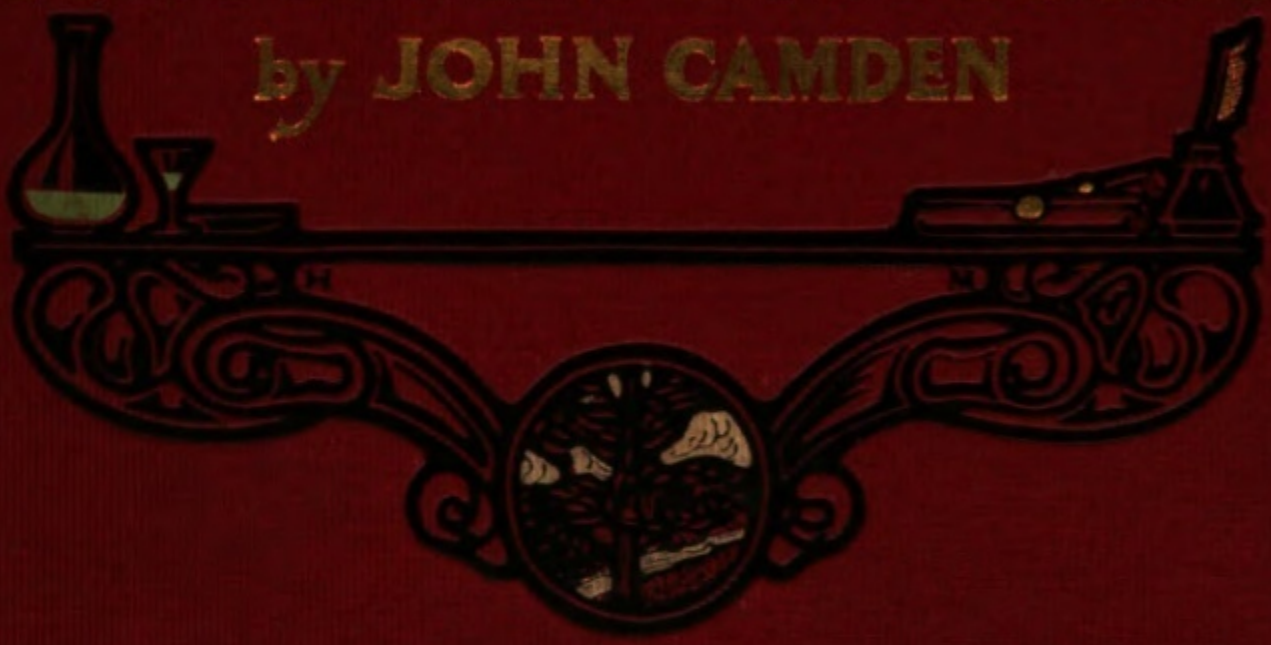
HUNDREDTH ACRE

by JOHN CAMDEN

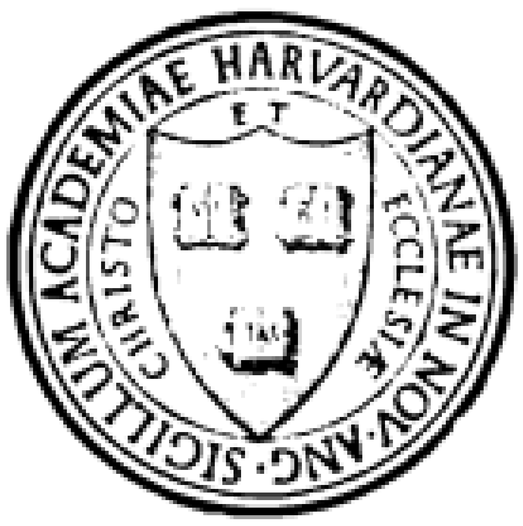


Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

8/4 23.8

Harvard College Library



BEQUEST OF

WILLIAM McMICHAEL WOODWORTH
(Class of 1888)

KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE
ZOÖLOGY, 1899–1904.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE HUNDREDTH ACRE

Digitized by Google

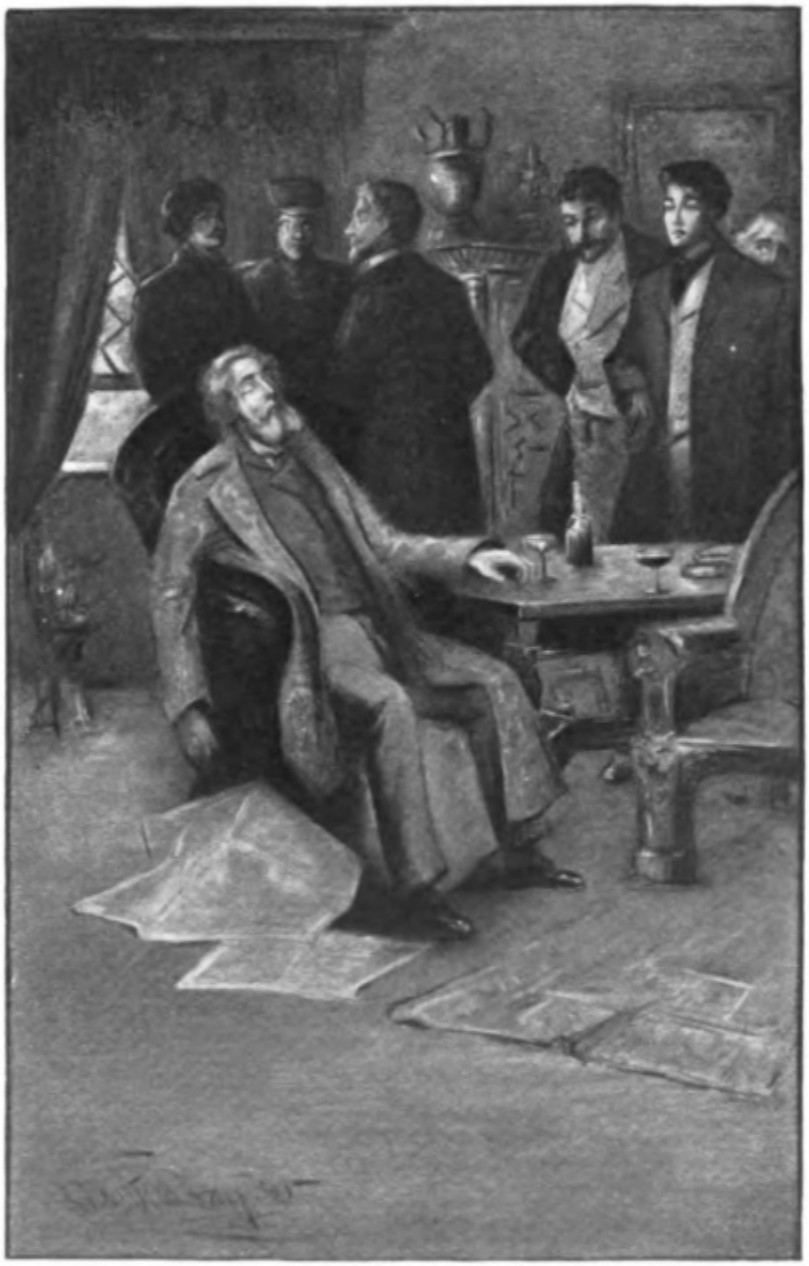
Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



"HE LOOKED LIKE A MAN WHO HAD FALLEN ASLEEP."

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Hundredth Acre

By John Camden

Herbert B. Turner & Co.

Boston, 1905

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

21423.8

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
BEQUEST OF
WILLIAM McMICHAEL WOODWORTH
FEB. 10, 1915.

