CLOSE QUARTERS;

OR, THE HOUSE IN THE RUE BARBETTE

CHAPTER V.

Once clear of the Albert Gate mansion, the barrister was bound to confess to a sense of indefiniteness, a feeling of uncertainty which seldom characterized either his thoughts or his actions. He admitted as much to his companion, for Brett was a man who would not consent to pose under any circumstances.

"It is quite true," he explained, "that our first duty must be to find Mr. Talbot, and it is still more certain that we will be able to accomplish that part of our task; but there are elements in this inquiry which baffle me at present."

"And what are they, sir?" said the detective.

"I fail to see why Mr. Talbot was dragged into the matter at all. On the straightforward assumption that Turks were engaged in the pleasant occupation of taking other Turk's lives—an assumption to which, by the way, I attach no great amount of credence—why did they not allow Mr. Talbot to go quietly to his own home? It was not that they feared more speedy discovery of their crime. The hour was then late; it was tolerably certain that he would make no move which might prove injurious to them until next morning, and then the whole aaffir was bound to be discovered by the police in the ordinary course of events."

"I don't quite follow you, sir," said Winter, with a puzzled tone in his voice. They had, for the sake of quietude, turned into the Park, and were now walking toward Hyde Park Corner. "What do you mean by saying that Mr. Talbot would make no move in the matter until next morning?"

"Oh, I forgot," said Brett.

"Of course, you don't know why the diamonds were stolen?"

"For the same reason that all other diamonds are stolen, I suppose."

"Oh, dear no," laughed the barrister. "This is a political crime."

"Political!" said the amazed policeman.

"Well, we won't quarrel about words, and as there are perhaps no politics in Turkey, we will call it dynastic or any other loud-voiced adjective which serves to take it out of the category of simple felony."

"What beats me, Mr. Brett," said the detective, viciously prodding the gravel path with his stick, "is how you ferret out these queer facts—fancies some people would call them, as I used to do until I knew you better."

"In this case it is simple enough. By mere chance I happened to read this morning that there had been some little domestic squabble in royal circles at Constantinople. I don't know whether you are acquainted with Turkish history, Mr. Winter, but it is a well-recognized principle that any Sultan is liable to die of diseases which are weird and painfully sudden; for instance, the last one is popularly supposed to have plunged a long sharp scissors into his jugular vein; others drank coffee that disagreed with them, or smoked cigarettes too highly perfumed. In any case, the invariable result of these eccentricities has been that a fresh Sultan occupied the throne. Now, don't forget that I am simply theorizing, for I know no more of this business than you do at this moment, but I still think that you will find some connection between my theory and that which has actually occurred. At any rate, I have said sufficient to prove to you the importance of not being too ready to make arrests."

"I quite see that," was the thoughtful rejoinder. "But you must not forget, sir, that we in Scotland Yard are bound by rules of procedure. Perhaps you will not mind my suggesting that a word from you to the Foreign Office might induce the authorities to communicate officially with the Home Department, and then instructions could be issued to the police which would leave the matter a little more open than we are able to regard it under the existing conditions."

"I will see to that," said the barrister. "When does the inquest take place?"

"This evening at six."

"It will be adjourned, of course?"

"Oh, yes; no evidence will be given beyond that necessary for purposes of identification, and this can be supplied by the police themselves and an official from the Turkish Embassy."

"Very well. You will mention to no one the theory I have just explained to you?"

"Not if you wish it, sir."

"I do wish it at present. Which way are you going?"

"Straight to the Yard."

"In that case I will accompany you a portion of the distance."

They had now reached Hyde Park and, hailing a hansom, Brett told the driver to stop outside the Carlton Hotel. The man whipped up his horse and drove in the direction of Constitution Hill, evidently intending to avoid the congested traffic of Picadilly and take the longer, but more pleasant, route through the Green Park and the Mall.

"By the way," said Brett, "did the driver of the hansom which conveyed Mr. Talbot and his companion from Albert Gate on Monday night tell you which road he followed?"

"Yes," said the detective, "he went this way."

