long years of devoted service. But consider a point. It was always impossible to know how Major Templer lost his life. We proved that the shot which killed him must have been fired within a few feet of his head, and our only assumption has been that the enemy capable of coming so close was unrecognised as such. I believed, as you will remember, that some woodman, or keeper, came to him in the likeness of a friend, and was thus able to murder him without the Major's suspicion of danger. But supposing, after all, that it was not so. Recollect what happened before your cousin went up through Gawler Bottom to his death. He had eaten and drunk at Kingscresset. He had taken a bottle of champagne, opened for him and poured out for him by Fastnet. If into that wine a stiff narcotic had been slipped, what may we imagine as happening in the woods? The Major presently comes under the influence of it, sits down to rest at the seat, grows drowsy, and falls asleep. Thus insensible, he is at the mercy of any enemy. The hidden man knows what to expect. He is in collusion with Fastnet. He is watching and waiting; and when he sees his victim unconscious, swiftly approaches and shoots him at close quarters. The dog, perhaps slumbering at his master's feet, leaps up and follows him—to give away his secret ultimately as we know.

I do not say this theory bears any great stamp of probability; but if Fastnet were a knave and had been bribed to serve some secret enemy, you will perceive how he may be knit into both these murders and even be useful in the others. For nobody knew everybody's movements better than did he. There can be little doubt that the poison was in your uncle's whiskey and soda when he drank it. But have you considered how it could get there without Fastnet's knowledge?"

"I have," answered Felix. "I know, from the trend of the inquiry at the inquest, that it was practically agreed the poison must have been in Sir Augustine's goblet; but, as the jury were unable for a moment to imagine that Fastnet put it there, so am I. Indeed, from a lifetime of friendship with Jacob Fastnet, I felt positive he could never have done so. When I was a child he had reached the age of five-and-forty. He is now more than seventy and—a great point to remember—short-sighted. Incidentally, I may tell you that he doesn't care about money in the least. He never married and had no responsibilities, and therefore no temptations. More than that, he is a good man, Bertram. He has kindly thoughts, and I have known him to do many generous actions with his wages—actions inspired only by simple virtue. Will you listen to me now?"

"Very willingly, Father. But these general sentiments concerning Fastnet do not, of course, answer my suspicion."

"They do not, but I can go into detail. Since all was accomplished and I am received, my mind has

known rest at last. While it seemed a terrible race between certainty and doubt, I own that I could think of nothing and was as a man beside myself; but now fear and all personal uneasiness have left me, never to return. Since I came back here, I may tell you that I have concentrated on the same problems as yourself.

"Let me show you how I have argued—from even a closer knowledge of circumstances than you possess. It is clear that my uncle was poisoned in his final drink on the night of his death. Suicide is out of the question, for he held it a crime under any temptation. We have, then, to consider the Venetian goblet. As we learned at the inquest, it is left by day in a compartment of the great sideboard in the dining-room. The sideboard is not locked, and anybody could have opened that cupboard on the left-hand side during the day. For hours at a time the dining-room is empty, and when you say that nobody could have put the poison into the goblet without Fastnet knowing it, you are wrong. First for the above reason, and secondly because the poison, once in the goblet, would have escaped his notice easily if introduced by another hand. Hyoscine may be a liquid preparation, so we were told by the Government analyst, and he added that it is colourless and scentless. Well, if you look at the goblet, you will see that a few colourless, scentless drops of anything might well lie at the bottom of it without attracting the least attention. The glass is amber in tint and it narrows at the base. Why, if Sir Augustine had poured out the whiskey and soda himself, he would never have observed a little moisture

at the bottom of his glass. And most certainly Fastnet would not have done so, for he is very short-sighted nowadays. Moreover, he gets exceedingly sleepy by half-past nine o'clock, as anybody can tell you. He has been past his work, in sober truth, for some time.

"Absolve Fastnet and consider others. There are a great many people who had business in the dining-room. Let us think of those who were certainly in it during that day, and probably each in it alone and unobserved. First, there is myself. I breakfasted early there before going to London on the morning of my uncle's death, and was in the room alone for full eight or ten minutes, while Fastnet and the footman were out of it and before Miss Templer joined me. Next there is Petronell herself. She may have entered a dozen times during the day. Then there are the two footmen, William Jennings and Sam Wharton, the son of the head keeper, Wharton. If you inquire into their histories, you will discover a pair of very innocent lads. Jennings is only eighteen and has a first-rate record, though a weakly constitution, which makes him an indoor servant. Wharton's son did well in the war and was going back to out-of-door work next spring, as he is tired of the house. Others of the servants had free access to the room also, though their duties would hardly take them there, except, perhaps, Mrs. Rice, the housekeeper.

"But here is the point: as I said just now, the place is often empty for hours together, and during those hours what is to prevent a stranger from coming into it—a stranger who knows all there is to know

about the ways of the house and the position of the goblet? If such a stranger succeeded in getting in and poisoning the goblet, I grant it supports your conviction that an enemy from inside acquainted him with the facts, and was possibly present at the same time to assist him; but you are still as far as ever from discovering who that enemy may be; and of one thing you can rest assured, it was not old Fastnet. Neither was it either of the young men, nor Westcott."

Silence followed, then Midwinter asked a question.

"Who, then, do you think it was, Father Felix?"

"I think this, my friend. I think the enemy, or enemies, within our own fold, were unconscious enemies. I believe, as I must believe now, that information, vital to the real, unsleeping enemy outside Kingscresset, was furnished by more than one of those inside it; but I believe that our men and women here—perhaps only one man, or only one woman—have given away the vital information from time to time under clever cross-examination, while quite ignorant of the fact that they were being exploited for private and terrible reasons. I have thought over this again and again during the last two days, and have asked myself what was that vital information. You can see for yourself the points necessary to those who have destroyed us, and one and all of these points were, on the surface, most insignificant and innocent sounding. I need not go over them—you can do that for yourself. And when you have done so, you will perceive that they represent a series of casual questions, which anybody might have answered from within the house for the

benefit of those without it, never guessing for an instant that they represented information of the least importance. That is how I explain your problem. At inns, or in their parents' homes, our men and women might have met strangers—hawkers, travellers and the like—and chatted of Kingscresset; and thus the knowledge, extrinsically worthless, intrinsically valuable, might have passed into the hands of those who used it as we know."

They talked long together and before they finally parted, Midwinter found himself convinced in some particulars; but not in all. Of Fastnet, at least, he entertained no further suspicion.

Sir Augustine's funeral took place on the following morning, and when it was over, after the crowds that had assembled to mourn him were gone away, Petronell, her mother and her cousin, stood and watched the filling of the simple earthen grave.

They spent the evening together, and with them was Mr. Grantley, an old friend from the firm of the dead man's solicitors. The terms of Sir Augustine's last will and testament were simple enough, and the constitution of the estate had been modified on Montague Templer's death. Sir Augustine provided amply for his son's widow, nor did the fact, known to him, that she proposed to marry again, lessen his generous bequest. For Petronell he had set aside fifty thousand pounds; while for the rest, after numerous annuities and legacies, the heir of Kingscresset was sole residuary legatee.

The lawyer talked long with his new client when Petronell and her mother had retired, and while much

bewildered to learn the views of his old friend's successor, Mr. Grantley perceived that he dealt with a man already established in his intentions. Everything was now very clearly set out in the mind of Sir Felix Templer; and he had no difficulty in making his purpose equally lucid to the listener.

"Until recently," he said, "I had not contemplated inheriting Kingscresset, and even when the possibility became imminent, I denied myself any consideration of the matter, for I confess to you that I did not expect to survive. The cloud over our house and the awful beings who have swept Sir Augustine and his heirs out of existence, leaving myself alone to represent them, may still have a final bolt to discharge. I think they have, and am indifferent for myself, but not the less concerned for the immense human interests I apparently control. As you know, what was once settled property is now vested absolutely in me and in me alone. This course was in my uncle's power to take, and he took it—to pleasure me, though at a time when he still cherished futile hopes that I might live to re-establish the race. Kingscresset will go on, though the family of Templer ceases to exist when I shall do so. It is therefore my duty to make ample representations at once and leave you in no doubt of my general ideas, even though I should die to-morrow—a very possible contingency.

"There is no heir to the property, and my cousin, Petronell Templer, with whom you have spoken this evening, has but one use for money, and but one interest in it. Like myself, she is dedicating her life to the Church and will soon become a religious."