Copyright 1905
By Herbert B. Turner & Co.
Entered at Stationers' Hall
London

Published May 1905

George French, *Boston*

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The House on the Rue Fontaine St. Georges	9
II.	The Mute Witness	23
III.	Lady Serena	35
IV.	The Woman in the Case	50
V.	The Ex-Housekeeper	62
VI.	The Will	76
VII.	On the Boat	91
VIII.	The Woman with the Red Hat	104
IX.	Searching for Clews	118
X.	No. 24 Rue Taitbout	130
XI.	Andrew Schenck	145
XII.	Anice	158
XIII.	The Secret Stair	174
XIV.	A Cablegram	187
XV.	A Morning Walk	203
XVI.	An Interesting Meeting	215
XVII.	The Tunnel	230
XVIII.	A Managing Aunt	244
XIX.	The Offers to Compromise	257
XX.	An Agreement	269
XXI.	A Startling Revelation	285
XXII.	Portman's Witness	297
XXIII.	Mother and Son	312

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE HUNDREDTH ACRE

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE ON THE RUE FONTAINE ST. GEORGES

It was a bitter night in February — the sixth of the month — and it began to sleet as I turned the corner of the church of Notre Dame de Lorette and looking north, along the street of that name, saw the lights of the Place St. Georges casting long, shimmering reflections on the wet pavements and blinking in the wind. Lights shone, too, here and there, behind close drawn blinds and in low doorways, but, for the most part, the streets were dark, cold and almost deserted. The few people afoot hurried homeward and only an occasional vehicle passed in that direction.

I was making my way in the teeth of the wind toward Dr. Lloyd's lodgings. I had not seen him for months, but no sooner had I arrived in Paris than I received a summons to come and sup with him. Lloyd was one of the richest and most eccentric

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

men I knew. He could live like a prince anywhere and he chose to wander over the world and settle at last in an obscure corner of Paris, where he could pursue his researches in history, art and science and collect rare old books and curiosities. He had not married and at seventy-seven was without any close ties. He had two nieces, one of whom had married an Englishman, Lord Bentinck, in spite of Lloyd's opposition, and the other, a young girl, was living near Boston. There was also a nephew, Andrew Schenck, a worthless young scapegrace, who hoped to inherit his uncle's enormous fortune and was therefore spending his own on horses and drink. I had known Lloyd all my life and was junior counsel for him in his famous lawsuit with old Hez Portman. I thought it not unlikely therefore that his summons meant some new commission for me.

As I reached the corner of the rue Fontaine St. Georges I could see his lodgings across the way. He had the little house, four doors below the corner, with the overhanging turret and the iron grate at the entrance. The place had taken his fancy because it was an antique in modern Paris,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a bit of architecture of the time of Francis First and full of fanciful associations. A street light placed directly opposite shone full on the low front of the house and showed the fluted pillars on either side of the door. The entire front was of softly colored gray stone and there was a turret on the corner toward the rue de St. Lazare and the narrow arrow-shaped windows showed light within. I knew that Lloyd's welcome was always warm to those whom he really called his friends and that he was sure to have a fine supper and some fine old wine, and the thought of good cheer on such a night hastened my steps. I crossed the street and rang the bell with such good will that I heard the shuffling steps of the concierge within before its reverberations ceased. The old man — a withered and bowed little Frenchman — opened the door and ushered me into a room which had served in the old days for the porter. Here he helped me off with my storm coat with a graciousness that was partly derived from his natural affability and partly from donations of francs and half francs on the occasions of my previous visits. The place was scantily furnished; a high-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

backed chair stood by the window where I had often seen old Cartouche nodding in the sunshine. There was a table with a lamp and a copy of the " Figaro " spread out under it. No one could leave the house by the front door without traversing this room, and the other door, into the hall, commanded an unobstructed view of the narrow stairs which ascended to the doctor's quarters above. As I went out into the hall I saw his tall lean figure outlined against the light at the head of this staircase.

" So you got my note in time, Brinton?" he said, " I particularly wanted to see you tonight for I heard you were on your way home."

" So I am," I replied, shaking hands as I reached the landing, " but I had no thought of going without seeking you."

" But not tonight," he said, leading the way to his study.

I laughed a little, experiencing a pleasant sensation of comfort and luxury at the sight of the familiar bookcases, the cheerful soft coal fire in the grate, the shaded lamp, the fur rugs, the easy chairs, the soft, heavy curtains. I had always thought

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Lloyd's rooms the perfection of comfort, in the strangest surroundings, for the house had scarcely a modern appliance and showed everywhere its relations to ancient times.

"It all looks the same," I remarked, "and it is delightful. When I am rich I want just such a room to tempt a poor devil to come through the sleet for the pleasure of being made envious."

"It's a bad night, I know," he admitted smiling, "but I wanted you."

"Why tonight?" I asked, sinking into a chair; "'the better the day, the better the deed,' is the saying, and if the deed is as bad as the night—" I shrugged my shoulders.

"True," he responded, pouring out a little glass of cordial and handing it to me, "yet an opportunity lost comes not again. We must plan for the day; who knows what the morrow will bring?"

"More money for you," I replied; "I see by the home papers that those mines of yours are turning out record breakers. Do you remember old Widow Haskins? Who used to say—'them that has gets!'"

"It's true, in a way," he remarked,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

" sometimes I tire of it; money makes money. I'm sick of it."

" Teach me the trick," I said, " I've had no chance to weary of it; I don't think I should."

" Nor did I, at your age," he replied, with a grim smile.

He was standing on the hearthrug looking down at the fire and the glow from it somewhat softened the harsh lines of his strong keen face. I can recall him today as he stood there and remember with great distinctness the quaint ungraceful lines of his spare figure, bowed a little at the shoulders like a man who had stooped over his books, his narrow gray head with the high arched forehead, his hooked nose and keen twinkling gray eyes — set well back under shaggy brows. He looked up and caught my gaze fixed upon him.

" Well, Brinton?" he said, with a smile.

" I was thinking that I never saw you look better," I remarked; " money getting is conducive to health and happiness; I always said so."

" On the contrary, it is a nuisance," he retorted, with some bitterness; " it makes you the victim of your relatives; they are

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

always waiting for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, but they are not contented with the crumbs, they want the whole pudding."

"Naturally," I replied, laughing, "so should I. There is nothing harder than to accept crumbs. But I thought you had cast these things — relatives especially — behind you."

"Precisely, but relatives — like the poor — are always with you. It was of one that I wanted to speak to you," he added, "but we will eat first for I see that Marie has sent up the supper."

As he spoke an old Frenchwoman, in a neat black dress and white cap and apron, pushed aside the portière into his dining room and courtesied as she announced dinner. The table was spread for two in an octagon-shaped room which was completely lined with low bookcases containing some of his rarest volumes. The meal was a triumph of French cooking for old Marie was as famous as any *chef* in Paris, and in spite of "his lean and hungry air," Lloyd was something of an epicure. He seemed in unusually good spirits and talked a great deal, telling me of his historical researches

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and of his great luck in acquiring some rare old books and furniture at a sale of some great but impoverished family's household effects.

"There's a cabinet yonder," he said, pointing to his study, "that I want to show you, Brinton. It's a bit of sixteenth century Italian work in iron, and it's magnificent. You know these elaborate cabinets — *armoires artistiques* — were not introduced until about the time of the Rénaissance and then they came from Germany, but the French and Italian workers were quick to imitate and some of the most beautiful examples that we have are Italian."

"You mean the famous cabinets with secret drawers," I said, "that always figure in romance?"

"Precisely," replied Lloyd, with his grim smile; "there are several secret drawers in this one. I paid something like two hundred dollars for it and I wouldn't part with it for twice that sum."

"I didn't know you cared so much for old furniture," I remarked.

"Sometimes I do," he replied, rising — for we had just finished dinner — "I will show it to you now," he added, leading the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

way back to his study after handing me one of his choicest cigars.

The cabinet, a really beautiful and quaint piece of furniture stood in the corner, immediately in front of a soft red curtain which draped the alcove beyond the window.

