

THE HEIR OF ROTHWELL CHASE.

By T. W. SPEIGHT.

CHAPTER III.

"You will pardon the question, Sir Harry," went on Dimwade presently—they were strolling up and down the shrubberies by this time—"but do you happen to know of any one who has a spite against you, or who would be likely to revenge himself, or herself, for any fancied wrong or slight, by making off with your grandson?"

"So far as I am aware, I have not an enemy in the world, and I say it with thankfulness."

"I wish all of us could say the same," answered the detective with a dry smile. "Now, in case of anything serious happening to your grandson"—Sir Harry winced perceptibly—"who would be the next heir to the title and estates?"

"My nephew, sir," he answered shortly. "May I presume, sir, that you and your nephew are on friendly terms?"

"No, sir, you may not. Friendly terms, indeed!"—with a snort of disdain. "Nothing of the kind."

"Um,—and your nephew resides where, if I may ask?"

"In London. Clerk in ship-broker's office, or something of that kind."

"You could not oblige me with his address, I suppose now, Sir Harry?" This very insinuatingly.

"No, sir; I could not. Don't want to know it. Never want to see his face again—an impudent jackanapes. If you want to find out about him, ask the Dowager Lady Cosgrave. I have no doubt she can tell you what you want to know."

It was evident to Dimwade that he had unwittingly touched Sir Harry on a sore place, but it quite answered his purpose to find that he had done so. "The Dowager Lady Cosgrave," he murmured to himself. "Shan't forget."

Suddenly, Sir Harry came to a halt and grasped Dimwade by the lapel of his coat. "What's your object—what are you driving at," he demanded brusquely, "in asking me so many questions about my nephew?"

"I am simply prosecuting the inquiry, Sir Harry—always, of course, in your interests—in the way in which, according to my judgment of the case as it stands, it ought to be followed up," replied the detective dryly. "What we are now considering is the question of motive."

"But you don't mean to infer that my nephew, the son of my only brother, could be such a consummate villain as to"—He broke off short and stared blankly at Dimwade.

"Not for one moment do I infer anything, Sir Harry. I am gathering information—nothing more."

Sir Harry walked on muttering half-loud: "What!—my own nephew. No, no! Bad he may be, but not bad enough for that. I'll not believe it.—And yet worse things come to light every day. And then the temptation! Only a child of three between him and the title. (Not but what I'm good for another dozen years yet.) No; it would be incredible."

At this moment a footman came in search of Sir Harry. Lord Casterton and Mr. Blount-Morris, anxious for news, had ridden over thus early to the Chase. Sir Harry hurried away. He would see Inspector Dimwade again a little later in the day.

"There's no call for you to stay longer," said the London officer to Yardley when the two were left alone. "Besides, there may be news waiting for you. Of course, the moment you hear anything of consequence, you will send word to the Chase as speedily as possible. Meanwhile, I'll have a quiet look round on my own account."

As soon as his colleague had taken his departure, Dimwade drew from his pocket a list of the inmates of the Chase and everybody connected with it, either as indoor servant or outdoor, which he had himself drawn up from information supplied him by Sir Harry, and ran his eyes over it to refresh his memory. Then he lighted a cigar and strolled in the direction of the stables.

The day wore on without bringing a message of any kind from Superintendent Yardley, while Mr. Dimwade went about his inquiries in his own quiet way. Early in the evening finding there was nothing more for him to do at the Chase, he walked over to Berriemore with the view of ascertaining how matters were progressing there. He found that various telegrams had been received from different points, announcing the arrest of this or the other suspicious character, only to be followed up by other messages an hour or two later to the effect that the said suspicious characters, having been able to give a satisfactory account of themselves, had been duly set at liberty. Four-and-twenty hours had now gone by since the disappearance of the heir of Rothwell Chase without bringing the faintest clue to the mystery. It may be that Inspector Dimwade was more puzzled than he cared to confess; but in any case he put a good face on the matter, even to his friend Yardley.

No news being forthcoming by this morning, Mr. Dimwade travelled up to London by the forenoon train. In the course of the following day he carried out a certain inquiry on which he had set his mind—that is to say, he satisfied himself that Evan Marchmont had not been out of London, nor, indeed, away from his office duties, on the day of the abduction.