"That will mean her legacy is swallowed by the clerics."

The priest's eyes hardened and the lawyer, too late, regretted his blunt method of stating the fact.

"Choose your words more carefully, Mr. Grantley," said Felix, "and do not interrupt me again. In any case, I shall have little further need for the services of your firm, and when you have carried out all Sir Augustine's directions I place my affairs in other hands."

"I pray you will reconsider any such step, Sir Felix," spoke out the business man, aware of what this must mean. "That, I am bold to believe, is the very last thing my old and dear friend, Sir Augustine, would have wished."

But his hearer was not moved.

"If you would listen to me, you would the better understand," he answered. "I possess the power to administer Kingscresset and its revenues as I please. All is mine, without reservation, and the Crown, under the new constitution of the estate, has no claims upon it when probate and death duties are paid. Needless to say, they represent an iniquitous extortion; but our rulers are dead alike to reason and honour. Willing, therefore, all to a specific purpose, it is best that the details of my intentions shall be carried out by those who will in future control, develop and organise here. The conditions I make are reasonable and will be respected. No man will be molested in his present security, or his tenures and contracts interfered with by those who follow the Templers at Kingscresset. The farms will remain with the present tenants; the

land will continue to be held by those who hold it, while they desire to do so; all for whom the new enterprise fails to find congenial work will receive a pension if they deserve it; and should any prefer to seek a course of life more in keeping with their former occupations, I shall endeavour to find them new homes and new masters. But I hope the majority—even the house servants—may be able to remain, though their numbers must be greatly augmented and their duties modified.

"I have determined to turn Kingscresset into a great asylum for boys—the unwanted, the waifs and strays. The institution will be endowed, and the revenues and accommodations of this huge place are such that we shall always be able to support and educate a thousand lads. The harvest is ready and the labourers are many and willing. Our numbers will never be less than one thousand, and the children will be welcomed from infancy to adolescence. I hope those who presently approach the great problem in detail may plan, not only elementary education here, especially in the direction of agriculture and husbandry, but also elaborate a scheme by which, when the boys are ready to begin the business of life, work will always await them according to the measure of their ability and promise. I believe, if God so wills, that a precious and efficient colony will thus grow up for the salvation of young and friendless souls; and I cannot imagine any worthier purpose to which these walls might be dedicated."

"And what do you yourself design to do, Sir Felix?" asked Mr. Grantley.

"The will of those set in authority over me. My superiors no doubt may desire that I play my small part in this great organisation, and should that be their direction, I shall rejoice and, if I am to live, dedicate my remainder of days to the task. But God may determine otherwise."

"They will, of course, invite you to remain and direct your Asylum."

"They will certainly do no such thing, for the sufficient reason that they have at command a thousand abler and more experienced men for such a task. My purpose is shackled with no single condition or stipulation concerning myself; my life is very uncertain and my health is broken since I lost my arm. But what little I can do will be done for the new Kingscresset, if Heaven permits me to identify myself with the undertaking."

Mr. Grantley stared at this ascetic lord of millions, now content to be under the will of others, and Felix Templer read his look with an unerring judgment of physiognomy peculiar to him. He smiled at the lawyer's flushed and doubtful face, and his asperity vanished.

"You wonder to hear me talk like a pauper and underling, my friend. But wonder no more. Learn that Kingscresset may represent a vast potential promise of good, and that, by the mysterious will of Providence, a thing so worthless itself as wealth may be exalted even to the salvation of souls. That, as I see life, is the solitary purpose to which money should be put, and though we apply it in a thousand channels for the amelioration of suffering and the betterment

of our fellow-creatures, all such operations are vain unless, for their final end and aim, they seek to save the immortal spirit of man. Wealth, then, should be employed so that this fleeting theatre of preparation we call 'mortal life,' may be planned to welcome all who enter it in the Name of their Creator. It should be devoted to the building of human character and the education of successive generations, so that every man and woman born into this world departs from it fortified, purified, and equipped for the greater demands and more glorious sanctions of the world to come."

The elder bowed his head. He had nothing to say, and a plea on his lips that not thus would Sir Augustine have willed his patrimony, died unspoken.

Felix rose and indicated that their conversation was at an end.

"When you have considered these thing in all their bearings on the estate, and satisfied yourself of the various obligations and promises in which I must jealously support my dear uncle's will, then let me hear from you. The local men—Mr. Terry, Mr. Winsloe, and others who work in subordinate capacities under them—will all meet you to-morrow, and I shall also be here for a few days, to lend any assistance in my power. My wish is that all who care to remain under the new dispensation shall be invited to do so, and I believe that my future directors will approve this plan."

"All will go forward quickly enough if Rome has the work, no doubt," declared the lawyer, after some brief further conversation.

"Be sure of it. My Church enjoys a vast experi-

ence in such matters, for God has touched many greater human hearts than mine to act in harmony with His vice-gerents on earth."

There was a pause and, as Felix extended his hand to bid the elder good-night, he spoke again.

" It is given to me to read character," he said, " and estimate a man's views and pretensions, not only from his words, but from his eyes. For human eyes speak a language they have learned in the world, and their expression is stamped upon them, both by what they reject and what they receive from life. You are a man of business and your career has brought you into close relations with the difficulties and tribulations of those handicapped in the struggle for existence by great possessions. It was your hateful trade so to be involved, and the experience has made of you a pragmatic and sceptical person. I read your distrust of me in your face ; and I see more. The eternal verities as yet mean little to you, Mr. Grantley. You may even dare to doubt them, when you devote a casual thought to their significance. Seek Faith, sir, and the perspective of life will be changed for you, its values corrected. And enter your inquiry in a humble spirit. Cast reason behind you and open your heart to the Light always ready to burn Its way into every soul. Remember the words of the Persian mystic, who says that the philosopher with his two eyes sees double and misses the Unity of Truth ; that he who tries to find God by logic is as a man seeking the sun with a candle ; while those who receive the illumination with open hearts shall discover their Creator in all things. And now, good-night."

Somewhat dazed before this tremendous challenge, the old lawyer retired.

"The last of the Templers," he reflected, "what a weird sort of bird to hatch out of that famous family!"

CHAPTER XIII

FALL OF THE HOUSE

FELIX presently learned that he must minister in the great charity for which he was responsible. The needful machinery was set in motion with that energy and despatch to be expected from those who had the ordering and foundation of the scheme. Experts swiftly co-ordinated the many factors that went to the enterprise, and in six months Kingscresset had been transformed. A thousand boys, together with the staff to regulate and control their young lives, were soon forthcoming. New buildings sprang up—a gymnasium, a hospital—all in harmonious relation with the mansion ; playing fields were planned ; every child might have his own little garden. At the head of the lakes a bathing place was created ; in the woods forestry began to be taught. Felix Templer, at his own wish, occupied unofficial status in the establishment. He knew the place and its possibilities so thoroughly that his aid proved invaluable during the process of organisation, while of the many who depended upon the old order, he retained all who were willing and possessed intelligence and skill to make them of value in the new. Many remained ;

not a few were pensioned. No man or woman ever declared any grievance against the new authority; certain of the younger people changed their faith and accepted that of the founder.

He moved among them with life-force abated since his wound, and the people held him holy. He had the tact and judgment to interfere in no process of the great creation; but his sagacity and enthusiasm continued to be potent factors of the development, and those in authority consulted him at every step.

To the boys he was neither priest nor schoolmaster, but their friend of the open air, who joined them at their play, went with them upon their pleasure excursions, taught them the beauty of the great rhododendrons in spring time and encouraged those who learned farming to qualify for pioneer work in other countries. For two years he lived this life and on one occasion Petronell, now a religious, but not as yet withdrawn for ever from the world, came to see him and was troubled to find her cousin changed. It seemed to her that old age approached him. His hair was going grey, his cheek had fallen; only his eyes shone with the mild and steadfast fire of old. They visited their treasured graves, and she told him that Helen Templer had wed again. This was news to Felix, for now he never opened a daily journal, and all mundane interests were shrunk into the politics and progress of the Home. The world held not another interest.

"You did not associate the name 'Templer' with it after all?" she asked.

"I felt no human name must be perpetuated here. We—the last of the Templers—shall soon vanish and

be forgotten; but Kingscresset will endure from generation to generation, to the glory of God and the strengthening of the Faith. Every year, so many healthy, happy lads, endowed in mind and body to do the work of the world, will pass out into the world; every year, fresh children, unwanted and unloved, will be thrown by the waves of the world to us, who have need of them and love for them."