"It is damaskeened iron inlaid with gold and silver," Lloyd said, touching it with the affectionate hand of the connoisseur, "and the bas-relief here is exceedingly beautiful. I am an admirer of the old iron work;" he added; "to me the perfection to which it was carried in the tenth and twelfth centuries is remarkable. Here, too, is one of your secret locks. Put your finger here, beside this head of St. Francis, and press that tiny silver bar — so!"

I had followed his instructions and a secret drawer sprang out of the side of the cabinet. In it lay a sealed packet. I laughed.

"Behold the document!" I said.

"I inadvertently opened the wrong drawer," he replied, "but after all I intended to tell you of the whole matter. Don't you recognize that packet?"

I looked at it more closely. "Assured-

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ly," I replied, " it's the will I drew for you a year ago."

" I put it there yesterday," he said; " it was in my safe on the rue Scribe, but I intended to change it."

" And you have changed your mind instead?"

He closed the drawer and sitting down, motioned me to a seat on the opposite side of the fire.

" I will tell you," he said, " for I want you to go to see my niece."

" Lady Serena?" I inquired, smiling; I knew how hotly he and Serena had quarrelled.

He shook his head. " No, Anice Holland. I haven't seen her since she was eleven. But since Serena has married an English lord, who wants my money, and Andrew has gone to the devil, I begin to think of Anice. She's been brought up by her father's sister, Mrs. Erckmann, and they have been writing me about her. They want her to come to Paris to study and I want some idea of her before I send her the means to come over here and torment me. Can you manage to see her?

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I'll give you her address; she lives with her aunt."

"I can go — of course," I said, with a little hesitation; I did not care to report on the poor girl.

But he took me at my word and scribbled her address on a card which I put mechanically in my address book while he continued his conversation.

"You know at my death, after my scientific bequests, she is to have half my fortune and Serena the other half; I shall not leave Andrew Schenck one cent."

"I know," I replied, "but I rather expected you to relent."

"I did," he said; "I took that will out intending to destroy it but I have had letters from home and I shall let it stand. I shall put it back in the safe tomorrow."

I was not at loss to imagine the contents of his letters from home but I made no comment and after a moment he continued.

"Andrew has been behaving like the devil," he said grimly; "I shall send him a check to keep him out of jail but there's the end of it. Sometimes I can't believe the young scapegrace is my own kith and kin;

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he's a low, drinking, swearing, gambling ruffian and his last dido is beyond my forbearance.''

As he spoke, Dr. Lloyd rose and opening an upper door in his cabinet drew out a slender bottle of golden wine and two quaint long-stemmed glasses.

" It's Chateau Yquem,'' he said, " and the finest; I want you to taste it, Brinton,'' and he filled the glasses and set the bottle beside him on the table. " No, I shall not forgive Schenck,'' he continued, in reply to a humorous suggestion of mine as I took up my glass; " I have never had any toleration for vulgarity, for pot-house dissipation. Andrew isn't as much of a gentleman as old Cartouche.''

" Cartouche is unique,'' I replied, " and like your wine improves with age. After all, Lloyd, I can't help pitying the young rogue. You brought him up to luxury and adrift he'll go to the devil at a terrible rate. Can't you make some provision?''

Lloyd's strong, lean face darkened, the shaggy brows dropped over the small twinkling eyes, he struck the table with his clenched hand.

" No!'' he thundered, " I'll support no

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

rogues. I tell you, Brinton, I'm done with him, I'm done. He'll learn what it is to work for his bread and it will do him good. I'd rather give all to Serena and let the Englishman spend it."

"He may be a hard case, too," I suggested.

"Lord Bentinck is a pretty decent fellow, I've inquired," he replied, "and Serena was always my favorite. I'm thinking of running over to see her."

"You're a changed man, Dr. Lloyd," I said, rising; "the skies will fall."

"Have another glass," he suggested, "there's no hurry; it's early yet, not half past eleven."

I declined but he filled his own glass; then, as I insisted upon going, he left it untouched on the table and went with me to the head of the stairs.

"Don't forget Anice Holland," he said, and then added with a shrug, "my relatives are all sitting around waiting for me to die, I don't know why I should consider them."

"They'll wait some time," I retorted, "you look good for another sixty years."

"I'm getting on," he retorted, "but I'll

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

confess that I feel unusually fit. Come in tomorrow to dinner."

"I can't, I'm engaged with Lavaur."

"Is that fellow still here?" asked Lloyd, with interest, "bring him around; he's a crank, of course, but he's got brain."

"I'd like him to hear you say that," I laughed back; "*au révoir.*"

Lloyd waved his hand and retreated into his study. Old Cartouche helped me into my coat and opened the outer door. The storm had abated and the moon was struggling to look through scudding clouds.

"We shall have a fine day tomorrow, Cartouche," I remarked, as I passed out.

"*Eh bien, monsieur,* for those on whom the sun shines!" he said, with a shiver.

"To be sure," I replied, "but there is a consolation, it shines on the just and the unjust."

"Monsieur speaks truth," replied the concierge, closing the grate behind me and looking out, his wrinkled face illumined by the lantern across the street; "but I am old, and it rises not so often on the old — except out at Père la Chaise," and with this cheerful reflection he closed and bolted the door.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

I was at breakfast in the café of my hotel when Lavaur came in. He had been a chum of mine at Yale and was one of the best fellows in the world though, as Dr. Lloyd said, something of a crank. His father had been a French professor at Yale and his mother a rich New Haven girl. Gilette Lavaur was a strange combination of French vivacity and American shrewdness and common sense. The possessor of inherited wealth, he had chosen no particular profession though he was a past master of chemistry and a really good physician, but his taste for painting had crossed his taste for more practical things and he spent much time in the Latin Quarter leading a Bohemian life. When I saw him enter the café, looking right and left for me, I recalled Lloyd's half contemptuous estimate of him with amusement. Lavaur heartily disliked Lloyd while he acknowledged his brilliant qualities; the

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

truth was that the two men were too much alike in their singularities to care for each other. At this point in my reflections, Lavaur discovered me and signalled a greeting over the intervening tables, making his way to my place.

"Come and breakfast with me," I suggested, as he took the chair opposite.

"Breakfast!" he replied, with a shrug, "I never breakfast. I had coffee in bed and I shall lunch at one. I roused myself at a beastly hour this morning to get over here and catch you. I want you to take the day off with me. Come over to my shop and meet some fellows from home; there are two here now from New Haven and three from New York. We can put in a day in the Quarter which will do you no end of good."

I shook my head at this alluring picture.

"Can't do it," I replied, "I have two or three business matters here and I must see Lloyd again. By the way, Lavaur, Dr. Lloyd wants you to come over with me to his house on the rue Fontaine St. Georges."

Lavaur grunted.

"That old crank?" he remarked, "that

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

reminds me though;" he began to fumble in his pocket and pulled out a much read newspaper that had the familiar home headlines, " you know his nephew Andrew Schenck?"

" Very much so," I replied, smiling while I stirred my coffee, " what of him?"

Lavaur grinned sardonically and pushed the sheet toward me.

" That's the same Schenck you and I met in Rome three years ago," he said; " don't you remember how tipsy he was? How that old stick, his uncle, must adore him!"

As I expected, the paragraph gave me the key to Dr. Lloyd's anger. It appeared that Schenck had been secretly married to the daughter of Lloyd's former housekeeper and it had only come out because Schenck had deserted the girl and ceased to contribute to her support. The newspaper gave a long and glaring account of her suit for divorce which had been granted and alimony demanded. This was, of course, the matter which required the uncle's check to save the nephew from yet deeper embarrassments, and this was the very thing that would be most offensive

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to Lloyd, involving — as it did — a deliberate attempt to deceive him for the purpose of retaining a hold upon his money. Knowing both, I could not suppress a low whistle of surprise and dismay.

"Well, he's done it this time!" I remarked.

"And lost a fortune, I suppose," said Lavaur, with a chuckle, "though Lloyd looked good for a hundred years when I saw him last. Poor Lady Bentinck will be old and fat before she sees a cent of that inheritance."