The only thing now left for him to do was to report to headquarters that, so far, he had nothing to report, which is not a pleasant statement for a zealous officer to have to put his name to. Of course, he would still continue to keep an eye on the case, while trusting that the active search which was being everywhere prosecuted would not fail in finding, ere long, some traces of the child, either living or dead.

Two days later, Sir Harry Marchmont, without consulting anybody, put forth the offer of a reward of two hundred and fifty pounds for the recovery of the missing heir, an offer which, after the lapse of a week, was doubled in amount.

During this time, Inspector Dimwade came and went more than once between London and the Chase; but all the laying together of heads, as between himself and Superintendent Yardley, seemed to bring the mystery no nearer a solution than it had been all along. Then presently Dimwade's services were requisitioned for the unravelling of a famous poisoning case, and he was seen no more at Berriemore or the Chase. As day succeeded day without bringing any tidings of the lost child, the cloud which had settled over the Chase and its inmates

deepened and darkened till the torch of hope which had burnt so brightly at first, was all but quenched in utter gloom. All felt the influence, from highest to lowest. Sir Harry moped about the house, a disconsolate and forlorn old man, out of whose life nearly all its remaining spring and energy had faded in a few short days. Even the servants went about their duties with hushed voices and abashed demeanour, as though some one slydead in the house.

Sir Harry had never realized till now, not merely how dear the lost boy was to him, but to what an extent his hopes and ambitions were wrapped up in him. It seemed strange, but he had never cared for his son when a child as he cared for this younger Frank. Now that his term of existence was drawing towards a close, the young life which in the natural order of things would "take up the running" when for him the race would be over, had an attractive force such as had never drawn him towards the boy's father at a time when death—his own death—had seemed as yet nothing more than a pale phantom only dimly to be discerned through the long vista of the years to come.

Sir Harry, who himself opened the post-bag and distributed the letters, had more than once in the course of the last twelve months congratulated himself in secret on the fact that he never came across a letter to his ward addressed to her in a masculine hand, and had, in consequence, laid the flattering unction to his soul that, whatever might be the state of their feelings towards each other, the engagement between Edeline and his nephew had not so far developed that acute stage of the disorder which strives to console itself for the absence of the beloved object by frequent epistolary communications. But in so thinking, Sir Harry deceived himself, or, rather, was deceived by his "scapegrace of a nephew." Evan Marchmont's letters, of which Edeline received one each week without fail, were invariably addressed for him by the wife of the friend with whom he lodged, so that the baronet, who was aware that his ward still kept up a correspondence with some of her school-friends, after a casual glance at the address, passed his nephew's letters on to her in bland unconsciousness of the real contents of the envelope. Miss Fenton's conscience did not fail to prick her now and again, for although the ruse was a harmless one, it was a deception none the less. Yet, on the other hand, for her lover to have openly addressed his letters himself would in all probability have sufficed to rouse Sir Harry's irascible temper, and have ended by provoking a scene between herself and her guardian which would have been productive of no good result on either side. For this reason it was that Edeline continued to accord a tacit sanction to the scheme devised by her lover, in preference to risking a rupture between her guardian and herself.

In the establishment in which Evan Marchmont was employed the annual holidays had of necessity to be spread over a period of several months, so as to ensure that too many members of the staff should not be away at one time. As a result of the arrangement in question, it so happened this year that Evan's holidays had to be taken some three or four months earlier than was agreeable to him. As soon as the date had been fixed, he wrote to Edeline, informing her of the fact, as also that he should spend a certain portion of the time at Berriemore, it being quite out of the question that he could sustain existence any longer on no more satisfactory diet than a letter once in seven days.

Evan was not quite a stranger to the Chase or its neighborhood. Three summers before, he had come down to Berriemore during the annual absence of the family, and by dint of a little judicious bribery, had been allowed to see over the mansion and explore the grounds. The Chase had been the home of his ancestors for several generations, as also the birthplace of his father, and Evan had been actuated by laudable desire to become acquainted with the old roof-tree, although, through no fault of his own, he had been compelled to do so surreptitiously or not at all.

