(Concluded from last week.)

"Ah, indeed; it's wonderful how long time tarries," said my host cheerfully. "Business good, Hood? I hope you are not losing by the experiment, I suppose," he said, turning to me again, "that it is a trying position to be in a subordinate state. Every one likes his independence."

I assented conventionally, and Hood waited very courteously until I had made my answer before he took up his to reply to his former master's ques-

"I can't complain, sir," he said "There's not much traffic in the Gwent, sir, but I do a certain business."

"Ah, I should have thought it a wiser policy to have gone nearer civilization, Hood. Why not have taken a place at Llanellan?"

A faint but respectful smile hovered on the man's nervous face. "I don't hold so much with Llanellan, sir. This is a tidy house, and business will improve. I hope."

"Well, well, let us hope so," was Mr. Kesteven's answer as his eyes wandered toward the inn. "A pretty place, is it not, Mr. Greatorex?" And then with a glance of scrutiny at the landlord, "You have had an accident, Hood?"

"Yes, sir." was the answer: "a slight accident, sir-nothing of consequence. I fell against the bar yesterday," and he put a finger apologetically to his clean shaved lip, which I now perceived to be somewhat swollen.

"A nasty fall, a nasty fall," said Mr. Kesteven, shaking his head. "It is lucky it was no worse." He moved away with a courteous nod of his head, to which the innkeeper responded with a salute. As he did so he turned and, taking my arm, smiled back at Hood. "You see the Gwent has its visitors sometimes, Hood. Mr. Greatorex is staying with me. So perhaps we may turn the Woodman in time into a fashionable resort of society." He laughed as if at his own small

fest, in which the innkeeper joined, and, pressing my arm, walked on. He seemed a very kindly master, I thought, and I had no doubt but that Hood had been an excellent servant. I remarked as much, to which he assented cordially. "I have never come upon a man who

fell into my ways better and knew his work more efficiently," he said. "An admirable servant-altogether admira-

Our walk had exhilarated me and, what is more, had given me a huge appetite. The result was that I ate heartily of lunch, which was delicately served by the agreeable old housekeeper. Mr. Kesteven also seemed to rally his appetite, for he had eaten but little the previous evening, and drank a good deal of brown sherry, in which he jestingly invited me to join him. But I was for the sour or perfumed claret, which I found much to my palate. Whether it was the sherry or not, my host's tongue plied very continuously during the meal, but always in the most possessed and civil manner. He spoke of his house, of his ancient descent (which was as ancient as the castle) and finally of himself. The Kestevens had been people of note in other centuries, had hoarded gains and fulfilled the pomp even of courts, had fluttered briefly and very brightly and in various characters across the stage of history. But now they were dwindled to this one old feeble man. The race had lost its physical vigor. From contesting tournaments, fighting battles and intriguing against courts it had come to philosophizing over life between four walls. And then, falling silent for a time, he inspected his finger nails and suddenly and after a space rose and pushed back his chair.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Greatorex," he said, with a gesture of apology. "I had not noticed you have not finished. Pray forgive my discourtesy."

Of course I put myself at his disposal, for, in truth, I had eaten and drunk quite enough. But, seeming not to hear me, he looked upon the table, and at last, raising his eyes to mine and playing gently, but scarcely in a nervous fashion, with the forks before him, he said very quietly:

quaintance for some twenty hours, Mr. Greatorex. It is little two men may know of each other in so brief a time. But I am wont to take quick cognizance of people and content to risk a mistake. You have, if you will forgive me saying so, an admirable habit of silence." He paused, and, as if it had been to justify his sentence. I held my rose out of the gloom as if to meet shortly afterward pushed open the tongue. "A recluse like myself-that him. I myself went down into the casement and looked out on the park. is how you would style me," he re- courtyard, and then found my way The dusk had settled on the forest at sumed, "must have some occupation I am no student. It follows that I have some other hobby—shall we say?" in his face. Naturally pale, it was now a second I kept my post, with my A ghost of a smile glittered on his of a peculiar and ghastly pallor, which head hanging from the window, uncerface, and then his head turned sharply toward a window which overlooked the courtyard. There was the sound "I am about to disclose to you, Mr. Greatorex, the secret of my seclusion."