Brett rubbed his hands, with a queer expression of thoughtful pleasure on his keen face.

"Ah," he said, "I like that. It is well to be on the scent."

He did not explain to his professional confrere that it was a positive stimulant to his abounding energy and highly strung nerves to find that he was actually following the path taken by the criminal whom he was pursuing. The mere fact lent reality to the chase. For a mile, at any rate, there could be no mistake, though he might expect a check at the Carlton. Arrived there, Brett alighted.

"Are you going to make any inquiries in the hotel, sir?" said Mr. Winter.

"Why should I?" said Brett. "You have already ascertained from the management that no person even remotely resembling any of the parties concerned is staying at the hotel."

"Yes, confound it, I know I did," cried the other, "but I never told you so."

"That is all right," laughed Brett. "Come and see me at my chambers this evening when the inquest is finished. Perhaps by that time we may be able to determine our plan of action."

Once left to himself, Brett did not enter the hotel. He made it an invariable rule in conducting inquiries of this nature to adopt the French method of "reconstituting" the incidents of a crime, so far as such a course was possible in the absence of the persons concerned. He reasoned that a very plausible explanation of the unexpected appearance of the three strangers in the Albert Gate mansion on Monday night had been given to Jack Talbot. This young gentleman, it might be taken for granted, had not been selected by the Foreign Office to carry to a successful issue such an important and delicate matter as that entrusted to him, without some good grounds for the faith in his qualities exhibited by his superiors. Brett thought he could understand the brother's character and attributes from his favorable analysis of the sister, and it was quite reasonable, therefore, to believe that Talbot was a man not likely to be easily duped. The principals in this crime were evidently well aware of the trust reposed in the Assistant Under-Secretary, and they, again, would not underrate his intelligence. Hence there was a good cause for Talbot to accept the explanations, whatever they were, given him during the conclave in the dining-room; the effect of which, in Inspector Sharpe's words, had been to "puzzle" the young Englishman. Further, there must have been a very potent inducement held out before Talbot would consent to drive off with a stranger at such a late hour, and when the cab was dismissed at the Carlton, the excuse given would certainly be quite feasible.

"Ih must surely be this," communed Brett. "The man explained that he was a stranger in London, that he lived quite close to the Carlton Hotel, and that he found it convenient not only for the purpose of giving directions that would be understood, but also for paying fares, to direct the drivers of hired vehicles to go there and not to his own exact address, which he had found by experience many of them did not recognize, whilst his knowledge of the language was not ample enough to enable him to describe the locality more precisely. It follows, then, in unerring sequence, that Talbot was conveyed to some place within a very short distance of the spot where I now stand."

He looked along Pall Mall, up the Haymarket, and through Cockspur street, and he noted with some degree of curiosity that there were very few residential buildings in the neighborhood. Clubs, theatres, big commercial establishments and insurance offices occupied the bulk of the available space. It was a part of his theory that none of the other great hotels in this district could harbor the criminals, otherwise there would have been no excuse to stop the hansom outside the Carlton.

Brett did not take long to make up his mind once he had decided upon a definite course. A call at the Foreign Office procured him an official authorization from the United-Secretary to inquire into the circumstances of Talbot's disappearance and a promise that the Home Office should be communicated with.

He desired to review the whole of the circumstances attending this strange mystery of modern life, and the result of his reflections quickly became apparent when he reached his residence, for in the first instance he dispatched a telegram, and then made several notes in his private diary.

The telegram, in due course, produced an elderly pensioned police inspector, a quiet, reserved man, whom the barrister had often employed. He explained briefly the circumstances attending Mr. Talbot's disappearance, and added—

"I want you to find out the names, and if possible the business—together with any other information you may happen to come across—of every person who lives within a distance, roughly speaking, of two hundred yards from the Carlton Hotel. The Post Office Directory and your own observation will narrow down the inquiry considerably. It is the unrecorded balance of inhabitants with whom I am particularly anxious to become definitely acquainted." The man saluted and withdrew.

Brett imagined that he would now be left in undisputed enjoyment for a few hours' rest before the Earl of Fairholme kept the appointment fixed for seven o'clock. But in this he was mistaken.