A year later, Petronell came for the last time and bade her cousin an eternal farewell. She was about to surrender all remaining liberty. Thus it came about that when the house fell at last, the woman was not present and knew nothing until the end.

The death of Felix Templer happened in this manner and came to him nigh the spot where his cousin, Montague, had fallen. A favourite walk in the great woods—one always popular with the boys—was that beneath the limestone precipice known as the Curtain. Portions of the concealed pack-horse track had been uncovered, and the perfect specimen of a Tudor way possessed perennial interest for antiquaries who visited it. The great flowering shrubs by the lake were also tended with the care of old, for all Kingscresset's archæological and botanic interests had been carefully preserved under the new dispensation.

But the children loved the holes and corners of the trackway, and beneath those sections laid bare for scientific interests, they found many mysterious nooks and still, dark crannies in which to play their games. Father Felix often accompanied them during their hours of pleasure, and it happened here, while showing some of the boys how vanished, steel-shod horses had

marked the stones, that a little lad playing in the rocks immediately above him dislodged a boulder. It descended upon his back-bone, while he was bending down, and it injured him fatally. The frightened children obeyed him where he lay, his legs insensible, and some ran swiftly for assistance. Within an hour, he had been brought to the little chamber—bedroom and sitting-room in one—which he occupied near the main entrance of the Home. The doctors of the house hastened to him at the first news of the accident; while others were summoned as swiftly as possible from London, when the nature of the injury came to be perceived. Felix had, however, passed beyond reach of human skill, and he knew, before they told him, that he must die quickly.

He showed no fear or regret, but asked them to relieve his pain as far as that might be done without dulling consciousness.

"It has come," he said. "It has come."

On the following morning, he began to sink and his organs could not perform their functions. He directed that a telegram should be sent to Bertram Midwinter, and begged them to make it very urgent.

"My friend may be beyond call at present," he said, "but should it be possible, he will join me."

No light had broken through the impenetrable curtain of the Templer tragedy, yet it remained in the detective's mind, awful in itself, and personally hateful as embodying his own greatest and most complete failure. Again and again he had traversed the succession of events only to be stultified; but no incident in all the tangle was forgotten; the case

remained fresh as a green wound in his consciousness, and when there came news of a disaster to Felix, his first thought was that another and final blow had been struck by the unknown hand.

He was in London when the telegram came to New Scotland Yard, and, as soon as the message reached him, he set out for Wiltshire, and arrived at Kingscresset none too soon.

The sick man sank quickly. He lay in a simple iron bedstead under an ivory crucifix, and beside him, at the prayer-table, a priest prayed, while upon his right a nurse sat and held his hand, feeling his pulse sometimes while she did so.

At Midwinter's entrance, Felix asked the others to withdraw. He could not talk much above a whisper, but his mind was clear and his vision and speech still unimpaired. Out of doors a gale had sprung up, and heavy rain swept the terrace and beat against the windows of the death chamber.

He pressed his friend's hand and drew him down.

"Kneel close and listen, for there is little time," he said. "I want you to know before I pass, Bertram, that the great secret—the terror that ended our house—has been revealed to me. The reason, the means, the unknown hand—all are imparted."

"Since when, dear friend?"

"I have known for a long time now."

Midwinter stared.

"A long time! Do these men still live?"

"There is but one man responsible. My lips were sealed. Do not look at me with such amazement. You will soon understand."

"He has told you? You have it under the Sacrament of Confession?"

"Not so—otherwise I should not bring you here to-day."

"But——"

"Everything—everything, Bertram—from the death of John Gratton to my uncle's poisoning—everything—all one hand. It is written. The account you will find complete to the least detail."

"Good God! You could listen to him, breathe the same air with him and not call upon Heaven to destroy him?"

"I was powerless. Of all people I was most unable to raise one finger against him."

"And you leave it like that on your death-bed? You leave him safe, free—this incarnate devil loose in the world?"

"The truth is set down. Do not blame one fellow-creature until you have read it."

"But—but—the man—you say you have seen him—spoken to him—written from his dictation? It is horrible—damnable—I cannot believe it."

The detective betrayed deepest dismay and confusion. He looked in torture at the placid, grey face lying upon the pillow.

"You tell me that this accursed scoundrel lives, and flourishes, and moves unharmed through the world that he has fouled with his crimes and cruelty. And you have not lifted a finger against him in the name of your honour and your God? Are you, of all men, dead to justice?"

Felix closed his eyes.

"Call the nurse. I must drink," he said; and when his lips were wetted he bade the woman remain. Then he spoke to Midwinter.

"I had meant to give you the record that you might take it with you after our farewell," he said; "but since you feel thus, read it here—now—there may be time. And you can say good-bye afterwards. The chest in the corner. The key is in the lock. A manuscript with your name on the cover."

While his friend, scarcely believing that he heard aright, sought as he was bidden, Felix spoke again and his voice, moved by emotion, grew louder:

"We talk of justice. What is justice? Why should we, whose finite minds can attain to no ultimate knowledge of any subject, dare to assume certainty on such a profound theme? If Heaven wills that a thing shall be done, what is man that he should presume to describe it as unjust? Is it for us to declare the earthquake, the typhoon, the famine, the pestilence, unjust? Fire and Flood are His ministers, war and disease His creatures; and as well may they question Him as we."

Midwinter had turned from a little bureau with the papers directed to himself. For a moment he stood irresolute, still hopelessly puzzled and half terrified by what he heard. Then he answered:

"Surely we know right from wrong, Father. We are concerned with a most infamous crime, and it was our God and none other who wrote the commandment which says we shall do no murder. His word also it was that man shall shed the blood of those who shed blood."

Felix smiled up at him.

"Your voice is tinkling brass, my friend, before the thunder of the reality in your hand. Read, with the music of God's rain and the shout of His wind upon your ears. Read, and miss nothing. And remember this: you are sworn to silence for ever. Only on those terms may you open that manuscript."

The other bowed his head and sat in a window that faced the south and the storm. He opened the manuscript and from that moment did not lift his face again from its pages.

The doctor presently returned, to find his patient sinking surely and very peacefully.

The man and woman busied themselves with Felix and paid no attention to Midwinter. A second window opened near the bed, and Felix signed to them that it might be raised. He began to strive for breath. The doctor flung it wide. Then he whispered to the nurse and left the room. In a few moments he had returned with a priest. The dying man had already received the last blessings of his Church. But it was with his friend rather than those about him that the final effort of Felix Templer's thought appeared to be concerned.

The rain fell upon his pillow under the open window, and a great sigh and sob from the upper air, carried voices of the storm into the apartment.

"A sound of many waters, Bertram, and the beat of many wings. Great messengers for a little soul," whispered Felix.

But Midwinter did not hear him. The wide world had vanished out of his mind, save for those scenes

from the past through which he now moved again. Page after page he read, while unconsciously his right hand lifted each folio for the next and his eyes never once turned either to the right or the left. For a time no sound but the rough voices of storm and the intermittent gasp from the bed broke silence. The priest held his crucifix before the eyes of Felix, and still they were steadfastly fixed upon it; but his voice had ceased and the end was at hand.

He died without a pang or tremor and passed from brief unconsciousness into peace.

"Gone! Another saint of God has passed to his reward," murmured the little, grey-haired priest, and the others answered: "Amen!"

But as they looked at the friend of the dead; as they saw the visitor rise, his task completed, to their amazement they perceived that he was unaware of their words or their presence. It was not the death that had brought him from his seat, but the end of his task, the completion of the manuscript, which had coincided with it. As a man walking in a nightmare, Bertram Midwinter departed from them. His head was held high; in his eyes sat a great horror, without any cleansing pity. Not a softening thought abated the wrinkled agony of his countenance. Holding the papers, he passed forward as one possessed and unconscious of those now standing by the dead.

"Look at him—you who were so much to him," said the priest. "Let your eyes take their farewell of a face as beautiful as the soul that used to shine out of it."