of footsteps upon the rough cobble. I rose with him, strangely influenced by this solemn scene. Was it really solemn, or was it the mere whim of old age, the pompous revelation of sethe stone passage to the eastern wing of the castle. Fifty paces farther and, slipping away with that noiseless brought us to the entrance to the keep, but a dozen yards from this Mr. Kes-

teven paused and, turning the key in a heavy oaken door, entered a room of considerable size, which, as you will see, looked forth upon the back part of the park from the second floor. Like time he spoke no word save to direct A single lamp streamed faintly upon all the chambers in that ancient build-

ing, it was paneled with oak. save for a rickety chair or two and fixed upon the immediate purview. But | carpet. was wholly destitute of carpet, so that after awhile he uttered a little sigh, as I knelt swiftly and raised his head our feet rang loudly upon the stone of one whose deliberations had relieved loosening his coat and waistcoat. Bu floor. It seemed to me at that mo- 'him, and turned a mild eye upon me. | as I did so the movement brought the

against the wall and, stepping upon it | rived in Raymond.

"What do you want?" hat. "I beg your pardon, sir, I am nose took up the scent of mystery as a open, but there was nothing significant his mouth widened in a broader smile sure, but I called to know if you would hound sniffs the air, and when I spoke in that, I glanced out, but if any one than ever. "Then is it possible that be wanting that gun you spoke of the so abruptly it was only in the wish to had escaped that way the falling night you are ignorant, Mr. Greatorex?" said other day. Mrs. Main didn't know, let him understand that I thought my had long since swallowed him up. he. And looking at my interrogating and I thought that maybe it would

save time if I was to ask you myself." deportment, displayed no sign of nervousness, but only the rigid good manners of the trained servant. Mr. Kesteven stepped down from the chair and leisurely dusted his coat sleeves. Then he looked up, and the westering sun struck full upon his face, which I could not but observe was more color-

"No. thank you, Hood," he said suavely. "I have changed my mind. It was good of you, but I shall not need

The two men eyed each other for an instant, and then the servant's eyes fell with civil politeness.

"Thank you, sir. Sorry to trouble you, sir," he said and turned about on thrust upon you, a complete stranger, the threshold. But Mr. Kesteven stop- for a day and a night."

breathing hard, as from his exertions, "I should be obliged if you would kindly close that panel for me. I am Greatorex," he explained, turning to me with a faint smile. There was a perceptible pause for so

ready a servant, I thought, as Hood moved from his place by the door to where." obey the order. I thought, too, that I noticed a sudden flash of amazement pass in his eyes, but when he went by me they were merely deferential, and I imagined that I had been mistaken.

"And now, my friend," said Mr. Kesteven genially, putting his hand through mine when the panel had been closed, "we will get into the open air. We cannot avail ourselves too much or too often of these summer days; eh. Hood?" "No, sir," said Hood promptly, with

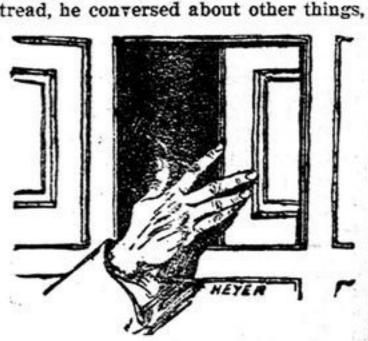
the promptness of a machine and with no more inflection than a good servant should have. "Ah, I feel it myself, Mr. Greatorex,

said the old man, leaning somewhat heavily upon my arm as we issued from the chamber.

Hood closed and locked the door

"The key, sir," he said respectfully,

"Oh. the key will do where it is," replied Mr. Kesteven, without looking round. "Leave it in the lock, Hood." As we retraced our steps along the corridor, which echoed dull to the



The panel slid back.

from mine.

"If you will excuse me for a few alcoves of the dining room. minutes, Mr. Greatorex," he said, "I will join you in the dining room."

into the large oaken dining room. When he entered, some few minutes later, I was astounded by the change lence, indefinite, but perturbing. For gave his head almost the appearance tain as to the direction of the cry. Then of a skull. Laying a finger on my arm, I grew aware that it came from within he spoke quite sharply.

"Mr. Greatorex," said he, "you can myself, I stood up still within the do me a particular favor if you will." room and listened. Again it rose, some-I listened, murmuring my willingness. what shrill and ghastly, echoing from "Can you drive me to Raymond at the floor above. Now, the dining room, once? I will have the horses put in as I have explained, was upon the

"Most certainly," I answered, staring and at a loss for more words.