"I should like to have her hear you suggest age and flesh," I said, with some malice.

"Oh, I know Serena," he replied, and laughed.

As he spoke an attendant stepped softly to my side.

"A person wishes to speak to monsieur at once," he murmured; "he is in the lobby."

Something in the man's manner aroused my curiosity and having just finished my breakfast, I suggested to Lavaur that he should go with me to the office where we might arrange about a possible meeting

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

before dinner. Lavaur, who had the cigarette habit to an odious degree, pulled one out of his pocket and lighted it as we sauntered into the hall. There were only two or three people in the lobby and I saw at once a queer little bowed figure in black. It was old Cartouche, standing just inside the door, holding his hat in his hand and gazing about him with quite an apparent nervous agitation. Doubtless he brought some message from his master.

"It's Lloyd's man," I said to my companion, "come to remind me to bring you to the house on the rue Fontaine St. Georges."

"Excuse me, pray," said Lavaur, with a laugh and fell back while I went on alone to meet the old concierge.

"What is it, Cartouche?" I asked, carelessly, "the doctor is well, I hope?"

The old man stared at me strangely; his lips shook, he twisted his cap in his thin clawlike fingers.

"M'sieur is mistaken," he said hoarsely, "M. le Docteur died last night."

"Died?" I repeated, aghast, "you rave, man!"

"Pardon, m'sieur," he murmured,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

apologetically, "it is true — he is dead."

I uttered a sharp exclamation of dismay and Lavaur, hearing it and seeing our faces, approached.

"Hear this, Gilette!" I cried in a low voice, suppressing my excitement, "Dr. Lloyd is dead — this man says he died last night. It is impossible! Why, Cartouche, I never saw him look better."

"*C'est vrai, m'sieur,*" he replied, looking down, "yet I found him dead in his chair — just where he had been sitting with m'sieur — and he was cold at six this morning — cold and stiff."

"Good heavens, I can't understand it!" I cried, looking at Lavaur.

But beyond a little surprise, he showed no emotion, placidly smoking his cigarette and gazing intently at Cartouche.

"Was it a stroke, or the heart?" he asked the concierge, mildly interested.

"*Mais, non, m'sieur,* I do not know," he replied, with a shrug, "the doctors do not say. M. le Maire is there and the gendarmes and two surgeons."

"Do they suspect foul play?" I asked anxiously.

Lavaur smiled. "It's the regular thing

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in the case of sudden death, Brinton," he explained, " it's like our coroner. I suspect the old gentleman's heart gave out."

Lavaur spoke in English and Cartouche did not understand but stood looking earnestly at me.

" You will come, m'sieur?" he demanded.

" Of course, I'll come," I replied, and then to Lavaur, " come, old chap, I'll be glad of a friend who knows Paris and Paris ways."

He hesitated a moment and then assented. Cartouche called a cab and Lavaur and I got in, the concierge mounting the box beside the driver, and we were off at a brisk pace. My companion leaned back in the corner, smoking with half closed eyes and in apparent indifference, but I could not imitate his unconcern. My own mind was busy with the problem of this sudden death. Lloyd's tall, stoop-shouldered figure, his lean, shrewd face, his twinkling eyes, rose before me to repudiate death. Then I remembered the incident of the secret drawer and reflected that I should have to get that will out and see that it was probated at the proper time.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The singular chance that had turned Lloyd's intentions at the last moment, his speech with me on the subject on the very night — as it had proved — of his death, recurred to me with such force that I told the whole circumstance to Lavaur and asked him the usual course in Paris.

"The *juge de paix* will affix his seals to all the papers and effects — unless you regard yourself as an heir," replied Lavaur, with a grin.

"Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed devoutly; "there is enough of a complication already."

"Precisely so," he said, "therefore you will hand the will to the *juge de paix* who will, in turn, deliver it to the president of the tribunal who, in his turn, deposits it with a notary public. Having executed this simple process with the usual amount of red tape, they will keep you cooling your heels until they are entirely satisfied that all the French laws in regard to wills of aliens — and they are rigid — have been complied with, and all the fees paid. My dear Brinton, I'm really sorry for you," and he laughed; "ah, here we are," he

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

added, as the carriage slowed up on the rue Fontaine St. Georges.

As he spoke, old Cartouche climbed down to open the door and I saw a gendarme on the steps of the house. We had no sooner alighted than we found ourselves in difficulty, for the police at first refused to admit us. However, this was arranged by Lavaur who happened to know the *maire* of this arrondissement and vouched for me as Lloyd's lawyer.

When we entered we found another gendarme in Cartouche's chair by the window eating some of the old concierge's roasted chestnuts. *M. le Maire* and Lavaur walked up stairs ahead of me, so I was the last to approach the room which I had left so pleasantly the night before. The familiar look of the stairs and hall gave me a shock; it seemed impossible that death had been there before me. When I entered the study Lavaur and the *Maire* were standing a little apart talking to a third person who proved to be one of the physicians who had been examining the body. The room was precisely as I had left it with the exception of the heavy cur-

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

tain which had been pushed aside to admit the pale gray light of a Paris morning. The cabinet stood in its place by the alcove, the old Flemish clock ticked in its corner, the chairs were pushed easily here and there, as we had left them, the bottle of Chateau Yquem, half empty, stood on the table with the two glasses — mine just where I put it and the other near the hand of the dead man. They had not yet moved him and he sat there, leaning a little on the table, his head resting on the tall back of his chair, one nerveless white hand hanging at his side, one almost clasping the glass. He looked like a man who had fallen asleep; the lean gray face was almost unchanged, the posture was easy, there was no distortion. The fire was dead in the grate; a cold draught from the half open window stirred the gray hair on Lloyd's forehead. In all else, the scene was so little changed that I felt as if he might speak to me at any moment. I stood looking at him, lost in painful thought; I suddenly felt that I had been fond of him, that I had suffered a bereavement.

Lavaur came to the table and bent over the glass which stood at the dead man's

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

hand. It was then that I recalled the fact that he had filled it as I rose to go and had evidently returned to drink the wine for there were only a few drops in the bottom of the glass. Lavaur took it up and holding it against the light looked at it closely.

"This is a curious glass," he said absently, "a very curious glass."

"Yes," I assented, "it is one that Lloyd bought in a curiosity shop on the Quai Voltaire."

Then I remembered the packet in the secret drawer and turned to the *Maire*, a courteous, gray, little Frenchman with pointed moustaches. I explained briefly the statement that Lloyd had made to me on the previous evening and, with the official's consent, I opened the secret drawer and found the will sealed and secure. Making sure that it was the document, I handed it to him and was told that the seals were to be affixed to all the dead man's effects before the body was removed for a post-mortem examination.

Meanwhile, Lavaur and the physician were bending over Lloyd examining him with a new and intent interest, and I saw

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

his hand as well as the wine-glass. But my attention was diverted by the arrival of the *juge de paix* and another surgeon who was to assist at the post-mortem. The little room was becoming crowded and the tragedy oppressed me; I turned away to the window.

Then Lavaur touched my arm.

"My dear fellow," he said, in a low voice, "there is poison in the wine-glass."

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER III

LADY SERENA

I found it difficult to believe Lavaur's statement that there was poison in Lloyd's wine-glass. I scouted the idea.

"My dear Gilette," I said, "you dream. I drank that same wine myself and I never felt better in my life."

"Precisely," he replied; "that is one reason for the suicide theory. There is undoubtedly poison in his glass, there could have been none in yours. We shall presently analyze what remains in the bottle and see if the drug is there, or only in Lloyd's glass. There is no doubt about it, Jack, I discovered the drug at once, and M. Verney, the physician, agrees with me. You need not look so skeptical. The post-mortem will convince you, however. Besides, I have found some grains of the powder spilled upon the table; you can see it yourself — the trail of the serpent, we might say."