In a tranquil splendour, akin to that of Guidarelli's

marble monument at Ravenna, lay the dead. Already Death had lifted a hand to wipe away life's disfigurements; but Midwinter did not turn his gaze for an instant from the door through which he now hastened. The watchers saw no sorrow, heard no word of regret. He ignored dead and living alike. They remembered afterwards only his eyes, that blazed with a fierce, universal loathing at all existence rather than any grief for his own bereavement. He disappeared as though feeling his foothold through darkness—dazed, outraged, stricken to the soul, incredulous of reality, contemptuous of death's presence, all uncaring that his dearest friend and first hero on earth had vanished for ever. He departed without the graciousness of one farewell or prayer, one least, last tribute of affection or respect.

Oblivious and overwhelmed he left them; and the woman, her duty done, shut the casement and wiped the rain-soaked forehead of the dead.

Five minutes later, the great bell of the Chapel tolled; the wind flung a canorous note over hills and valleys.

CHAPTER XIV

THE THING

THUS wrote Felix Templer, and Midwinter kept his oath, for no other man ever learned those monstrous things that he had set down.

Even so speaks the wise Sufi :

" Behold the world mingled together—angels with demons, Satan with holy cherubim—all their seed and fruits in one dish. Infidel with faithful, faithful with infidel. At the point of the Present are gathered all cycles and seasons, days, months, years. For world without beginning must be world without end also. There is no Past or Future with God—only an eternal Now."

How much more, then, must man labour in his own brief Now, so that he may win Eternity !

I know the secret of the doom that destroyed my race ; for the best of reasons I know it ; but before I describe the series of events which swept five innocent lives to paradise, it is necessary that I illuminate the point of view from which the destroyer acted, and record the light that shone upon every stage of his operations.

Disabuse your mind of cant before the ethical considerations to be set before you. Half the tragedies of life arise from lazy and dishonest thinking; half the world's troubles are bred from our cowardly fashion of accepting conventional values and cleaving to outworn lies, even while we know they clang with the discord of falsity.

You have heard of tainted money and the vain nonsense that goods ill-gotten in the beginning can bring no benefit; but wealth is a thing in itself and lies outside the categories of good or evil. Wealth may be put to worthless purpose and thus indirectly become a source of evil; it may be administered wisely and tend to the melioration of human life; but the thing itself possesses no good nor evil signification. A forest of ebony trees is wealth, but who shall regard the timber as good or evil? A diamond mine represents great wealth, but no sane man imputes vice or virtue to carbon. And an estate of three millions is wealth—capable of modifying and qualifying human life in three directions. It may be used for good; it may be employed for evil; it may be treated as a talent hid in a napkin—applied to no worthy end, withheld from its potential value, denied even automatic appreciation.

Acutely aware of this loss to the community, and understanding well how these huge moneys of Kingscresset might be spent to practical and righteous purpose, I ask myself whether it may be possible to remove the wealth from the supine hands of those who hold and will inherit it; and this I do because there has flamed into my intelligence a heaven-sent

assurance that humanity, not family, is the rightful owner of all wealth; and that since this race of little men will never put its possessions to legitimate purpose, it becomes my duty and destiny to do so.

The owner and the heirs—in themselves harmless and inoffensive persons of mediocre attainments and mentality—become by the accident of inherited riches, a drag on the wheel of progress and a threat to the upward evolution of morals. They stand in the way, for only one of this race of small souls is willing and eager to put the money to its proper uses and pour it upon humanity's lap rather than keep it in his own.

I had long considered with uneasiness the Kingscresset millions and the sorry uses to which, through generation after generation, they were applied; but it was not until near the completion of the war and during silent and pregnant hours at the front, that a revelation burst upon my darkness, as the Light upon Paul, and I perceived that it must be my great and terrible task to set aside those who stood between me and the Templer fortune and turn it to a rightful purpose.

For a time I suspected my gathering conviction to be the result of poison gas and an impaired intellect; but that fear soon passed. My mandate came from above, and Conscience echoed the message in tones too deep and clear to be denied. Gradually I saw the terrible duty before me, with a vividness so complete that even the least incident unfolded. I had not in fear or trembling to seek my path, for every step was pointed out, every necessary detail determined by my unseen guides.

I alone am responsible for the destruction of my family. I had no other accomplice than a will fortified by Heaven, no sharer of the secret save the Master who directed me. Not once did my lights grow dim or my ingenuity and resource fail me. Murder has surely never been approached in a spirit so pure; never has wit of man been inspired to the shedding of blood on such an exalted vision; and never has so trifling a price in human lives been paid for such a stupendous return. By their sacrifice, thousands and thousands of lads will pass into the world equipped for noble actions, sustained by highest teaching and precept, healthy of body and soul, endowed to let their light so shine that others may be uplifted and advanced thereby. For generations to come this stream of adolescent life and vigour will pour from Kingscresset and help the world order even to the ends of the earth. The heirs of Kingscresset were but as dust in the balance against the welfare of these thousands as yet unborn. The best that Matthew, Sir Augustine's son, would have accomplished was to carry forward an archaic tradition and preserve the relic of a vanished feudal system until general progress and the return of the land to its rightful owners put a period to his activities. That, I say, was the best that could be hoped from him; but how easily might worse have happened; how easily might those who followed fail of even so much rectitude and waste their patrimony on selfish and worthless pleasure. Matthew Templer was a shadow; of his son one could guess that his sharp and selfish intelligence would never have lifted him above the ancestral prejudices of

possession; while Montague, the soldier, was a reactionary, of narrow spirit and insensitive soul.

For the poor promise represented by these second-rate men I substituted a glorious certainty and, in passing to the inheritance over their dead bodies, secured Kingscresset for righteousness by commission of an unparalleled crime. I speak of "crime" in the classic sense rather than our weakened, modern understanding of the word.

For me, the reckoning lies not with my fellow-man. Retribution lies with my Maker, and if the frozen deeps of nethermost hell must be my punishment, then, with a Judas and a Brutus I shall endure, since after their likeness I, too, was created by the Eternal Purpose.

. . . . . .

I now reach the machinery by which this great achievement was accomplished, with one object ever present to fortify my hand and hearten my heart. I knew that many things hideous and horrible must be endured before Kingscresset opened its arms to the little children and justified its creation; but faced personal pollution for the sake of the mighty issue that demanded it. I strove to empty myself of all human qualities and my family became less to me than strangers. I fought to operate as a machine no more sensible than the weapons I wielded; but the machine not seldom faltered, as flesh and blood were bound to do. My trial was agonising and often, through long night watches, I prayed that the cup might be removed from my lips.

It remains only to record the insignificant parti-

culars of how I attained my object; and for your sake, Midwinter, I am at the trouble to do so. The risks were always tremendous, but, in my case, less great than they had been for any human being. Again and again, my heart rebelled against the horrible task imposed upon me; sometimes, in my moments of desperation, I almost hoped that you would discover me; but it was not to be: your own generous affection and trust effectually blinded you. Providence willed the task, and Providence, having appointed me the minister, supported me at every step and more than once intervened to guide my path and strengthen my fortitude when the difficulties of the work and the terror entailed by it seemed greater than I could bear.

Before setting out I summed my endowments. I was in the first place a consummate actor—a fact discovered by me at the time of our Morality Play—written by Father Champernowne and acted before the war by the Red Lion Brotherhood and their friends. On that occasion I also played, and a young friend who worked at Parkson's, the wigmakers, had made for me a close grey beard and wig for the part of an ancient Saxon King, who resisted the Irish Bishop missionaries, but was ultimately converted by them. This beard I had kept, and to dye it black and use it again was a simple matter. I knew now that I could act any part with extraordinary ability, and on the strength of the beard, when the time came to create an imaginary murderer, I determined upon an elderly and stoutish man. Subsequent events turned him into a German. His garb was neat, dark,

and closely-fitting—a workmanlike costume proper to his purpose. I determined to wear my own head of hair and simplify the disguise as much as possible with tinted glasses, which effect a complete transformation in a moment.

When Montague Templer surprised me reading my uncle's will at Kingscresset, I had already fixed upon the figure I designed to represent in the destruction of my race, and the accident in the library, though I deplored it at the time, regarding it as an inauspicious omen, proved infinitely valuable afterwards. My initial purpose was to study the general terms of Sir Augustine's intentions for future direction. I knew where he kept his will, and also knew that to open the drawer of the desk was a simple matter. Old burglar acquaintances in my London parish work had shown me their methods. I had read the greater part of this document when surprised by Montague, and having long since planned my future actions, proceeded to describe the dark figure who was to appear at a later time.