"I owe you many thanks," he said, tottering gait of his, he disappeared and bounded up the stone staircase

into the courtyard. It was not fifteen minutes ere we the corridor I made straight for my were upon the road. I drove the mare host's room without any reason, but at a rapid pace, being conscious of my under the guidance of mere impulse. companion's restlessness, and for a The door stood ajar, and I flung it open. me at the crossroads, but lay back on the room and its contents, illumining his seat with his arms folded, his hat with a silver radiance the old man's The room was devoid of furniture lowering upon his eyes and his eyes body where it lay stretched upon the

"You drive well, my friend," he said. "From all appearances you have a hard nerve. It is well. It is well. It is the one thing I have aimed at, and I might have succeeded had not my ascendants weakened the blood." I told him that so far as I could see

he had no reason to complain of his

"You think so? Then it seems that you are not only a silent but an observing person," he said, smiling. "But you are wrong-you are wrong. Nevertheless, I am glad to find you so observant. My dear sir, there is nothing so important as observation. Education and breeding and birth, these you may buy or feign, but observation is ment, and with the odd preparations the measure of a man's character." for that mission, that I was, so to speak, With that he sank into silence once upon the very edge of a mysterious dis- more, nor, so far as I can recall, did covery. Mr. Kesteven placed a chair we exchange one sentence till we arwith difficulty, raised his hand till it | We drew up in the main street, off a

touched the topmost panel near the large and formless building, upon the window. There followed a slight creak, door of which was emblazoned the and the panel slid back, disclosing a name of a solicitor and public notary. dark and vacant space in which I could | And here, begging me to await him, | The old man's body lay stretched upon dimly discern the separation of shelves. the old gentleman alighted and entered My host had but dropped his fingers the house. It was not very long after- face into the glow of the lamp, and I should revisit the neighborhood. into the recesses of this cupboard when | ward that he reappeared with a pleas- saw it was struck with a deadly pala faint noise caught his ears, and he ant little lawyer behind him, and I noturned abruptly. I had followed him | ticed that he himself seemed very well | rang a peal of bells for the housekeepopen. But I turned now with him and off his mind; but, to tell the truth, I not a matter of more than a minute, at a loss to account for, I could not followed the direction of his gaze. The felt that it was time I had some ex- my glance ran around the bedroom. but recognize. man Hood stood forward in the door- planation. It was not that I grudged Could it be possible that there was way with an apologetic air. Mr. Kes- the old gentleman my fellowship, such foul play? I could see no signs of vioteven's hand dropped sharply, and with as it was, and it certainly was not that lence upon the body-for that it was only idea was, for Mr. Kesteven's sake, a certain brusqueness he demanded, I was tired of the experience. Quite but a poor corpse I had no doubt, since to smooth his affairs for his succesthe contrary. I was tantalized by the horrible color of the face had been sors." The ex-valet touched an imaginary these strange tastes of adventure. My revealed to me. The window stood fidelity had earned its wages

"It is well to be armed at all points, He was a perfect model of servile my friend," he had remarked compla- ing a paper. This I gently withdrew, cently. "I find a complete equipment and as I did so the housekeeper knockis a solace against possible evils."

"That's very true," I said, "and I am delighted if my small services this afternoon have, as it would seem, been the happy occasion of suggesting to you this comfortable reflection. But now, if you will excuse me, Mr. Kesteven. I will put my thanks in your hands for a very agreeable hospitality "Let him gallop all the way."

He was visibly disconcerted, as I had fearfully. hoped he would be.

"You are not thinking of your inn?" he demanded after a pause in which he recovered. "My dear sir," I replied, "I have been

"As you are here. Hood," he said, "I don't think we are strangers to each perplexity. I was embarrassed by so other, Mr. Greatorex," he observed strange a sequence of accidents. Some-

quietly. "I dare say we understand where behind and still aloof, but self one another better than appears. If, confessed, as it were, by the conduct not so young as I was, naturally, Mr. however, it be any relief to your con- and deportment of my unfortunate science, I assure you that I am much host, hung the shadows of a mystery better for your company. But," he to which I had no clew. It was plain added dryly, "I should be the last to that he had a secret which he kept hold you if your duty claims you else-We looked at each other for a mo-

ment, in which time I noted a twinkle gleaming in his eyes, and then simultaneously, I think, we burst forth into laughter.