It was in a certain natural glade, or clearing in the grounds, known as the Chestnut Walk, that Evan and Edeline had agreed to meet. The so-called walk was in the heart of a thickly-planted belt of woodland, and could only be reached by a couple of narrow winding paths through the trees, one at either end. It was a most secluded spot, and the lovers felt that there, if anywhere, they would be safe from observation. Close to one end of the Walk was a long-dried-up fountain, the massive masonry of which, now covered with moss and lichens of various kinds, was falling more completely into ruin year by year.

Our lovers had not met since Evan's stormy interview with his uncle, a year before, when the baronet had carried off his ward to the Chase, fully determined to do all that lay in his power to keep the young people asunder. That they had much to say to each other this afternoon which would in nowise interest any third person, may at once be assumed; therefore, we will discreetly allow them a quarter of an hour to themselves before venturing to intrude on their privacy.

As a matter of course, Evan had already heard all about the disappearance of his youthful cousin, both through the newspapers and by means of the ample particulars which Edeline had supplied him with from time to time. To-day, however, as they paced the Chestnut Walk arm in arm, he heard the story afresh from her lips, and thereby had the affair brought more vividly home to him than by either the printed or written details while he was at a distance.

"By the way, dear," said Edeline, "I think I understood you to say just now that you have taken up your quarters at the Black Swan Hotel. If so, you have Mr. Romer Vodney for one of your fellow-guests."

"And who may Mr. Romer Vodney be?"

"A private inquiry agent—in other words, a private detective—who made his appearance at the Chase a few days after Inspector Dimwade's last visit, and asked your uncle's sanction, which it is scarcely needful to say he at once obtained, to his starting an independent investigation on his own account."

"Of course, this Mr. Vodney did not appear on the scene till after the offer of the five hundred pounds reward. Such fellows never do.—By the way, what kind of looking man is he?"

"Tall, very thin, and somewhat round shouldered; clean shaven, with shallow aquiline features; keen restless black eyes, and an unkempt mass of oily-looking black hair. In age about thirty."

"A study from the life, and one which

renders it impossible to mistake the fellow. He was in the billiard-room last evening when I strolled in, and there was something peculiar about him which caused me to wonder who and what he could be. In any case, he is decidedly clever with the cue, and contrived to pocket sundry half-crowns during the hour or so that I remained in the room."

When at length the lovers contrived to tear themselves apart, it was with a mutual promise to meet at the same hour and place the following afternoon.

"I have been making a few quiet inquiries about Mr. Vodney since I saw you yesterday," said Evan. "At the hotel, nobody seems to know his business or anything about him; not, perhaps, that that is to be wondered at, seeing he may not improbably have his own reasons for keeping his profession a secret. But what does seem singular is the fact that he never rises till close on mid-day, and that both his afternoons and evenings are invariably passed in the billiard-room. If he goes out at all, it is merely for half an hour's stroll in the town with a cigar before dinner. Now, what I should like to know is how a man who spends his time as Vodney spends his, can, as a matter of fact, be ferreting out and piecing together the details of a case which has admittedly baffled the efforts of two experienced and trained officials. That is a problem which I confess I am altogether at a loss to solve."

"One of Mr. Vodney's most significant remarks to your uncle," replied Edeline, "was to the effect that if the theory he had formed of the mystery were the right one, the clue to it must be sought not inside the Chase but outside it."

"All which in no way tends to make his conduct seem less unaccountable. By the way, has he been to the Chase at all since the great occasion of seeing my uncle?"

"Yes; he was there only two days ago."

"Ah! And what had he to say for himself?"

"What he said was, that he felt nearly sure he had hit upon a clue which in the course of a few days would put him on the right track, but that he would refrain from saying more just then."

"Did he ask my uncle for any money in the way of an advance towards any expenses he might have been put to?"

"No; he did not even hint at such a thing."

Evan tilted his hat an inch farther back on his head. "All I can say is that I'm more mystified than ever," was his remark. "I wish I knew the fellow's London address—if he has one."

"Then your wish can very easily be gratified. His address was printed on the card he sent in to your uncle the first time he called at the Chase. It is No. 5a Heathfield Gardens, W. C."

Evan at once proceeded to take a note of the address in his pocket-book. That evening, after he got back to Berriemore, he telegraphed a certain question to one of his friends in London. By noon next day an answer came to the following purport: "No such person as the one named in your message is known at the address given by you."