The moment that my cousin turned on the hall lights I threw open the window, indicated a scuffle, and struck myself on the side of the head with the electric torch that I had brought to my task. I then fell backwards and was discovered a few moments later by Montague. I had imagined that it must be Sir Augustine who was descending.

None doubted my narrative of events and none, of course, imagined that I had mastered the contents of my uncle's will. One thing only overwhelmed me in this examination : the colossal and irrational legacy

left to John Gratton. Huge though the figure that the estate represented, I felt that by no means must one hundred thousand pounds, free of all duties, be separated from it; and in order to prevent so grave a loss, it became clear to me that Gratton would be called to pay the price of his bequest. The money was left without condition to him alone; and from that hour I knew that the unfortunate man must die.

I had seen the botanist for a moment on one occasion, but now gleaned all particulars concerning him and, having described my imaginary assailant in the library, prepared to create this figure in the flesh. For, improbable though it may appear, I saw scene after scene of my tragic drama opening before me as they actually occurred, and soon perceived that, if I were able to persevere in my false character, the police would be faced with a problem beyond human skill to solve. To disguise myself effectually proved a simpler task for me than most men. Not only was my shaven face unchallenging, but my habit of dress marked me off from others and my custom, to live in my cassock, made any departure from that rule the more effective disguise.

To start thus attired on a night journey and to remove these garments and create the necessary transformation was an easy matter, given an empty first-class carriage. Indeed, the only danger centred in the guard of a train, if he had seen me enter it. But the guards often terminate their section of any journey before the train completes its course, and a new guard not seldom appears at some intermediate station.

This is what happened on my initial expedition to Sheffield. I knew the country to which I was going, and determined to find lodgings at Grindleford, a place removed by some miles from the home of John Gratton at Holmesfield.

I had returned from Kingscresset to London, and now left the Red Lion Hostelry for a few days—departing in haste one night on pretence of visiting a sick friend in the north. No details and no direction for letters were left behind me. I caught the night mail and learned from the guard, who had seen to my comfort, that he left the train at Derby.

When we entered Derby, I retired to the lavatory of my first-class carriage, locked myself in, tucked up my cassock, transferred my cloak and hat to a hand-bag, and put on my beard and spectacles and close black cap. Not until the train was moving did I reappear in my compartment as "Mr. Purvis"; and as "Mr. Purvis" I left the train at Sheffield and proceeded to Grindleford. There I had no difficulty in finding a lodgment and wrote the same day to John Gratton, whose home was but a few miles distant. His urbanity made subsequent operations simple enough. He was vain of his attainments, but very willing to pleasure anybody who flattered him upon them. He swiftly came to see me on his motor bicycle, and the progress of our friendship has been correctly recorded. It was a painful task to destroy him, for albeit his life had been dedicated to no matter more important than the herb of the field, yet it had opened brightly and full of promise. But the irony of his fate decreed that out of goodness, evil should come by

a dreadful genesis; for it was his own rare courage that had won Sir Augustine's egregious reward. Thus he died by his own good action—a situation scarcely to be paralleled out of Greek tragedy.

Upon the night that we supped together for the last time, I related my great discovery of a rare cryptogam—the "shining moss," as it is popularly called. By day it is not to be observed, save as a dull film on cavern rock, or secluded earth; by night it gleams wanly in its own phosphorescent light. He was interested and doubted my assertion, whereon I offered to show him the truth of it upon his way home. I had already travelled repeatedly behind him on his motor bicycle, and he agreed to the suggestion without thought of danger. In the place of my pretended discovery John Gratton's dead body appeared on the following morning. I had chosen a spot secluded and beyond reach of any eye when the night should come; and thither we set out some time after midnight. It was a lane, which fell away from the main road and descended, under rocky and overhanging banks, to a water-course in the valley beneath. Here, as we rode together, at the darkest and narrowest part of the descent, I declared we were approaching the theatre of my discovery. I carried a heavy spanner which I had abstracted, while we ran, from a leather bag at the rear of the motor bicycle, and as I called on him to stop, I struck him with all my might at the back of the skull and leapt from the machine. The blow rendered him unconscious instantly if it did not actually destroy him. The motor crashed into the bank and Gratton fell off. Whereupon I dragged him to the

centre of the lane, struck him twice again, to insure swift death, and then broke down from the overhanging hedge certain masses of earth and stone already marked as apt for the purpose. The machine had caught fire and, with the displacement of the stones, it was easy to leave an impression that unexpected obstacles were responsible for the young man's death. I left him with a blood-stained rock beneath his shattered head and touched nothing save the spanner, which I flung into a water-hole on my way back to Grindleford, two miles distant. My solitary difficulty was the fear of leaving footprints, but I exercised every care, and since none were ever sought, none were found. It was a case where, by the creation of every possible appearance of an accident, the police were hoodwinked and the obvious accepted as the true. Many murders are doubtless hidden so.

My landlady had retired before we left the house. Indeed, I had delayed Gratton until I judged the woman to be in bed and asleep. She was not aware that I had gone out with him, and in the morning I took occasion to mention that I had not. I set out by the earliest train possible for Sheffield and guessed that I should already be on my way south before the dead man was discovered. For the place of his destruction was very isolated and removed by a mile or more from any occupied dwelling. It happened that a carter did find him at an early hour, but not before I had left Derbyshire.

What followed can be swiftly told. I emerged from the local train in the disguise I had adopted for Grindleford and presently started southward. I knew at

which platform the train to London would arrive, and avoided speaking to or challenging anybody. Thus I entered the train, quite unmarked, with my kit-bag and hand-bag. I left the kit-bag on a seat in an empty first-class carriage and withdrew at once into a lavatory compartment, as on the earlier journey. There I doffed my pads on breast and shoulders, and let down my cassock, which I already wore, with the robe wound round my waist. Into my hand-bag went beard and glasses, jacket and cap; from it emerged my cloak and hat. The change was effected in three minutes at most, and I returned to my compartment five minutes after the London train had cleared the station. I reached the metropolis soon after noon and informed my colleagues that my friend—a fellow-worker in the war—was dead.

The sudden, fatal accident to Gratton created no stir, and I heard nothing concerning the event until my cousin Petronell informed me of it. Meantime, there came into my heart an eager craving to complete the awful task imposed upon me with the greatest possible speed. Upon my success depended the cause for which I wrought; but to spread this shedding of blood over a lengthy period would be, I knew, impossible to my nature. It was needful for many reasons that all should be accomplished and my strokes struck swiftly. Accident determined the order of these executions, and when I heard that Matthew Templer was about to spend a month or more at his favourite spot in the secluded valley of a Devon river, I perceived that Providence had laid His plan for my purpose.

One pauses here to remark how that Power, which guided my operations, willed to involve Montague Templer, the better to confuse the issue, throw dust in the eyes of the police, and render me the more secure in their confusion. Of Montague and his movements I was not thinking. I did not know until you told me, that the Major had been in Sheffield when Gratton died; nor did I learn, until Petronell announced it, that Montague was at Plymouth when Matthew Templer perished. His friend, Ernest Wilberforce, also had been quite unknown to me, and not the least curious act of that all-watchful Will responsible for the web I wove appears in the way these two men became, for a time, involved in your mind. Indeed, your suspicions were only dispersed by the death of Montague himself. Henceforth you believed in the reality of the black-bearded man as firmly as I had taught the rest of the world to believe in him.

It happened that on a reading tour, ten years earlier, I had spent a fortnight in the Dartmoor country, and was familiar with the region where Sir Augustine's son was now to pursue his sport. For this enterprise I took great preliminary pains, and was, indeed, over-ingenious. The theory of a German now commended itself to me for many reasons, and I altered my procedure. The name of "Purvis" was, of course, discarded, but while preserving my disguise, I created a foreign savant, took a room at the little Inn of "The Seven Stars" in Poundsgate, and addressed two envelopes to that direction. An empty one I posted from London three days before my own departure; the other, containing a letter invented for the purpose, I

left in a pillar-box at Exeter station on my way down. The latter purported to come from Exeter Museum. This idea was futile—a needless effort that seemed good to me at the time; but it availed nothing and proved quite unnecessary. It may possibly have delayed your actions and created a false scent; but little was gained. My notion had been to create a suggestion of the reality of "Marc Lubin," and this for a moment no doubt it did; but you, my good friend, did not leave it there, and from finding the falsity of the letter, after visiting Exeter Museum, to proving the non-existence of "Lubin" himself, was a short step. No real clue ever came into any detective's possession from first to last; when I left clues they were for my own purposes alone.