"Come, come, I think I understand Mr. Greatorex," said he, "and the understanding notches another score to you in my stick. I admit that you have a right to something further. I freely confess it, only I am an old man and must take my time. Are we agreed?" "My dear sir," said I hastily, "I

would not press you for the world, and I am no more inquisitive than any honest man who hopes that he might be of some service to a friend in trouble." "You are very good," he returned

gently. "You can be silent, and you can proffer a question at the right time. I think all the better of you. And for what you say of friendship, why, I am sincerely obliged to you, and I think you can render me an invaluable aid." "I have no warmer wish." I answered, and I turned the horse's head forth-

with upon the road to the Gwent. We reached the castle in the twilight, but it was not until after dinner that Mr. Kesteven reverted to the subject of our conversation. He was very bright during the meal and talked with more wit and philosophy than I had yet seen in him. But when he had finished he drew away from the table and said more soberly:

ered from several signs that there is | vellow with the dust and dirt of year important news for myself. I had much worn in parts and its marg thought that it would be unnecessary until tomorrow, but it will be best to lilegible, but I made out, with some night. It is more wise to be prepared. difficulty, the faint and ancient letter-If you will pardon me for a short time | This was how the document ran: but made no reference whatever to the I will return directly, and in the meanmatter upon which he had been en- time I dare say you can amuse yourgaged when we were interrupted. At self with one of those venerable space of some thirty footsteps and a "I have had the honor of your ac- the top of the stairway he took his arm books," concluding with a glance to the close thereof to pause and survey ward the shelves which occupied the

When he had gone I obeyed him mechanically, taking down several of the He walked backward a few yards musty volumes, though my mind at toward the room which I had learned that moment was very far from their was his bedroom, and as he did so the contents. Indeed, I could make no lean figure of the deferential innkeeper long pretense of interest in them and last. All lay very still.

Suddenly a sound rose on the si the house, and, hurriedly withdrawing ground floor, and Mr. Kesteven's room, as well as my room and most of the living chambers, was above it on the northern wing of the castle. I ran quickly therefore through the doorway three steps at a time. When I reached



the carpet.

lor. I lifted him upon the bed and When I turned again to the body I noticed that one of the hands was clutched at the door and called upon her master in an agitated voice.

"Come in." I said in low tones, "Your master is very ill. Where is the nearest doctor?" "At Llanellan, sir," said she tremu-

"Send the man posthaste." I ordered. "Is he"- she asked, and stared at me

"Yes, I fear so," I answered.

CHAPTER IV.

HE events of that day, together with the two surprising sequels, to which I shall come presently, set me for the whole His face suffused with amusement. of a week upon the horns of doubt and very private and to which I should have been admitted on the very eve of his unhappy death. That death, so to say, had robbed me of my opportunity, and I could see no means to regain it. My dim suspicion that he had come by his end through violence was dissipated soon enough. The doctor certified to heart disease, from which he told me that Mr. Kesteven had long suf-

"He might have gone off any moment, Mr. Greatorex," he explained. "A shock, a violent exertion, even a strong emotion-this would suffice to determine the climax of the disease." A shock! The word lingered somehow in my thoughts without particular reason. The cries I had heard might well enough have been drawn from the old man in his last pains, and yet I had the impression that such deaths were usually instant, if not painless. Those shrieks had been prolonged and reiterated.

And here it was that I had my first surprise. Under the stress of the painful emotions of that time I had forgotten the leaf of paper which I had taken from the dead fingers. But while I was revolving the circum stances of the mystery the recollection of it flashed suddenly upon me, and feeling in my pockets I discovered where it had remained since the en trance of the housekeeper. It w broad daylight, and the doctor fr Llanellan had just gone from the house. I laid the paper upon my be.. "I have had important news today, room table and studied it coreful; Mr. Greatorex, or, rather, I have gath- It was of stiff parchment and staine gnawed as if by mice or rats. T. to trouble you in regard to my affairs | characters were faded and well night