This reply did not fail to deepen the feeling of distrust with which Evan had already begun to regard Mr. Vodney and his pretensions. Yet, to suppose that the man was simply an impostor, who had been induced to take up the case by the hope of obtaining the reward, was scarcely a feasible assumption in view of the fact that the five hundred pounds would not be forthcoming except in return for some bona-fide information which would lead to the recovery of the boy. The more Evan considered the affair the more puzzled he became.

When he met Edeline again, which he did that afternoon in the Chestnut Walk, they could only wonder and surmise together, and put questions to each other which, till further enlightenment should come from some quarter, there was no possibility of their being able to answer. Between whiles they had their own personal matters to attend to—sweet confidences to exchange, vows of unalterable love to reiterate—not that any such iteration was needed on either side, but simply because it is so sweet to be told again and yet again by the lips most dear to us that we are beloved.

When Evan got back to Berriemore, he found, to his chagrin, that he had either lost or mislaid a silver cigarette case by which he set great store. It had been the gift of a dear friend, since dead, and he valued it accordingly. At once he called to mind that he had had it last that afternoon in the Chestnut Walk. While waiting for Edie, he had sat down by the ruined fountain and lighted a cigarette; then, instead of putting the case back into his pocket, he must, in pure absent-mindedness, have laid it down on the stone-work and there have left it. The question was, whether he should go back at once and search for it, or risk leaving it where it was till he met Edie there on the morrow? The place was a lonely one, and little likely to be intruded on meanwhile; still, he felt that he should not readily forgive himself if his dead friend's gift were lost through any remissness on his part. The evening was a fine one, he was tired of the hotel and its company, and he decided that he could not do better than go back and search for his missing property.

On this particular evening he found himself back at the fountain in due course. There, just as he had left it, was the cigarette case he had come in search of. The moon was rising by this time. It was not yet high enough in the heavens to overtop the loftier branches of the encircling trees, on which the tender buds of spring were here and there bursting into leaf; but its rays, filtering through them, made an intricate fit ballroom for elves and fairies and other shy creatures of the night, whose revels the "inward eye" as Phantasy alone is privileged to behold.

So still and beautiful at this hour was the spot, that Evan, heated somewhat by his walk, seated himself where he had sat in the afternoon, and proceeded after the fashion of his age and kind, to conciliate the tutelary spirit of the place by burnt-offering in the shape of tobacco. Then he fell to thinking about his lady-love, and what more delightful occupation could any young man have at such an hour and in such a place? His meerschaum had burnt itself out without his being aware of the fact, so immersed was he in the pleasant process of aerial castle-building, when something broke his reverie on a sudden and caused him to look up with startled eyes. From the footway which gave admittance to the glade at the point nearest the Chase, a dimly-outlined female figure had glided into view, and after advancing a little way over the checkered floor of silver

bar and shadow, now stood motionless as in the act of listening. Evan's first thought was that it was Edie, whom some strange chance or magnetic attraction had brought there again at the very time he was thinking about her; but a longer and steadier look convinced him that he was mistaken. So far as he could make out, the woman was a stranger to him. Where he sat he was in deep shadow, being hidden in part by the broken masonry of the fountain, and in part by the low-spreading branches of an ancient yew which grew close by. Actuated by one of those instincts which work in us without consciously bringing into play any portion of our reasoning faculties, he moved slowly and noiselessly back into a space of still deeper shadow, where it would be impossible for any one to discern him from a greater distance than three or four yards, but whence the entire space of moonlit glade was clearly visible to him. Scarcely had Evan accomplished this before a man came quickly into the glade from the end opposite that by which the woman had arrived, and passing within half-a-dozen yards of the fountain, went directly up to her, while she on her part advanced to meet him, and putting one arm about her, drew her to him and kissed her three or four times.

In the man, to his intense astonishment, Evan at once recognised Mr. Romer Vodney. But who was the woman?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

GENTLE GIANTS.

A Race of Men Who Were Physically and Morally Our Superiors.

The Guanches, the inhabitants of the Canary islands, are said to be the remnants of the ancient race who 10,000 years ago peopled the drowned continent of Atlantis. They are reported to have been strong and handsome, and of extraordinary agility of movement, of remarkable courage, and of a loyal disposition; but they showed the credulity of children and the simple directness of shepherds. So tall were they that the Spaniards speak of them as giants, and their strength and endurance were so great that they were conquered by stratagem, but not force. They ran as fast as horses, and could leap over a pole held between two men five or six feet high; they could climb the highest mountains and jump the deepest ravines.