As for the weapon employed, I had brought back many trophies from the war, designing them for the Church Boys' Brigade—an organisation dear to me. But the notion of such barbarous decoration in the Hall devoted to their meetings soon left me, and the memorials of the trenches remained untouched in certain boxes until, with the creation of "Lubin," I remembered a German service revolver and its ammunition. The value of this weapon in substantiating the theory of a foreign assassin will be in your memory. The cigarettes also were contained in a dead officer's case that I picked up myself from a trench on our advance. The matches and German newspaper were easily procured in London.

My journey to Devon proceeded without incident. A fellow-traveller accompanied me as far as Bristol, but there he alighted and the guards were changed.

Once more I retired with my hand-bag and emerged again transformed. None was the wiser, and my light cloak and cassock now disappeared until I resumed them on the completion of my mission. At Exeter, I posted the letter to myself and in the evening of the day was met at Ashburton by Halfyard and driven to Poundsgate without incident.

On the following morning, I marked Matthew upon the river, and soon perceived the nature of his daily movements. They varied little, and I observed that he generally returned to Holne by the fisherman's path at the close of the day.

Now, having already planned to see his daughter, Petronell, on a certain morning, it was vital to accomplish his destruction upon the preceding day, if possible. I knew the evening on which I must return to London, and proposed to destroy him as near the hour of my departure as possible. This method had proved effective in Derbyshire and was to be satisfactory here. But in the case of my cousin I intended to make murder obvious and took no pains to conceal it.

He proceeded up-stream as usual on the last day of his life, and knowing how he would return, I awaited him. The only danger was another traveller in that lonely spot, but none appeared, though, indeed, a woodman followed us at no great length of time. Matthew came trudging homeward to his death, and desiring to postpone recovery of the body, I shot him from my hiding-place, then dragged him to the little cliff over the river and pitched him down. I then hid his rod and gaff. The accident of the woodman's passing an hour later and his discovery of the reel

precipitated the finding of Matthew Templer; but it made no difference to me.

I was back at the "Seven Stars" soon after he had breathed his last, and an hour later my host drove me to catch my train at Ashburton. Dusk was now down and, having been unobserved as I entered the railway carriage, I quickly removed my disguise and donned my cassock and cloak before we reached the next wayside station. At Totnes I emerged, carrying my hand-bag and kit-bag; and here, in the fading light, a porter easily mistook me for one of the Buckfast Benedictine monks, who travel to and fro about their business from the Abbey. This accident, for which I had not bargained, again shows the Master Hand jealous to destroy any clue that might have arisen to endanger me. A travelling and cassocked priest might have challenged attention elsewhere, but none at this particular spot, and the inspiration that forced me to doff my disguise at such an early moment came from that inner monitor—not myself—responsible for so many features of this narrative.

I left Totnes some time after ten o'clock, travelled to London in a third-class carriage, arrived after three in the morning, and, going straight to the Hostel of the Red Lion, enjoyed some rest and celebrated the second mass at St. Faith's upon that day.

With my cousin, Petronell Templer, I afterwards returned to breakfast at the Hostel; but we had not reached our destination before a telegram from Devonshire came into my hand.

I may mention here that the order of my strokes was now planned. Because the tremendous death duties

consequent on the decease of Sir Augustine must not be twice incurred, it appeared necessary that he should outlive all his heirs but myself.

Before the death of Tom Templer, the idea of a hostile German had been firmly planted in the minds of all concerned, and with the boy's destruction, I designed our enemy should reappear under new conditions. The apparition was easily possible, owing to my possession of secret knowledge that now and hereafter simplified my own actions and contributed to the confusion of those seeking to solve the mystery. I refer to the pack-horse track. The truth concerning this vanished way had come to me years earlier when, as a lad, I was exploring the woods of Kingscresset and hunting for birds' nests under the cliff of the landslide, locally known as the Curtain. Accident put the discovery into my keeping, and being the sort of boy who loves secrets, I hugged my wonderful knowledge of the concealed path and gloated when my elders from time to time speculated as to the mystery of its disappearance. Needless to say that I explored the subterranean channel from end to end, and had wit to understand the accident of its creation. The hillside had subsided and swallowed it, while the great rock masses from above, descending upon it, created a tunnel, where in olden time had run an open defile between steep banks. From the entrance, above Gawler Bottom, to the exit, on the outer moor, this place was perfectly familiar to me before the war, and now I perceived why, first, it had been revealed to me in boyhood and why, secondly, my lips had been sealed concerning the discovery. For this dark need

had I learned the strange accident; for this, as I potently believe, had the cliff itself fallen centuries earlier—to prepare my subsequent task and assist towards the perfection of its accomplishment.

Given the pack-horse track, my entry into the woods was private and my departure from them at all times secure. It will be seen, therefore, that when I left Sir Augustine and Montague Templer on my journey to London upon the day of young Tom's death, and after they were returned to Kingscresset, I could easily abandon my supposed progress to the station, strike over the moor and descend into the tunnel. I knew that Montague would presently follow Tom, and I knew what he was destined to discover when he did so; for during the previous night I had left the house in the small hours, taking with me Sir Augustine's key of the bridge from the library. The saw from the tool-shed was easily procured and the work of destroying the bridge occupied the briefest time. The night favoured me: it was dry and still. The trap was set in half an hour and the boat back in its place. But already dawn had touched the sky, and rather than return to the tool-shed, I sank the saw in the lake before leaving it.

I came and went through the window of the library and left the bridge key in its usual place before returning to my room; while next morning, having parted from my uncle and cousin on my way to the station, I put the discovery of the pack-horse track to its first serious use, descended into it from that lonely region where the chimney opens on the knoll, and having proceeded along it, was easily able to descend into

Gawler Bottom before Montague reached the broken bridge. My object had to do with an intuition that under Kingscresset woods must the next act of the tragedy occur. Montague was fond of shooting in this secluded haunt of birds and beasts, and would presently yield himself an easy victim to anybody there concealed. It was not, then, to satisfy myself of the death of Matthew's son that I broke my journey and descended into the woods. The task was deliberately undertaken that the vision of the unknown might be reported and the illusion of his existence strengthened. That Tom Templer would be drowned before his cousin followed him, I well knew, since nothing could support the bridge under the weight of his footsteps; but I was on the spot for another purpose, and when Montague saw a man with a black beard, black, close cap and tinted glasses staring upon him from behind the dwarf rhododendron bush, my object was accomplished. I had judged his actions accurately and guessed that he would make no effort to swim across to me. Had he done so, I was armed and should have shot him in the water. But his time was not yet. He hastened away, doubtful whether to seek the wherry on the upper lake or return to the house, and it was only at a later time in the day that I learned he had returned to spread the alarm. Meantime, I climbed swiftly to the Curtain, entered the concealed trackway, left my disguise therein and presently emerged aloft on the heath and went my way to the station. I caught a train later by one hour than that it was supposed I had caught; but there was none to question that circumstance since my

movements never occupied anybody's mind. All that concerned me was to keep my appointment for that day with you, Midwinter, and I actually sat in your company, learning the failure of your investigations, when came the evil news from Kingscresset. You will remember how, upon receipt of it, I feared that ill had overtaken my uncle; while you correctly suspected that it was Tom Templer who had suffered.

Montague Templer's report of his experience by the lake duly followed, and the legend of the black-bearded man won further credence and support. It proved interesting to observe afterwards, when for a season suspicion attached to Montague Templer himself, how your acute reasoning fastened on the Major's statement and showed how improbable it was that Montague should really have seen our enemy by the lake. In truth, the only false reports that ever circulated of the apparition were those that came from me. And no man suspected any word of mine.

CHAPTER XV

THE THING (*concluded*)

IT was at this juncture that you broke to me your far-fetched suspicion that Montague Templer might, with a friend's assistance, be the secret destroyer. Coincidences had lent colour to the idea and the accident of Ernest Wilberforce's close companionship with my cousin helped you to elaborate a shadowy theory. Under some conditions it might have suited my purpose to support it, but Montague was now himself in the shadow of death, and I had no desire to complicate the issue. His own approaching end would absolve him of any complicity; but before that happened, both he and Wilberforce were effectually exonerated. The false scent of the inexorable German was still to lie thick on your path, and you despaired, my friend, at this season, and strove in vain to retrace your steps. You doubted now whether John Gratton's end were the accident that it appeared, and began to suspect that "Purvis" and "Lubin" might, in reality be two different persons. You admitted, however, that Major Templer must now stand in the gravest peril, if an innocent man,

and urged me to caution him against risking any needless danger.