It was hard for me to be convinced, but

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I saw that Lavaur was thoroughly in earnest and I knew his cleverness as a chemist; he had pre-eminently the gift for such researches. It put a new and terrible face on the whole affair and one that was wholly confusing, but there was one thing that I could not believe.

"He never committed suicide," I declared; "I knew the man — it wasn't in him to do it. And if it wasn't suicide —"

Lavaur laid his hand heavily on my shoulder.

"*Tonnerre!*" he said, "we will call it suicide — do you not see?"

"Yes, I see that poor old Marie and Cartouche will be suspected," I replied, "of course, I see, Gilette. Therefore this discovery of yours strikes me as being portentous. I do not attempt to dispute your conclusions; you say it is poison — that the drug is in the glass; I accept the statement, but who — in heaven's name — put it there?"

"The simplest and the safest theory is that he put it there himself," retorted Lavaur dryly.

I looked up and our eyes met squarely.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I do not believe that for a moment," I said firmly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Neither do I," he replied, "for more than one reason — but it's an ugly matter and there must be a theory in this case and that seems the most harmless —"

"Nonsense!" I interrupted, with indignation; "Lloyd was one of the sanest men I knew, with no more reason to kill himself than I have. He looks as if he had fallen peacefully asleep. These French officials must be idiots to fancy such a thing."

"They are frequently," he assented genially, but all the while his steady eye maintained its gravity; "all the same, I think, Brinton, we will call it suicide."

"We will call it no such thing!" I retorted testily; "what do you mean, Gilette?"

He laughed a little bitterly. "My dear fellow," he began, but we were interrupted by the *Maire*, M. Radot.

He had gone below stairs a few moments before and now returned.

"Monsieur," he said, addressing me, "there is a lady at the door who desires

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

admittance, declaring that she is M. le Docteur's niece. She is also in great distress and excitement over this sad event. Do you know her?"

And he handed me a card which I read in some astonishment.

"Lavaur," I exclaimed, "it is Lady Bentinck!"

Something akin to a smile flashed into Lavaur's eyes but he made a wry face.

"It's a bad time for women and hysteria," he commented grimly; "however, you will be the one to see her — you know her best."

"Oh, yes, I shall be very glad to see her," I retorted, and assured M. Radot that it was all right, that Lady Bentinck was really next of kin.

M. le Maire had evidently been impressed — I could easily imagine in what manner — and was willing to allow Lady Serena the utmost latitude which the formalities of the situation permitted. It ended in my going down-stairs to the concierge's room to explain to her the painful state of affairs. The gendarme retiring to the vestibule left the room free for her reception.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

LADY SERENA

I had not seen her ladyship since her marriage and the prospect of meeting her would have enlivened a dormouse. I must confess to well nigh forgetting the grim gray figure up-stairs in the study when I opened the concierge's door and saw Lady Serena. She was standing by the window with all her frills and furbelows gathered up in both hands as though she expected to accumulate all the cigar ashes and chestnut shucks that the gendarmes had scattered on Cartouche's erstwhile spotless floor.

She had changed in a way; she was more of a *grande dame* and less of a coquette, but she was still altogether lovely, a creature of pink and white, with an abundance of golden hair and delightful dimples, and she never looked more charming than now under a great hat, covered with soft gray plumes, and with some kind of a filmy, bewildering boa around her neck. When I entered she held out both hands in the kindliest greeting but with a face full of distress.

"You here!" she cried, "tell me what it all means, John. Can my uncle be dead? I can't believe it!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Neither can I," I retorted gravely, "yet it is true," and I told her as simply as I could the details of his sudden death, without disclosing Lavaur's painful theory — or indeed the discovery of the poison.

"Dr. Lloyd was talking of you only last night; he was thinking of going over to England to see you," I concluded, "and today — well, it is all over, Lady Serena."

She sat down weakly in Cartouche's chair and looked at me with that wide innocent look that she always had at command. She was plainly bewildered, however. Perhaps she had thought so much of the possible inheritance that this sudden realization stunned her.

"Do you know I think it is all just like Uncle Henry?" she cried.

It was my turn to be amazed.

"One would think that he was in the habit of dying suddenly," I remarked dryly.

"Oh, of course I don't mean that!" she declared, "but you know he always did the unexpected — he always disappointed you in some way. If I had only seen him yesterday!"

"Yes, if you could only have come to

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Paris one day sooner," I assented; "I think he really wanted to see you."

"But I did — I was here, here at this very door, and he would not see me!" she cried.

"You were here — yesterday?" I was a little bewildered; why had Lloyd spoken so frankly of her, and of his will in her favor, after refusing to see her? "My dear Lady Serena," I said, "whom did you see here? Old Cartouche?"

"The concierge — that old man? No, it was a woman," replied Serena, nervously unfastening her boa and slipping it down on her shoulders; "and — and, well she was pointed in her refusal."

"I cannot imagine old Marie, the cook, being anything but affable," I said, "nor do I believe that Lloyd authorized a refusal. I shall ask her myself."

"Oh, never mind!" cried Serena hysterically, pressing a lace bordered handkerchief to her eyes; "I've no doubt he told her to shut me out. You know he never forgave Bentinck for marrying me — wasn't it ridiculous? As if we could help it? But oh, I'm so sorry, I'm really so sorry, John. He used to be so kind to

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

me as a little girl, and he really was such a cranky old dear. What ought I to do? Bentinck isn't with me; you'll have to advise me."

"I don't think you can do anything just now except go back to your hotel and wait," I replied, "unless you want to see him—"

"Oh, I don't!" cried Serena, with a little scream of dismay; "I don't—I'd never get over it, you know I'm a coward, John!"

"Frankly, I didn't know that," I retorted, almost amused at her evident terror and the way she rose, gathering up all her furbelows in her hands and yet seeming to overflow with ribbons and feathers and little strings of beads; "where are you staying?" I added.

"Oh, at Meurice's, of course," she replied, "and I've no one with me but my maid. I really came over on purpose to see Uncle Henry; I wanted to see him about—about—" she hesitated and blushed and was apparently relieved by the entrance of Marie.

The old woman came to tell me that Lavaur desired to speak to me. She was

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

beating a hasty retreat, after dropping her courtesy to Lady Serena, when it occurred to me to question her.

"Lady Bentinck, why not ask Marie now about your uncle's refusal to see you?" I said, turning to recall the domestic.

But Serena would not permit it.

"Oh, never mind," she said, with a shrug, "it was probably not her fault and what difference does it make now?"

It was evident that she had not caught Lavaur's name and I excused myself a moment to answer his summons.

I made up my mind meanwhile to question Marie later myself about her denial of Lloyd's niece.

I found Lavaur on the stairs alone. His face wore a singularly reserved expression and he asked nothing about Serena.

"Brinton," he said abruptly, "get Lady Bentinck away and I'll report to you later. This discovery of poison in that glass is going to make no end of trouble and formality and I shouldn't let her know of it yet."

"I have not told her," I assured him, "she is alone in Paris; she was here yesterday to see her uncle —"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I know it, the old cook has already told the *Maire* and the commissaire de police," replied Lavaur grimly.

"Confound the old fool!" I muttered, "how absurdly premature."

Lavaur shrugged his shoulders.

"As it turns out, my dear Brinton," he retorted, with his cynical smile, "Lady Serena was not the only female visitor yesterday."

"The plot thickens," I remarked dryly.

"Precisely, but you know what to expect of the French police," he replied, "though I suppose you have never been arrested in Paris?"

"Heaven forbid!" I muttered devoutly.

"It's not so bad as all that," he said, suppressing a laugh, "experience is a great teacher. Go and take Serena away, my dear fellow. Where is she staying?"

I told him and he laughed.

"Of course it had to be a swell place to suit her. I suppose Uncle Henry was to pay the bills. See here, Brinton, I'll meet you there at two o'clock. Can you wait for me?"

"I must," I replied regretfully; "there is nothing for me to do here."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Nothing," he replied decidedly; "it's a matter now for the doctors and the police."