"Turning this corner, it is necessary to proceed upon the passage for the the walls. If ye will then duly determine a height of five feet from the footway thereupon will be disclosed a small knobbe, the which revolving will give access to a large cupboard within ve wall. Observe carefully upon the back of the cupboard and where the

oaken pannells adjoin the stone. Here ye will perceive a spring, the which pushing a doorway shall open behind, giving entry to an interior chamber. A flight of stairway leadeth thence"-Here the parchment had suffered so grossly at the hands of time or from the assaults of its natural enemies that

the characters became unreadable and finally ceased. It was plain that this sheet had some connection with the disclosure Mr. Kesteven had intended to make to me, but beyond this conclusion I could not go. And so after a desultory study of the ancient characters I put it aside, locking it more by habit than of intentional

prudence in my private letter case. I now stood honorably charged with the last offices to my dead friend. An inquest was inevitable in the circumstances, but it was no more than a formality, and my evidence, with that of the housekeeper, Mrs. Main, and the doctor from Llanellan, was sufficient to close the investigation. It was not until these ceremonies were over that I experienced my second surprise, a surprise which, although I had become somewhat acquainted with the eccentricities of the man, fell upon me like a thunderbolt. Upon the morning after the funeral I rode into Raymond to pay a visit to the lawyer, Greenstreet by name, who I understood, acted on Mr.

Kesteven's behalf. I regarded this the last of my melancholy duties, which discharged, I was free once more to resume the tonr which had been so strangely interrupted. Mr. Greenstreet, the little fat, bowing solicitor whom had already seen, received me with polite ceremony. His face wore a mingled expression of solicitude and satisfaction as he fussed in a nervous manner with his papers.

"A most melancholy end, Mr. Greatorex," said he, shaking his head; "so sudden, and a sterling, honorable man, sir. Well, we must all go some day." I put the question for which I had come and in response was saluted with a stare of astonishment.

"Any assistance, Mr. Greatorex?" he echoed, surveying me, with his mouth open. "Any assistance? Well, I suppose you can be of some assistance." And he chuckled heartily, as if inviting me to join in his joke. I told him that I was leaving the dis-

trict that same day and would like to know in what way I might aid him. seeing that it was improbable that I "Then you do not intend to reside at

the castle?" he asked. There was a certain tone of condeminto the room, and the door stood pleased. He talked as if a load was er. While she was coming, which was nation in his voice which, though I was

> "Why, certainly not!" said I, "Why in the name of fortune should I? My

The little man started to his feet, and face he positively beamed. "Why, yes, it must be so," he said excitedly. "Mr. Kesteven, sir, by a will under date of

Aug. 16, has made you his sole heir." It was now my turn for amazement. The unexpectedness of the news left me agape, and then, after the first moment of silence. I felt my ears slowly growing warm, and I knew that I was blushing red as a peony in my confusion and astonishment

The greedy little lawyer enjoyed the effects of his surprise. "But the natural heirs"- I began,

stammering. "There are none," said he promptly. "The late Mr. Kesteven had no near relatives."

"The will"— I protested feebly. "Was made three days ago. I, of course, assumed that you were well acquainted with its contents-a few legacies to his housekeeper and the servants, and yourself the residuary legatee. In order, however, net to raise your expectations too high, Mr. Greatorex," he proceeded, now more coolly and quite officially, "I may say that there is little beyond the castle itself-a bare competence and no

I waved my hand. "Good heavens!" said I. "But what right have I"-"It is scarcely a question that re-

quires an answer," he replied dryly, "so long as Mr. Kesteven had the right. But, by the way, I may say-and it is



Mr. Greenstreet received me with cere-

a curious coincidence"-and here he rummaged among his papers-"if you are anxious to get rid of the castle, I dare say it can be managed. Oddly enough, only this morning I had a letter from a firm of solicitors in London, assuming it was for sale and inquiring the terms. Let me see. Ah, here it is!" He handed me the letter, which was directed from the offices of a firm in Pardoe street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. "Quick work," I commented

The little solicitor assented. "It is a beautiful neighborhood," he replied, rather proudly, "and the castle is a fine building. Very antique, remarkably antique."

The adjectives were hardly chosen to my taste, but I could find no fault with the sentiment. Yet it seemed strange that a purchaser should have been so instant; I had understood that the experience was uncommon in the property market. As I sat contemplating the letter Mr. Greenstreet inter-

"Well, sir," said he, smiling, "am I to entertain the offer?" "No." I answered, though I could hardly have said why. "You will live on the property?" inquired the lawyer.