I hardly anticipated that my first attempt upon Montague's life would prove successful, for the plans I laid depended largely upon chance, and it was by no means certain that he would do exactly as I desired. But Providence willed that he should react in the measure to be hoped, and from first to last the incidents of his death followed that order I had marked out for him. Indeed, more happened than I planned, and at a certain juncture my intentions were simplified by the invaluable incident of my cousin's terrier. What at the time occasioned me anxiety proved a blessing in disguise.

It will be remembered that two days before Sir Augustine was to deliver his address at a meeting of the English Church Union, he and I departed from Kingscresset by motor car and left for London together. I saw him to Claridge's Hotel and left him, ostensibly for the Hostel of my Brotherhood; but here they expected me on the evening of the following day, and not until then did I rejoin them.

If you are about to do an unusual thing that may challenge attention which you would seek to avoid, it is well to choose your time so that it shall synchronise with some great and startling incident—an event to focus the minds of all men and distract them from more trivial matters. I appreciated this fact, and knew that my own movements at the time of Montague's sudden death would interest nobody.

I returned to Kingscresset immediately after leaving my uncle in London, and was seen at the local station.

I left on foot, by the way over the high moor, reached the unknown entrance of the pack-horse track, and descended into it. Secreted here lay my disguise, now to be donned for the last time, and I had brought with me some food also and the German cigarettes —an item of the war trophies I still possessed in a box at the hostel. These I brought for the purpose they ultimately answered, because I designed that after the death of Montague, my secret hiding-place should, if possible, be discovered. To furnish you, Midwinter, with strong clues now became desirable, and the problem of how to reveal the subterranean passage, or enable others to discover it, was the most interesting that lay before me.

I cannot honestly say that it had been solved to my satisfaction before I entered upon the task; but I trusted further developments and my own awful genius to lay the place bare at the right moment and confront you with those evidences of German occupation which would await you.

Familiar with the movements of the woodmen and gamekeepers, I knew that on the evening of this day Lawrence Fooke, an under-keeper, would descend from the hill, or ascend from Gawler Bottom upon his rounds; and it was my purpose to appear before him that he might see the mysterious enemy and report. I hoped the sequel would be Montague's personal investigation, and it depended entirely upon his movements whether I should attain my purpose on this occasion, or be called to await another opportunity. The chances were even against me, and had my cousin come attended, he would have been safe enough.

Even so it happened, and unknown to Montague himself, but not unknown to me, Wharton dogged him all through the morning and frustrated my purpose, for it was, of course, essential that my last meeting with Montague should take place without a witness. Unseen, I watched the manœuvres of both men, and began to suspect that I had failed, for after mid-day, on the morning of his death, my cousin left the danger zone and Wharton also disappeared.

I outrun the narrative, however. Having assumed the black beard, close cap and tinted spectacles, I emerged above Gawler Bottom and took up a position some five-and-twenty yards from the track. Punctual to his time, Fooke duly appeared and saw me. He stared and, giving him leisure to register his impression, I sank back into the deep undergrowth and hastened for my hiding-place a hundred yards distant. That he could not pursue to any purpose I knew, for the man was hopelessly lame; though I had not bargained for his shot gun. He fired twice, and the second discharge hurtled dangerously near my ears; but he had shot at random, for I was invisible to him, and not a pellet touched me.

The trap was set, and it remained to be seen whether Montague would be tempted to accept the bait.

As we know, he did; but I made no attempt to reappear from my hiding-place upon that evening, although, hidden at the other end, above the aperture in the knoll, I was able to see Montague's preparations and observe a cordon of beaters stationed outside the woods and beneath also, at their confines with the lake. My own place of exit to the moor, of course, lay

far without the circle of their activities. I guessed the idea, spent a quiet night in my hole, and was the witness of Montague's fruitless search for his foe on the following morning.

Then he departed, and the faithful Wharton went his way also. I now felt in a mind to abandon the undertaking, for I had counted upon Montague's operations, but not on Wharton's secret service to him. I waited, however, until the afternoon was advanced, and then met my reward, for my cousin returned and the gamekeeper did not. Now came the crucial moment, and I appeared before him suddenly without my disguise, clad as usual in my cassock.

He was amazed to see me, and still more astonished when he heard what I had come to say.

"All is over!" I told him. "Thank God you are safe, old fellow, and our trial ended! Midwinter has caught the murderer. He was taken last night at the junction emerging from the Kingscresset train."

It matters not what else I said, for I was talking to a dead man, and only desired to hold his attention a few moments. He would never see a fellow-creature or listen to a human voice again. I explained that I had just come from the house and been directed to seek him at Gawler. We sat upon the seat in the woods where he died, and taking an opportunity when he turned to call his dog, I drew the revolver from my breast and shot him through the back of the head. Not four minutes elapsed between our meeting and his death; then, fearing the return of Wharton at any moment, I rolled up my cassock to my waist as I ran, and soon plunged into the dense rocks and undergrowths

beneath the Curtain. I had modified the revolver cartridge and removed half the charge, since half was quite enough for my purpose, but the explosion was none the less loud enough to challenge the attention of the outlying watchers. It echoed from the face of the Curtain, and I doubted not that those who heard it would close in swiftly.

This is what happened; and now fell out that unrehearsed effect which at first confused me, but which ultimately proved of such value in the tissue of the tragedy. A witness there had been of Montague's destruction; and that witness was his little dog, "Chum." The creature behaved exactly as you, Midwinter, deduced, and your prescience in that matter filled me with admiration for your great gifts. The terrier, seeing his master fall, first ran to him, then sped after me, uttering a shrill bark. He would not let me approach him, but followed close and strove to bite me as I descended to the hiding-place. My hope was to clutch him, if possible, drag him down and silence him below; but the creature proved too agile, and from where I stood, waist deep, before sinking into the hollow, he was at the height of my breast, still barking and preparing to fly at my face. I might have shot him, but to fire again was out of the question. Already I heard the shout of approaching men and was just about to descend and leave the rest to chance when "Chum" came near enough to strike, and I hit him with all my strength, using the butt of my revolver. I aimed for his head, and had the blow got home, he must have been destroyed, but the dog moved and I only broke his shoulder. He uttered one yelp,

then rolled out of my reach into a hollow under the fern; and there must have remained, probably unconscious, till long afterwards, and the approaching men had passed on their way.

Meantime, I had vanished and proceeded through the darkness I now knew so well. The rest was easy enough. At the flat stone I struck a few of the foreign paper matches, and left the revolver, the fragment of German newspaper and the cigarettes. Then, with my disguise in my pocket, I climbed from the pack-horse track by the aperture in the knoll upon the moor from which descended my knotted rope. This I took away with me, and less than an hour later, reached Kingscresset railway station with my usual handbag and in my usual attire.

No man ever commented upon my movements, if, indeed, they formed the subject of a thought. I returned to the Hostelry at the time I had undertaken to be there, and you came by appointment to sup with me on the same evening. I marvelled that the inevitable telegram from Kingscresset should be so much retarded, but the delay was subsequently explained, and the situation I had created to confront you and myself on our arrival that night will not be forgotten.

One problem alone interested me that I was careful not to raise. That my cousin's dog had not returned I observed without comment on the following morning; but when the wounded creature did arrive I hailed it as a final interposition of Divine Will on my behalf, and hoped that, with "Chum's" unconscious aid, the hounds might be induced to follow his line

and so display my hiding-place. I regarded it as highly desirable that the pack-horse track and what it contained should now be revealed; but knew that I must be the last person to make the discovery. It was my inspiration, in sending the wounded terrier to the woods again, with Fastnet, which insured the needful revelation. Much came of this. It seemed impossible longer to doubt of the German's existence; but once more only would the news of his reappearance ever be recorded; and that was from my mouth. For I had always designed the final attack upon my own life. That, indeed, I courted rather than feared. It seemed well that one who had caused such agony should suffer in his own body also; and to have destroyed myself would have been but a minor scene in the secret drama had such a sacrifice been demanded.