I accepted his assurance and conducted Lady Serena to her carriage, but no sooner were we on our way to the hotel than I fell to wondering why Lavaur, who had been so reluctant to go to the rue Fontaine St. Georges, should be now so willing to stay there and to send me away. However, I was allowed no time for reflections as my companion kept up the conversation.

"Do you believe in presentiments?" she asked me; "I think I do — oh, yes, really. You see I was suddenly determined to see Uncle Henry. I had no reason to know that I should be welcome, but I felt that I must come. Bentinck laughed at me, but I had my way."

"You always did, Serena," I commented dryly.

She gave me a sidelong look and smiled a little, as if she was uncertain whether I meant it as a compliment or not.

"Why, of course, what is the use of living without it? By the way, John, are you married? I haven't heard."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"That casualty hasn't happened yet," I replied.

"I believe I'm glad," she said laughing, and then she pulled a long face. "I am very heartless to laugh when poor Uncle Henry is just dead, doubtless you think I'm a wretch. I am so sorry — really so sorry; I always hoped it would be patched up, that uncle would like my husband. Of course you know he was vexed because he thought Bentinck wanted only the *dot*. Dear me," added Serena, with a shrug, "why shouldn't he want a *dot*? Poverty is hateful, and when one has big estates — I can't quite imagine Tom marrying the proverbial milkmaid, but then I don't feel as Uncle Lloyd did. One must have things — I'm sure that Bentinck has never been as mercenary as my cousin Andrew and uncle adored him —"

"I'm not sure that he adored him," I remarked; "he was devoted to Andrew's mother; she was the favorite sister."

"Oh, I know," rejoined Serena, nodding at me, "and Jack — do you suppose he's left everything to Andrew?"

I looked at her with a grim smile.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"What do you mean?" she said, uneasily, playing with her lorgnette.

"I'm a lawyer, Serena," I said.

She made a wry face. "I hate lawyers," she declared; "Bentinck has one and he always comes down when things are in bad shape and then we have to live in Dorsetshire and give up society and — literally eat bread and cheese. I hate that man, I do really."

"You speak with so much feeling that I cannot help suspecting that you have had a recent visit from him," I remarked, as we neared the hotel.

She blushed scarlet and bit her lip.

It was no longer difficult for me to divine the presentiment that had brought her to Paris. The carriage was stopping at the door of the hotel when she suddenly laid her hand on my arm, pointing with the other out of the window opposite.

"Good gracious!" she said, "to think that I should remember him and that he should be here — here when uncle is just dead."

"Who?" I asked quickly, my thoughts flashing to Andrew Schenck, but I was mistaken.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It's old Hez Portman," she said with a queer little laugh, "don't you know? Uncle Henry's bitter enemy; they've had a land feud for twenty years and they almost came to shooting before uncle left home. I believe that old man will be positively glad, he's such an old ogre. Don't you see him?"

I made out a stubby figure in a brown suit, with a tall silk hat which did not set naturally on a bullet head, and I had no difficulty in recognizing the man. A deadly feud had raged between Lloyd and Portman over the boundary line between their two places outside of Boston; a feud out of all proportion with the importance of the disputed line.

"Did you know that your uncle lost the suit in the Circuit Court," I said, "and he was going to appeal it to the Supreme Court?"

"Dear me, no," said Serena, with a shrug, "how furious Uncle Henry must have been to lose it. Were you his lawyer?"

I nodded, smiling a little as I thought of the acrimony with which the battle had been waged, and watching Portman's

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

stubby figure until it disappeared in the crowd.

The carriage had stopped and I was helping Serena out when she looked up and saw her maid approaching.

"Oh, there's Shane and I'll have some tea later if you can come up-stairs to my parlor, John, and take the time to drink it."

I knew that I had to meet Lavaur in an hour and that I might not see her alone again.

"Lady Serena," I said gently, "I wouldn't mention my reasons for coming to Paris — not now."

She looked up at me in wide eyed amazement for a moment and then she blushed furiously.

"I wish you would tell me what it all means," she said, petulantly. "Truly I cared for Uncle Lloyd, one would think —" and she burst into tears and dropping her veil over her face, hurried past me into the hotel.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

It was nearer three than two when Lavaur came in. I had been waiting for him with great impatience and hailed him the moment he entered the lobby. At his suggestion we retired to a secluded corner of the smoking room, where we could be alone, and he ordered cigarettes and wine before he would say a word about the case.

"Have the police finished their examination of the premises?" I asked finally, my endurance quite exhausted by the languid ease with which he rolled a cigarette.

The servant who had brought the wine had effaced himself, and we sat alone in an alcove behind the palms.

"The police have made a thorough search of the premises, and have cross-examined the servants," he replied, in his leisurely manner," and M. Verney and I have completed an examination of the wine. There was absolutely no poison in the bottle and none showed in your empty glass,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

but his contained a considerable quantity and the trail of the powder on the table — which led me to the discovery — is quite unmistakable; there were also a few grains spilled on the hearthrug."

"At his feet?" I asked.

"No, on the opposite side of the table. Did he put anything in his glass when he poured out the wine?"

"Not a thing," I replied positively; "I was observing him at the time and he filled both glasses at once and asked me to taste the wine. I took one at haphazard; therefore, if he had put poison in one of the glasses I might have taken it."

"Precisely," he said thoughtfully, "and if we were living in the middle ages we might suppose that he had intended to poison you and took the wrong cup himself by mistake. However, as that is not feasible, we must suppose that there was either poison in the wine-glass when he took it from the cabinet, or that he put poison in it after bidding you adieu. The first theory is improbable, for he could scarcely have poured the wine into the glass without observing the powder in the bottom of it.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

On the other hand, neither you nor I think he committed suicide."

"No," I said firmly, "I am sure he did not. His opinions on that point were well known; he had even written an article on the subject, I believe for some magazine at home. He regarded it as a peculiarly cowardly act."

"Opinions often change and men become cowards when they are forced to face an extremity," he retorted tritely.

"We do not, however, know of any such extremity in his case," I said bluntly.

"No, we do not," Lavaur replied, puffing away at his cigarette; "but you know these French police — or rather you don't know them — they are looking for a theory — in short, for a woman."

I laughed a little grimly.

"Lloyd will disappoint them," I said, "he wasn't at all that sort."

Lavaur looked at me from under his half-closed eyelids and began to laugh softly.

"Do you know that there has been a woman there recently and one who has pleaded with him about money matters?" he said. "So much we know — thanks to Cartouche's excellent hearing; it continues

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

good — even on the other side of the key-hole."

"Hang Cartouche's hearing!" I said emphatically, "Lloyd was rich and, of course, had pensioners. It is unlikely that this woman — if she exists anywhere but in Cartouche's imagination — or any other woman — drove him to suicide. Does the concierge attempt to describe her?"

"He does, and it is very melodramatic," replied Lavaur smiling, "she was tall and wore a black face veil and a black jacket, her skirts seem to vary from brown to blue as Cartouche happens to feel — and at present he feels blue."

"Bosh!" I ejaculated, "it is a romance of his — nothing more. Some poor creature who wanted some of Lloyd's money — a great many people wanted a pinch of it."

"Very likely," he said, with a shrug, "but we get back to the suicide theory. It remains to explain the poison, it was there. Now, of course, we can begin by suspecting the servants —" he waved his hands in a liberal fashion — "but ——"

"I do not suspect them," I replied deliberately, curiously oppressed by the whole thing, "but — unless this goes for suicide

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

— they will be suspected, of course, and probably arrested."

"They are practically under arrest now," he replied placidly, pouring out some wine; "have a glass — no? You're afraid of poison, Jack!"

"You've got a theory, Lavaur," I said, with impatience, "what is it? Out with it?"

"Yes, I have a theory," he replied lightly, "but it is very theoretical. In the first place, we seem to have nothing to thrust a peg in. That whole day is minutely accounted for. Dr. Lloyd was in the house the greater part of it. The police dragged the whole net while I sat and smoked with *M. le Maire.* By the way, Brinton, you should smoke more, it's a talent. It makes a man a good listener and an impersonal witness."