"Yes," I replied, adding, "for the But, in truth, I was in no state of

mind to determine upon any particular course with definition, so involved were my emotions in the face of the extraordinary news I had heard. It was an amazing stroke of good luck which by a signature of a dozen letters converted a comparatively impecunious and briefless barrister into the proprietor of an ancient estate. These thoughts and feelings moved me as I rode back to the castle, quite oblivious of my earlier resolution to be gone from Raymond and the scene of that disaster. It seemed now that I was definitely bound up with the fortunes of the place unless I accepted Greenstreet's offer to negotiate a sale of the property for me. I had fallen into a reverie-nor am I ashamed to confess that it was a very pleasant reverie-when I reached the top of the hill upon which the castle stood. That hurried drive which Mr. Kesteven and I had undertaken three

days previously had obviously been for the purpose of executing the will. I now asked myself the motive which had induced him so to favor a casual acquaintance, but I could find no answer save in the general eccentricity of his conduct. He had died without a relative, even without a friend, as it appeared, and to that fact the mere addition of a passing whim, generated possibly under a stress of unknown emotion, must suffice to explain his behavior. At that phrase of my own, "unknown emotion," I was pulled up sharply once more. What was there at the back of all these incongruous and incomprehensible incidents? In current of these reflections I almost rode over the innkeeper Hood by the entrance of the park. He saluted me pass and gliding noiselessly to open the iron gates. At the sight of him the lawyer's statement as to the contents of the will recurred to me, and I reined in, giving him good day.

"This has been a sad business, sir he ventured in his even tones. I nodded, replying with some com

"Especially, sir, for poor Mr. Kesteven, who was, in a manner of speaking, quite alone in the world." "Yes," said I, though the remark was

perhaps irrelevant. "So Mr. Green-

street, his lawyer, tells me." Hood's glance met mine, as though he would inquire of me; but feeling, no doubt, that this would be too great a liberty, his eyes reverted to the gate, which he still held open respectfully.

"Mr. Greenstreet tells me," I went on, "and I suppose I am free to repeat it, that your old master has left you a small legacy."

The man started visibly, and for a abroad. I always told poor Mr. Kes-He seemed almost as surprised as I had been, but he recovered his astonishment next minute and dropped his "Thank you, sir. It is very kind of

him-Mr. Kesteven, I mean. I served him three years, and a better master no man need want." "He paid you a similar compliment," said I, smiling.

"He was always very good to me, He stood silent, as though for me to enter, but as I did so he said respect-

"I suppose we shall be losing you, sir? It's a great thing for Mr. Kesteven to have had you with him in his

which I really could not restrain in my excited condition, "not just yet, Hood, I think. I'm afraid you'll have to put up with my company for a little longer. You see, Mr. Greenstreet informs me that I am, quite unexpectedly, left heir to the castle."

If Hood were as much astonished at this statement as at his own good fortune, he certainly did not show it. I caught one glance of his extraordinary eyes, and then he had turned and was | way was so good humored and withal so closing the gate.

wants an owner, and I hope you'll be room, and being apparently a talkative living here, sir." I told him I did not yet know and rode up the park, leaving him to fix

the locks. I had said no less than the truth when I had answered Hood's questry, and I found myself suddenly elevated to new dignity in the eyes of the

"I'm not a bad fellow," he was good enough to explain, "but I'm a devilish fool. All the Montgomerys are. We've had a lot to put up with. Our estate's had fallen, unrelieved by stars. I rang no better than a barnyard. We're a pack of idiots, that's what we are, Mr. Greatorex. And when there's liquor about- Well, you know what it is."

I didn't quite follow out his meaning, but, on the whole, he struck me as a very amiable fellow, honest accord-

ing to his lights, and bearing a certain distinction of person which, derived from a long and gentle race, could not wholly be concealed in the dull and uneducated individuality of its last representative. He certainly knew a great deal about horses, and as a result we grew very friendly ere he left. When he did so, it was with a frank hope, boyishly expressed, that I intended to live at the castle. But it was not due to the arguments

of Montgomery that I finally decided to stay at the castle, but to an incident very different, which fell out in the following way on the next evening: I had dined early, and as the light was still very full across the valley I sauntered out through the park and wandered down the road toward Woodman, When I reached the inn I stranger leaning against the stone coping before the doorway smoking a cigar. At this moment Hood emerged from the taproom, and I nodded to him, asking if he had heard yet from