After Montague Templer's death, when human justice was again foiled by my preternatural care for detail and my providential aid, I stood in the eyes of other men as a being on the brink of destruction. I had anticipated the present situation and judged the moment propitious to take my mighty step long ago resolved upon. It was also the occasion to exhibit those natural, psychological reactions proper to my own dreadful situation. The correct symptoms I displayed, and while trusting my life, as it was inevitable I should trust it—to the Hands of my Creator—I none the less displayed human traits of weakness and physical fear proper to one of my character in the haunting situation I now appeared to occupy. These dramatic touches were demanded; but it was also demanded that I should swiftly cease

to exhibit fear and not permit my threatened life to cloud my duty. Such an attitude awoke universal sympathy for me; and now I lost no time in striking the next blow from the unknown and inexorable fate that had descended upon my race. This fell where it was to be expected, upon myself, and I carried on the illusion of a steadfast, unsleeping fiend, who sought swift opportunity to number me with his other victims.

Having resolved on the course of events, it remained only to render them realistic and agreeable in tone and tenour to those that had preceded them. I resolved to inflict a serious wound upon myself and indicate a stroke intended for the heart, which should miscarry by a few inches and leave me injured, but not vitally. I determined to vary the scene of the outrage and create a new atmosphere. London by night should witness the next activity of the enemy, and I would see him and report how he had fired upon me just as I sprang forward to secure him. The events immediately anterior to this alleged assault were in the last degree important as supporting its details, and I did not anticipate the power to order them so speedily and in such a satisfactory manner. But I was able to carry out my plan on the day after my return to London from Kingscresset, and its swiftness added no little to its effect. What did I require? I designed a brief conversation with some lad, unfamiliar to myself, and I needed that an independent witness should see and be able to report the meeting. On leaving Father Champernowne, after our talk, I passed towards Red Lion Square and was aware that

he would be following me in a few minutes. If, therefore, he should observe me in speech with some passing lad, he would recollect the fact afterwards: but it was necessary, in virtue of what the lad was to tell me, that he should—first, be a strange lad, secondly, depart from me before being overheard. Thus I should hold the boy briefly in talk, but, when he had gone on his way, report a conversation which had not in reality occurred.

The matter fell out so simply that I wondered afterwards to think how many hours I had devoted to it. An errand boy, unknown to me, came along, and I stopped him and spoke a friendly word. I invited him to our Brigade Hall, told him that he would always be welcome there on any evening, and might come and bring a friend. He showed no great enthusiasm, and then, seeing Father Champernowne approaching, I gave the youngster sixpence, bade him a kindly farewell, and said that I should expect him. He passed in sight of the Father, and we then spoke together, while I gave the version of my chat with the lad afterwards reported by Champernowne at the inquiry.

One incident of the attack upon myself alone took a turn that I had not intended: yet it perfected my own purpose, and I rejoiced in it afterwards, as showing that God guided me in every step of my dark way. I had thought to inflict a flesh wound upon my left arm at such a spot that it would be judged my assailant had fired for the heart and failed, thanks to sudden and violent movement from myself. Even so the event was calculated by you and the surgeons afterwards; but

my bullet, from a small weapon also among my German trophies, broke the bone of the upper arm and inflicted a wound far more severe than I had designed. None the less I gloried in my lost arm, for my remaining necessary activities were unimpaired, and the need for my disguise was no longer demanded.

I chose Blind Alley as the scene of the assault, having decided that Cassidy, the dying Irishman, should be the person who had summoned me. Thus the details of the plot against me would appear consistent and carefully calculated, for of course investigation would prove that Cassidy had sent no such message, while the circumstances could only serve to increase your conviction, that somebody possessing closest knowledge of myself and my habits and duties, was responsible for the attempt upon me following the false message. Lastly, there remained the weapon to dispose of; and it was partly on account of this important necessity that I chose Blind Alley. For along the left side of the passage runs a conduit, and where I fell a sink opens from it. I planned to thrust the little pistol down this opening the instant that I had fired, having proved that it was possible to do so before the event. This, then, is what actually occurred. First I dropped the tinted glasses; then, the instant my shot had been fired, I thrust the pistol down the trap, staggered a few paces farther, and fell face downwards, where I was discovered. At no time was I really unconscious, though I pretended to a lengthy insensibility; but it was only in part simulated, for my mind, in reality, wandered after the severe injury, and not until the following day could I furnish a co-

herent account of the event to you, Bertram, and to Father Champernowne. It is an example of the astounding powers of self-deception to which a man may come that, after my wound, I half believed myself in the unknown monster whom destiny had appointed to destroy my race! For a time he seemed to me quite real—something actually outside myself—until my fever and physical suffering abated and my arm was removed from my body.

There remained only my last, cruel stroke, and I pleaded with Heaven to remove Sir Augustine by natural means, so that the blood of one I dearly loved should not be upon my hands. It did not, however, please God to relieve me of this task: my duty to the bitter end was demanded. I turned to the problem of his destruction, therefore, and planned it that I should appear to be far from the theatre of his end, as in the case of all my other victims.

To remove him was easy enough in virtue of his regular life and consistent actions; nor did I care to conceal the fact that murder was responsible for his death. Indeed, knowing that an autopsy would almost certainly reveal the existence of hyoscine in the internal organs, I insisted in supporting your demand for it; and a skilled chemist discovered the drug.

All, now, was ready, and my plans for the subsequent destiny of Kingscresset had reached the point where it only remained for others of experience and administrative ability to develop them.

Sir Augustine, it will be remembered, was accustomed to drink his nightly stimulant of spirit and aerated water from a Venetian goblet, the gift of his dead wife.

He never failed of this little rite, and the goblet, after Fastnet had cleansed it in the morning, always stood in a cupboard of the great sideboard in the dining-room. There it reposed till the night came, when it was brought to Sir Augustine and the old butler mixed his final potion.

The goblet is of tinted crystal, and to drop my poison into the bottom of it was not only an easy operation, but a safe one, since the amber-coloured glass of the bowl served to conceal any trifle of moisture at the bottom of it. Thus, when I descended to breakfast on the morning of my sudden and unexpected call to London, after returning convalescent to Sir Augustine's home, I had only to wait for a moment when the dining room was empty. I then opened the wing of the side-board and introduced the few necessary drops of hyoscine into the bottom of the goblet. When night came I knew that Fastnet would take the cup to his master and pour whiskey and soda upon the liquid concealed in the conical bottom of the glass. All unsuspecting he did so, with the result that presently Sir Augustine passed from somnolence and insensibility to death.

As for the poison, I became possessed of it at a time far anterior to my uncle's death and before I had designed to use it for that purpose. It is a hypnotic drug employed medicinally in cases of cerebral excitement, mania and epilepsy. At the front many army doctors had occasion to employ it in lessening the sufferings of shell shock and nervous excitement so prevalent there. A medical friend had made me take not a few doses to my great advantage, and when I left France he gave me a bottle of the crystals with

instructions for their use. It was a very powerful drug, and the lethal dose would be but small. I melted the crystals in spirit, in which they are freely soluble.

Thus Heaven again willed the means and made it easy enough to employ them.

That Sir Augustine would drink the poison and pass beyond all earthly cares I knew with certainty. Only its detection by Fastnet could save him; but the old retainer was short-sighted and even a younger, quicker man would hardly have perceived the minute, scentless and tasteless drop of liquid at the bottom of the glass. From swift and easy slumber my uncle passed to death. His newly-awakened ambitions respecting myself had caused me exquisite uneasiness; but I had temporised in this matter out of tenderness for his last earthly hope.

The need to inflict that final wound appeared needless, and he escaped it.

There is nothing more to be written, and I am content to tell the truth to you, my poor friend, that no false estimate of myself shall remain in your mind. It is better that one soul shall be lost than countless souls; and if my eternal condemnation is assured, the salvation of many thousand orphaned, unloved, friendless lads will continue to be a far greater and more important fact. *Anathema maranatha*, I wait in the Hand of God—a mystery, which it remains for Him alone to resolve, appraise and requite. You must remember me as one who, under the direction of his Creator, has wrought unutterable evil which, in the white-hot crucibles of Providence, shall be transmuted into good. For you, Bertram, you will have sworn to

keep my secret inviolate and destroy these pages after you have read them; since my Church must for ever remain in ignorance of what went to the creation of Kingscresset Home; while for me echo the words of Shabistari, the Persian: "Real prayer can only be yours when you have staked and gambled yourself away and your essence is pure."

And if my pure essence should now be poured out upon the everlasting fires—still it is well with me.

THE END.

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