"Pshaw!" I retorted, "you'll get a cigarette heart as well as your information."

He shrugged his shoulders; he knew his incessant cigarette smoking was an ugly habit and he found a dozen excuses for it.

"Go on and tell me what the police have got hold of," I added, with impatience.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

" Very little, as usual. Old Marie never left the house until she went home at night; she sleeps in a garret on the rue de Chaume — an appropriate place, too, by the way, for a cook — and as she had been to early mass — what we call the biddy's mass at home — she had no call to go out after breakfast. When Cartouche is absent she answers the bell, but she only answered it once that day and that was when she refused a veiled lady admittance —"

" Lady Serena," I said promptly.

" Exactly. It was during a fifteen minutes absence of Cartouche's; he went to the chemist's for some medicine. Happily for him he could produce the bottle and the chemist bears out his statement. Now we come to Dr. Lloyd's part of it. He was out from ten in the morning until a quarter of one, and he was out for twenty or thirty minutes in the afternoon — at the time when Lady Bentinck called."

" Ah," I said, " then he did not know of her visit."

" No," replied Lavaur, " and it appears that the mysterious female of the black jacket and veil had called before ten and had seen him for about fifteen minutes.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

After she left — Cartouche showed her out — Dr. Lloyd gave a sweeping order to refuse her admittance at all times and seasons. The simple fact is that Marie mistook Lady Serena for the tabooed visitor — with whom she was not very familiar — and, as it turned out, she never even gave Serena's card to Dr. Lloyd at all."

"That was unfortunate, he really wanted to see her, I feel sure," I said, and then added musingly, "it's a closed case, Lavaur, I don't see any trail, do you?"

"There are one or two theories possible," he replied, tossing aside his third cigarette, "and one is that there was a third person concealed in the room when you and Lloyd were there, a third person who managed to poison the wine and effect an escape."

"I cannot imagine it," I retorted, frowning on such a suggestion, "the place is small and Cartouche was below stairs all the while."

"Then we must fall back on the servants."

"Never in the world!" I replied, with warmth; "old Marie is a simple person

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and Cartouche was really devoted to Lloyd.''

Lavaur nodded, half closing his eyes as he leaned back in his chair.

" You refuse that,'' he said, " you scout the idea of suicide. Very well, then we suppose it was murder. Some one must have been in the room and put the powder in the wine while Lloyd was bidding you goodby. *Bien,* that is possible but not probable. It is possible and one thing bears it out. There is a grain or two of the powder behind the Italian cabinet at the left hand corner, there are several grains on that side of the table. The person who put it in the glass was either hurried or nervous — or both — and made a bungle of it. We — you and I — know that Lloyd was not nervous. Moreover, why did he not sit down and put the powder in on the side of the table where his chair stood? He would not have done such a thing in haste.''

" Is it possible that he mistook it for a medicine? '' I interposed.

" Possible, yes, but he was not a believer in drugs according to my recollection of him. The servants say that he was not

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

known to take any. Besides, a man of his mind would scarcely keep a deadly poison so carelessly as to make a mistake. He was obviously methodical; he labelled and pigeon-holed everything. But, supposing that the murderer was concealed in the room, how did he, or she, get out? Cartouche sleeps in a closet at the foot of the stairs, and he swears that every door and window were bolted when he arose this morning, just as they were on the previous night. His imbecility in sticking to this — when he must see the drift of suspicion — convinces me that he is not evil minded; he would have planned better."

"How soon did he discover Lloyd's death?" I asked, after a moment's reflection.

"Just after letting Marie in, about seven o'clock. He went up to set the table for breakfast — Lloyd kept his New England habits — and Cartouche found then that he had never been in bed. He says that he thought he had had a stroke and he called Marie to help him. Then finding that he was really dead, he ran out and got a gendarme almost at the door. This man mounted guard while Cartouche ran for Dr.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Verney, whom he knew. Now, my dear Brinton, where was our prisoner; how did he, or she, get out?"

I shook my head. "I confess, Gilette, that — unless we can find some clew — the suicide theory is the strongest."

He smiled and thrusting his hand into his pocket he pulled out a small bit of woolen stuff and handed it to me. I looked at it in some bewilderment. It was apparently a fragment of brown serge, hemmed on one side and shot through with a darker brown thread; it had been jagged out of a larger piece.

"Well?" I said, looking up at his imperturbable face.

"It's a piece of a woman's flounce," he said, "and I found it behind the Italian cabinet, caught on a rear corner of it. Marie swears that she never possessed such a skirt, nor do I believe she ever did."

"The mysterious female again," I remarked, "but it doesn't materially help us."

He poured out another glass of wine. He had a very hard head.

"I wish Lady Bentinck had stayed in England," he remarked abruptly.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I saw his point.

"Do you think it possible ——" I began.

He threw out his hands with an impatient gesture.

"Anything is possible in a case like this, and Marie has confused her with this unknown woman. Can't you get her away, Brinton?"

"I suppose I could," I assented, "but the will must be seen to and I am necessary."

Lavaur frowned.

"Lloyd is to be buried tomorrow," he said; "you can read this confounded will and get her away by night."

"If she'll go," I said, with a grim smile, "Serena is a very uncertain quantity."

He shrugged his shoulders and sat staring moodily at his wine-glass.

"Aren't you going to see her?" I asked.

He frowned and then smiled.

"No," he said, "a man need not be a fool twice."

Then I knew that he had really loved Serena Lloyd as I had suspected.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Almost as he spoke one of the servants approached me.

"Monsieur," he said, "a lady wishes to see you; she is in the lobby."

"A lady?" I was a bit surprised; this could not be a summons from Lady Serena and no one else knew that I was in Paris.

"What sort of a lady?" I asked.

"A tall lady, m'sieur," he replied, discreetly looking down, "wearing a black dress and a black veil."

I glanced at Lavaur and saw a flash in his eyes.

"The mysterious female," I said, in English; "I'll go out and see her."

"*À la bonne heurre!*" said Lavaur, with a grimace, "I'm not in it though."

"Wait for me," I retorted hastily, and rising from my seat I followed the servant with a good deal of curiosity.

Was it possible that it was the unknown?

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER V

THE EX-HOUSEKEEPER

As soon as I entered the lobby I saw a tall, thin woman dressed in black and wearing a black face veil. She was standing in a remote corner quite alone, and I was at first convinced that she was unknown to me. However, in that I was mistaken, for as I approached she raised her veil and called me by name.

"You don't seem to know me, Mr. Brinton," she said, "though you've seen me often before. I was Dr. Lloyd's housekeeper for ten years in Boston, and before that I was Mrs. Schenck's nurse."

Looking at her steadily, I began to remember her drab-colored expressionless face and her small colorless eyes. She was Andrew Schenck's nurse and foster-mother, his own mother having died when he was three weeks old. I recollected it all now but I could not recall her name. However, she told it at once.

"I am Leah Buyse," she said quietly,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

" and I came to Paris two months ago as nurse to Mrs. McHenry's children. I have just read all about Dr. Lloyd's death in the evening papers and about your being here, sir, and I came straight around to this hotel to see Lady Serena Bentinck. Then they told me you were here and I wanted to see you."

" Have you seen Lady Serena?" I asked, suspecting at once that this was Lloyd's mysterious female visitor, and that all the romance about it was knocked to pieces.

" No, sir," she replied, folding her hands before her and looking down, " she wouldn't see me; may be she has forgotten me altogether, though I knew her very well and used to look after her when she was with Dr. Lloyd. But then she's married an English lord. I only wanted to know about Dr. Lloyd. It's very hard to believe he's dead; I saw him only yesterday and he was most kind — he always was that. I can't understand his killing himself, sir, it isn't like him. What ailed him?"

I knew by what she said that the public

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

had not yet got hold of the discovery of the poison.