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir," he replied. "It's a very welcome present, sir; many thanks to my poor master." "Well, you seem to be getting on, said I, with a glance toward the stranger, who, seeing my eyes on him, lifted his hat and smiled.

lower voice. "The gentleman's come to stay a bit, sir. Name Captain Sercombe, sir. You don't happen to know him? No, sir. I thought I'd mention it, in case you did. The gentleman likes the fresh air, sir. He's been living

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second his dark eyes shone on mine. teven that I'd make it pay, sir." And a furtive smile crept into Hood's somber face and broadened it into a grin. The stranger advanced in a leisurely fashion and said good day; then, cocking an eye at the clouds, asked me my opinion of the weather. I gathered that he was a fisherman and that the stream in the valley had excited his hopes. He was a very tall men of forty or more, somewhat stoutly built and with a military gait. His face, which was bare save for a long reddish mustache, was puffy and swollen, but he had a pleasant gray-green eye and a genial and engaging manner. His thin red hair was carefully brushed over a rather bald head.

"My landlord tells me there has been a death up yonder," said he, nodding "Well," said I, with a little laugh, toward the castle. "A regular romance, if I'm right in supposing you are Mr. Greatorex?" I told him that I was.

"Ah, well, you're very lucky." I replied somewhat coldly that he seemed to know more than I did my-

"Come, come," said he, with a laugh.

"My dear sir, we are all gossips, and, after all. I was bound to talk of something besides the weather," and his frank that I could not but join in his "I'm sure I congratulate you, sir, if laugh. In the issue I accepted his inyou'll pardon the liberty. The castle, vitation to drink a little whisky in his fellow he was very soon in the full swing of soliloguy. I must confess that he was an entertaining talker: He had seen a vast deal of life and in many countries. He had apparently been a soldier of fortune since he left tions, but circumstances soon made my the English army, for he spoke of servresolution for me. The rumor of my ice with the Peruvians, of brushes and inheritance was spread about the coun- escapades in sundry parts of South America and of multifarious adventures in several continents. It might neighborhood. And the first fruits of have seemed odd that the lord of Ivon this celebrity appeared in an unexpect- castle should be seated there in the ed visit from my young acquaintance, parlor of a shabby inn, hobnobbing Montgomery. His farm, it seemed, was over whisky and cigars with an utter a mile or two from the castle, lying in stranger about whom he knew nothing the next valley, and he rode over to and cared less, but I myself was little offer me his congratulations. It was better than a fellow stranger, and at plain that he had not been so deep in all events I required no excuses for liquor as he had appeared upon that myself. It has ever been my habit to evening at the Swan, for he was huge- give myself full license in my commune ly embarrassed during the interview with my fellows, and in the result I and more than once offered to reflect have usually found the custom producupon himself in somewhat deprecating tive of amusement and interest. We parted on friendly terms, and I congratulated myself as I walked home upon a very agreeable neighbor.

When I reached the castle the night

for a lamp and retired to my bedroom for a pocketbook which I had left in one of the drawers in an old bureau. I remembered to have placed it in the left hand drawer in the secretary. took the key from my pocket and twisted it in the lock, but as it would not turn I became impatient and shook the handles. The lid fell open of itself. Clearly it had not been locked. And yet I could have testified in a court of law that I had locked it in the afternoon. Furthermore, my pocketbook was not where I had left it, but in a lower drawer. The oddness roused my curiosity, and I went carefully through the drawers only to find that without a doubt they had been conscientiously and scrupulously rummaged by some one. The thought was not inviting. I sat down in a chair to consider. Later I went down to the dining hall and made out my notes for the day. A letter by the second post, which arrived late in the evening, lay, to my hand on the table. The situation demanded a patient temper and some thought. It threatened to discover a grave climax. So far my reflecnoticed in the twilight the figure of a tions led me. Why had my bureau been rified? What did this robber want? And yet again the problem fell upon me, something darkling, but urgent, importunate-had any one visited Mr. Kesteven through that open window in the article of his death? The confluence of these questions embarrassed me, and I opened my letter ab-

It was from Greenstreet and invited my consideration of the offer made by the London solicitors. They were pressing to know my price for the castle. I seized a sheet of paper and scribbled a line, scaling and stamping the envelope ere I went to bed. It was merely was not in the market.

(Continued on Page 2.)

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