Their endurance as swimmers was so great that they were accustomed to swim across the nine-mile strait between the Lacerote and Graciosa; having no boats, their method of fishing was to strike the fish with sticks or catch them in their hands while swimming. Their skulls, which are preserved in the museums of the island, and of which I took photographs, show marked cerebral development, the frontal and parietal bones being well developed and the facial angle good. In the early days of the conquest, before rapine and murder had done their vile work, the Guanches are spoken of as being musical and fond of dancing and singing.

Though so strong physically, the Guanches were nevertheless a very gentle race; they rarely made war with one another, and when the Europeans fell into their hands they did not kill them, but sent them to tend sheep in the mountains. So tame were the birds in this happy land that when the Spaniards first landed they came and fed from their hands. To kill an animal degraded a man; the butcher was a reprobate criminal and an outcast, and lived apart, and his assistant being supported by the state. No woman was allowed to approach the shambles, and in such horror was killing held by these gentle giants that no man could be ennobled until he had publicly declared that he had not been guilty of killing any animal, not even a goat.

Their standard of morality was high; they were monogamists and adultery was punished by imprisonment and death; robbery was almost unknown among them, and drunkenness not yet invented. The Guanches were bound by law to treat woman with the greatest respect, and a man was obliged to make way for every woman he met walking, to bear her burdens, and deferentially to escort her home should she wish it. If a Guanche were ennobled for any great deed the people were assembled on the occasion, and among the questions asked, to which a negative answer must be given before the patent of nobility was granted, was: "Has he ever been disrespectful to women?" The women are not celebrated as having been beautiful, but they were almost as agile and strong as the men. Even in war the women and children were protected and pillage was forbidden.

Making Rain.

Startling stories come from the West concerning the triumphs of the professional rainmaker. The dryer the atmosphere and the more cloudless the sky, the greater the certainty of bringing down an old-fashioned Noachian deluge in the course of an hour or two. The rain is always "local," thus proving beyond a doubt that the skies did not pour forth water on their own account, but that they were compelled to disgorge their treasures by the pigmy man down below. In these days he laughs most who laughs last, and after the discovery of the properties of steam, electricity, photography etc., the tables are apt to be turned upon the man who is profoundly skeptical. Predictions might be made now and printed with respectful attention which, a hundred years ago, might have caused the rash prophet's incarceration in a mad house. Nevertheless, in regard to the rainmaking business we shall still be compelled to bid the rain-makers go ahead, and wish them all sorts of good fortune, without laying a perilously large wager on their success. We have brought lightning to the earth and may bring water, as we may yet navigate the air; but where is the point of support—the pivot on which all these wheels are to be worked? If General Dyrenfurth and his men are indeed destined to prove successful, they will be looked upon as greater magicians than Edison. Just now they seem to rank in the minds of many with the traveller of various sea-serpentine experiences. The world is half credulous, half slow to believe; but it hates to be fooled.

East Indian Lepers.

Lepers in India were treated with shocking inhumanity before Christianity entered that country. Many of them were buried alive. The English rulers have put a stop to this custom, and for fourteen years there has been a special Christian mission to the 135,000 lepers in India.

THE SKELETON TRADE.

Observation of a Dealer Who has had Twenty Years' Experience.

To deal in the bones of human beings would be an occupation repugnant to most men. Yet in Philadelphia lives an old Frenchman who finds more pleasure in this occupation than anything else in his life. His store is a veritable den of skeletons. The weather-beaten sign swinging over the door, creaking dismally with every gust of wind, bears this simple legend: "M. de Robaire, Parfumerie." From which it is evident monsieur would have the world believe that he deals almost exclusively in those perfumed waters so dear to the feminine heart. Every family has a skeleton in the closet, however, and monsieur's family, which consists only of himself, is no exception to the general rule. He has his skeleton, in fact he has scores of them in closets and otherwise—the majority otherwise. The truth of the matter is, the old Frenchman deals in skeletons.

Living as he does in a neighborhood thickly populated by ignorant negroes, who are, as a rule, very superstitious, De Robaire has found it necessary to ply his queer trade as secretly as possible. The "doctor" has occupied his present headquarters for the last quarter of a century, and enjoys quite a large practice among the colored people, who would have nothing to do with him did they suspect the weird doings about the little shop.

The second floor boasts of only two small rooms, the rear one being used as a workshop, while the other, directly over the store and fronting on the street, serves the double purpose of bedchamber and storeroom.

Such another bedchamber as the one occupied by the old Frenchman probably does not exist, and how monsieur manages to sleep the sleep of the just among such grewsome surroundings, is an insolvable mystery to the few who have been admitted to it.

The walls of the small room are ornamented with skulls and crossbones and real life-size skeletons, or, rather, death-size skeletons in all sorts of grotesque positions. Four hideous skulls grin from their positions on top of the four posts of the bed and close to the sides of the bed stands a skeleton with arms outstretched doing duty as a clothes rack. The whole is dimly lighted up by a faint glimmer of light emanating from a lamp made of a ghastly skull suspended from the middle of the ceiling with thongs of tanned human hide.

De Robaire himself is an odd-looking man and the resemblance between him and one of his own skeletons is decidedly striking. He has gaunt, wolf-like features, his thin upper lip and bony chin being adorned with an iron-gray mustache and imperial. His head is entirely bald save for a few bristly red hairs standing up on his forehead like a small bonfire, and under a pair of bushy eyebrows of the same fiery hue his small black eyes glitter like coals of fire.

For a score of years he has been carrying on his business in the old place, having emigrated from France in 1865, coming direct to Philadelphia, where he established himself in business. For a time he had a hard struggle to keep soul and body together, owing to the number of competitors in the field, together with the dullness of business. It soon became necessary for him in addition to his other trade to set himself up as a druggist, and he still runs his shop, though principally as a decoy.

Late in the '60's when the Knights of Pythias were organized in this state, the demand for skeletons increased as they were used to a great extent in the lodgerooms. De Robaire prospered as a consequence, since most of his competitors had given up the business.

Off and on during the following twenty years business was brisk and dull by turns, but the old man has amassed a small fortune, and there is no reason why he should longer continue in the business, except that he has taken a liking to his work, such as every true artist does. He is an artist in the full sense of the word. There is undoubtedly no one who can articulate a skeleton as neatly as he, and it is no idle boast on his part when he claims that with eyes blindfolded he can take a mass of bones representing the human frame and build up the skeleton as it was originally, without one bone out of place.

Again, he can by merely touching a bone tell to a certainty what part of the frame of man or beast it belongs. There is no possible way of determining the nationality of the person who existed around a certain skeleton during life except that in the case of a negro the aperture in the skull once covered by the nose is not so narrow and sharpened as a white man's.

The "doctor," while standing in his workshop a few days ago with his sleeves rolled up over his skinny arms, thus held forth on the subject nearest his heart: "This skeleton you see me operating on I have imported from France. You will notice the high polish on the bones, due to a method of preparation practiced only by the French. They clean the bones by a process of maceration with muriatic acid, the whole operation requiring two or three months' time, while in this country the bones are hastily and carelessly boiled and come out rough and dirty. In all my twenty years' service I have never come across a Chinese skeleton. This it due to the fact that a Chinaman believes he will not reach heaven unless his bones rest in the Flowery Kingdom."

"The different prices of skeletons are based upon their degrees of hardness and whiteness, upon the development of the bones, and the amount or absence of fat in their extremities. For this reason the French article is decidedly of more value than the American or German. Up to this year over 2,600 skeletons have been imported into this country, but they have become scarce of late for some reason, and to supply the demand I find it necessary to manufacture them of paper. Of course I have a stock of them in my bedroom, but I would not part with any of these. Mon dieu! I have come to look upon them as dear friends and companions. Here you see my artificial skeletons made of paper mache, with artificial teeth, and the whole covered with a white polish which gives the appearance of the genuine article. I can make three of these each week, and they bring from \$10 to \$15, while the imported genuine article costs from \$30 to \$35, and the domestic \$20. But then the imitations are bought only by secret societies."

"Yes, I have grown old in the business and love it. I have articulated and handled over 5,000 skeletons in my time."