"That is the mystery, Mrs. Buyse," I said, quietly; "by the way, you say you saw him yesterday. Can you tell me at what time?"

"About half past nine in the morning, sir, he had just finished breakfast. We had quite a talk."

"About money matters?" I asked abruptly, eyeing her keenly. I suspected her of being Schenck's agent.

She looked up in surprise and I thought that there was a change in her face.

"Ye-es," she admitted, with some reluctance, "I wanted some help for Mattie,—Mattie's my daughter," she explained; "she's married but her husband was crippled in an accident in the mill last year and he can't work any more. There are six children. Indeed, sir, they do need help and Dr. Lloyd gave me a check for her. I've got it, I hadn't even had time to send it;" she fumbled in her hand-bag and produced a slip of paper; "there it is, sir."

I glanced at it mechanically and saw that it was Lloyd's check for one hundred dollars made out to Matilda Mack.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"The doctor was most kind," she said, with a conventional whimper, "and I can't bear to think he's gone. Wasn't it more like a stroke?"

"There was poison in his glass," I replied simply.

The woman stared at me with dilated eyes.

"You don't mean it, sir?" she said. "It was just kind of hinted that he'd made way with himself, but I didn't begin to believe it! To think of his poisoning himself!"

I did not think it worth while to go into the murder theory just then so I returned the check.

"You can't draw that now, Mrs. Buyse," I remarked.

Her face fell and she crumpled it tightly in her hand.

"Poor Mattie!" she said, "it's too hard — it is indeed."

I remembered Lloyd's orders not to admit her and suspected that the woman was a regular beggar and was trying to work on my feelings. Yet I could not help feeling sorry for her evident distress, though I saw it was less for Lloyd's death than for his money.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"You had been to see him before?" I asked carelessly.

"Yes, sir, twice," she answered readily, drying her tears; "once when Mrs. McHenry first came here with me, in the spring, and once when I came back from Italy — and this time. That is all."

"You are still with Mrs. McHenry?"

"No," she answered, reluctantly, I thought, "no, sir, I was taken sick in Rome and she sent me here two weeks ago to wait for her. I'm staying with a decent woman, who was a maid to Mrs. McHenry; she lives on the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin."

I wanted much to know if Mrs. McHenry still paid her wages or if she had depended upon bleeding Lloyd, but I did not feel justified in catechizing her further. Moreover, if her story was true, there must have been another female visitor on the rue Fontaine St. Georges. I could not quite divine her object in wishing to see Serena unless it was to solicit financial aid. In a moment, however, she struck another note.

"Do you know anything of Mr. Andrew, sir?" she asked anxiously; "is he here? He'll feel his uncle's death mightily."

"I think very likely he will," I re-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

marked dryly, thinking of the provisions of the will. "I don't know where he is. A cable was sent to his New York address, however. It was a surprise to most of us to hear of his marriage and divorce."

"Poor Mr. Andrew!" she sighed, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes; "the doctor was very angry. It was he who told me. I hope, sir, he hasn't cut him off in the will?"

"That question will be finally answered tomorrow," I replied sharply; the woman's eagerness for her favorite, though natural enough, offended me. It was not poor Dr. Lloyd that these people mourned but his purse.

She stood a moment longer, awkwardly silent and uneasy, and I was on the point of closing the interview when she spoke again.

"You'll think it strange, sir," she said, hesitating, "but can I find out to-morrow? You see, it's this way; Mr. Andrew has always been like my own boy to me and you know how it was — the doctor was so angry that I'm afraid for him. It'll go hard with him if he hasn't any money; he's been brought up to use so much and he's

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

been so open handed that he has lost most of that his mother left him. I can't help feeling bad, I can't indeed.''

The woman's attachment to her foster son was so obviously sincere that I forgave her.

"The will is to be read tomorrow at about one o'clock, I suppose,'' I said, "right after the funeral anyway, and then you can learn its contents from any one, Lady Serena's maid or old Cartouche. I can tell you myself, for that matter,'' I added, with some reluctance to be annoyed by her.

She thanked me effusively and bade me good morning. Then dropping her veil over her face, she made her way out and left me again at liberty.

Relieved to have a tiresome matter over, I went in search of Lavaur to find that he had finished his bottle and was walking to and fro in his corner of the now almost deserted smoking-room. There was only one other occupant, an old Frenchman, who was asleep over his newspaper.

It gave me a little grim pleasure to shatter the police theory of the mysterious female visitor.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"The woman of the black veil has materialized," I said, "and she is only old Mrs. Buyse, Andrew Schenck's foster-mother, and, for awhile, Lloyd's housekeeper. Nothing could be more prosaic; she had been there to beg for some money for an unfortunate daughter. It's the old story. Rich people always maintain a train of beggars."

Lavaur laughed grimly, continuing his promenade.

"Lloyd looked like that kind," he said, sarcastically, "very much so! However, that clew has vanished. It will set the police on another. I have half a mind—" he stopped, and stood looking at me thoughtfully.

"Well?" I said, interrogatively.

"Yes, I'll do it," he exclaimed, "I'll take Lloyd's house for a month or two."

I shrugged my shoulders. "My dear Gilette," I remonstrated, "how unpleasant."

"Why?" he asked, "it's an old rookery and I'll trail the serpent from there. I tell you what it is, Jack, I believe it's murder, and I want to find out. But if the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

police get the idea that it's suicide, let them, it's safer."

I assented to that, thinking of old Cartouche and Marie, of whose innocence I felt assured.

Lavaur took out his watch and looked at it.

"It lacks only three hours of my dinner time," he said, "and you're engaged — oh, I know — but I've asked five or six men and we can't disappoint them, besides, you were not related to—"

He was interrupted by a servant with a message from Lady Bentinck. She had heard who was there, and would we both come up stairs to take tea with her?

Lavaur hesitated and was lost.

"Come," I said authoritatively, "you must see her tomorrow. Besides, she is well worth seeing."

"Do I not know?" he replied, with a shrug, but he followed me to the elevator.

Lady Serena was waiting for us in her private parlor and she wore a bewildering tea-gown of pale blue silk covered with lace. A little tea table was set at her el-

bow. She seemed to have forgotten her emotion at the door of the hotel and she

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

greeted us both very simply, with unaffected cordiality.

"I think it is really cruel of you to leave me here so long in suspense," she said; "I am really very lonely and frightened and I am sorry now that I came."

"Don't expect us to agree with that," replied Lavaur, with his easy gallantry; "I haven't seen you for six years, Lady Bentinck. It's almost worth a murder."

Serena gave a little cry, setting the teacups rattling as she half rose.

"What do you mean?" she cried, "you can't mean that?"

He seemed repentant.

"My dear Lady Serena," he said, helping himself to a buttered muffin, "don't let us be heroic. It was a figure of speech. Yes, of course, the doctor's death is unexplained."

Serena looked at him a moment round eyed, but she had a thoroughly practical mind.

"Do you know I haven't a black rag with me?" she said, in an awed voice, "and I've sent my woman out to buy a costume for to-morrow. Of course, it won't fit!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"How disillusioning you are! I thought your things unfolded and bloomed — like the petals of a rose," remarked Lavaur frivolously; "I had no idea that you bought clothes just like ordinary, commonplace women."

"Dear me!" retorted Serena laughing, "if you could see the bills!"

Then she busied herself making the tea. I thought Lavaur made her a little self-conscious; she was flushed and not quite at ease.

"Isn't it too bad that I didn't come sooner?" she went on, handing me a cup; "John tells me that my uncle was ready to forgive me. I really can't imagine it, but then I suppose I ought to believe John."

"Should you?" said Lavaur dryly; "he belongs to a profession of liars."

Serena shrugged her shoulders, "I shouldn't like to say just what I think of Bentinck's family solicitor," she said, "and I shall spare John's feelings by not saying anything too honest about his profession;" and she looked at me archly, and then added: "You know my cousin, Andrew Schenck, has been getting a divorce

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY