



BOOK I. THE PROBLEM. I. "A GREAT CASE."

I had been a junior partner in the firm of Veeley, Carr & Raymond, attorneys and counsellors at law, for about a year, when the morning of the temporary absence of both Mr. Veeley and Mr. Carr, there came into our office a young man whose appearance was so indicative of haste and agitation that I involuntarily rose as he approached and advanced to meet him.

"What is the matter, sir?" I inquired. "You have no bad news to tell me, I hope." "I have come to see Mr. Veeley; is he in?" he replied; "he was unexpectedly called away this morning to Washington; cannot be home before tomorrow; but if you will make your business known to me—"

"To you, sir?" interrupted he, turning a very cold, but steady eye on me. "I am Mr. Leavenworth's private secretary," he explained, "and live in the family. It was a dreadful shock," he went on, "especially to the ladies." "They are all alone," continued he, "the Misses Leavenworth mean—Mr. Leavenworth's absence to-day, it is deemed proper they should have some one present capable of advising them. As Mr. Veeley was their uncle's best friend, they naturally sent me for him, but he being absent, I don't know what to do or where to go."

"No," said I. "It is not necessary. I have merely come in the hope of being of some assistance to the young ladies. Mr. Veeley is away."

"And you thought the opportunity too good to be lost," he went on; "just so. But now that you are here and as the case promises to be a marked one, I should think that as a rising young lawyer, you would wish to make yourself acquainted with it in all its details. But follow your own judgment."

"I made an effort and overcame my repugnance. I will go," said I. "Very well, then," he replied, "follow me." But just as I set foot on the stairs I heard the jury descending, so drawing back with Mr. Gryce into the reception room and the parlor, I had time to remark: "The young man says that it could not have been the work of a burglar."

"Indeed!" fixing his eye on a door-knob near by. "The nothing has been found missing—"

Upon his arrival, he found the deceased lying on a bed in the second story room with the blood clotting about a pistol wound in the back of the head; having evidently been carried there from the adjoining apartment some hours after death. It was the only wound discovered on the body, and having probed it, he had found and extracted the bullet which he now handed to the jury. It was lying in the brain, having entered at the base of the skull, passing obliquely upward, and at once struck the medulla oblongata, causing instant death.

The fact of the ball having entered the brain in this peculiar manner, he deemed worthy of note, since it would produce not only instantaneous death, but an utterly motionless one. Further, from the position of the bullet, it was manifestly impossible that the shot should have been fired by the man himself, even if the condition of the hair about the wound did not completely demonstrate the fact that the shot was fired from a point some three or four feet distant. Still further, considering the angle at which the bullet had entered the skull, it was evident that the deceased must not only have been seated at the time, but that the shot could be fired only from a point where he had been engaged in some occupation which drew his head forward. For, in order that a ball should enter the head of a man sitting erect at the angle seen here, of 45 degrees, it would be necessary for the bullet to enter at a very low down, but in a peculiar position; while if the head had been bent forward as in the act of writing, a man holding a pistol naturally with the elbow bent, might very easily fire a ball into the brain at the angle observed.

Upon being questioned in regard to the bodily health of Mr. Leavenworth, he replied that the deceased appeared to have been in good condition at the time of his death, but that not being a physician, he could not speak conclusively upon the subject without further examination; and to the remark of a jurymen, observed that he had not seen pistol or weapon where else in either of the above-mentioned rooms.

"I might as well add here what he afterwards stated, that from the position of the table, the chair and the door behind it, the murderer, in order to satisfy all the conditions imposed by the situation, must have stood upon or just within the threshold of the passage way leading into the room beyond. Also, that as the ball was small and from a rifled barrel, and thus especially liable to deflections while passing through the air, the fragments, it seemed to him evident, that the victim had made an effort to raise or turn his head when advanced upon by his destroyer; the fearful conclusion being, that the footstep was an accounted one, the presence of its possessor in the room either known or expected.

"Any reason to suppose that robbery had been attempted?" "No, sir. Mr. Leavenworth's watch and purse were both in his pockets."

"Being asked to mention who were in the house at the time of the discovery, he replied: 'The young ladies, Miss Mary, Mary Leavenworth and Miss Eleanor, Mr. Harwell, Kate the cook, Molly the up-stairs girl, and myself.'"

"The usual members of the household?" "Yes, sir."

"Now, tell me whose duty it is to close up the house at night?" "Mine, sir."

"Sir," he replied at length, "I cannot answer yes or no to that question. In all probability I was the last to go to bed, but in a house as large as this I cannot be sure of even so simple a fact as that." Then observing the unsatisfied look on the faces around, added slowly, "It is my business to see him safe."

"Your business, oh, as his secretary, I suppose?" He gravely nodded.

"Mr. Harwell," the coroner went on, "the office of private secretary in this country is not a common one. Will you explain to us what your duties were in that capacity; in short, what use Mr. Leavenworth had for such an assistant and how he employed you?"

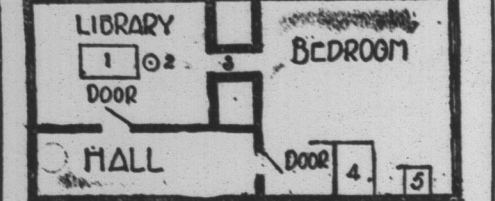
"Certainly," Mr. Leavenworth was, as you perhaps know, a man of great wealth. Connected with various societies, clubs, institutions, etc., besides being known far and near as a giving man, he was accustomed every day of his life to receive numerous letters, being in his engaged in the tea trade, he had made more than one voyage to China, and was consequently much interested in the question of international communication between that country and our own. Thinking that in his various visits there he had learned much which, if known to the American people, would conduce to our better understanding of the nation, its peculiarities and the best manner of dealing with it, he has been engaged for some time in writing a book on the subject, which since it has been my business for the last eight months to assist him in preparing, by writing at his dictation, three hours out of the twenty-four, the last hour being commonly taken from the evening, say from half-past nine to half-past ten, Mr. Leavenworth being a very methodical man and accustomed to regulate his own life and that of those about him with almost mathematical precision."

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PLAN OF THE FLAT. 1. Library Table. 2. Chair. 3. Passage-way. 4. Bed. 5. Shaving Stand.

FACTS AND DEDUCTIONS.

Turning my attention back into the room where I was, I found the coroner consulting a memorandum, through a very impressive pair of gold eye-glasses. "Is the butter here?" he asked. The coroner proceeded without hesitation to interrogate him.

THE CORONER'S INQUIRY.

For a few minutes I sat dazed by the sudden flood of light that greeted me from the many open windows. As fortune would have it, the coroner was no stranger to me. I had not only seen him before, but had had frequent conversation with him, as a fact, knew him. His name was Hammond, and he was universally regarded as a man of more than ordinary intelligence, fully capable of conducting the necessary examination with the necessary skill and address.