Smith brought in some tea, which was refreshing after his walk, for the engrossing nature of the morning's occupation caused him to forget lunch. A cigar and evening paper next claimed his attention, but he had barely settled down to the perusal of a garbled account of events at Albert Gate when his man again entered, announcing in mysterious tones the presence of Mr. Winter. Smith's attitude towards the myrmidons of Scotland Yard who occassionally visited the barrister on business, was peculiar. He regarded them with suspicion, tempered by wholesome awe, and he now made known the arrival of the detective in such a manner as caused his master to laugh at him.

"Show him in, Smith," he said cheerily: "he has not come to arrest me this time."

Winter entered, and a glance at his face brought Brett quickly to his feet.

"What is the matter?" he cried when the door had closed behind the servant. "You have received important news?"

"I should think I have," replied the detective, dropping into a seat. "I was just writing a report in the Yard when I was sent for by the Chief, and you could have knocked me down with a feather when I heard the reason. I suppose I am acting rightly in coming at once to tell you, although in my flurry at the time I quite forgot to ask the Chief's permission, but as you are mixed up in the case at the request of the Foreign Office, I thought you ought to learn what had happened."

"Well, what is it?" cried Brett, impatient at the other's careful provisos.

"Simply this," said the detective. "Mr. Jack Talbot bolted from London on Tuesday in company with a lady. They crossed over from Dover to Calais by the midday boat, and went direct to Paris. Mr. Talbot calmly booked rooms for himself and the girl in the Grand Hotel, had the nerve to write 'Mr. and Mrs. Talbot, 118 Ulster Gardens, London, W.,' in the register, and both of them disappeared forthwith. But we will soon lay hands on the gentleman, no fear. I have somehow suspected, Mr. Brett, that your notion of a political crime was all poppycock. It is a good big brazen-faced steal."

"Is it?" said Brett, his face glistening with excitement at the intelligence so suddenly conveyed to him. "Would you mind explaining to me how this precious information reached you?"

(To be continued.)

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GUARDING CROWN JEWELS.

A Remarkably Strong Room in the Tower of London.

There has only been one attempt to steal the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London, and that was when the famous Irish adventurer, "Colonel" Blood, attempted the feat in 1671. The clumsy methods of the notorious "Colonel" are not to be compared with the subtle and scientific ways of the modern cracksman, but even the latter—did he possess the genius of a dozen Raffleses—could scarcely hope to steal the Crown Jewels from the new Jewel Room, which is now completed in the Wakefield Tower of the Tower of London.

The floor and walls are made of solid stone, while a new steel grid has been built to enclose the plate-glass regalia show-case. The bars of this grid are made of the finest tempered steel, the ends being embedded in the solid masonerry of the roof and flooring. Connected with this grid is a hidden electric alarm, which instantly warns the custodians of the Tower if a bar be wrenched ever so slightly.

The doors of the Jewel Room are iron lined and fitted with the latest in complicated locks. The jewels themselves will lie in automatically closing steel cases, absolutely burglar-proof. While the room is being completed the jewels are kept in the Government strong-room, and when everything is ready they will be taken to the Wakefield Tower under guard and mounted for public exhibition in their new cases behind the grid.

At one time it was proposed that a trap should be constructed, so that, if necessary, the jewels could be lowered through the stone floor into the dungeon beneath the Wakefield Tower. This dungeon, however, is below the level of the river, and very damp; consequently the scheme was abandoned. As a matter of fact, nothing has been housed in this dungeon since the Middle Ages, when prisoners languished in the Tower.

FOOD AGAIN

A Mighty Important Subject to Everyone.

A Boston lady talks entertainingly of food and the changes that can be made in health by some knowledge on that line. She says:

"An injury to my spine in early womanhood left me subject to severe sick headaches which would last three or four days at a time, and a violent course of drugging brought on constipation with all the ills that follow.

"My appetite was always light and uncertain and many kinds of food distressed me.

"I began to eat Grape-Nuts food two or three years ago, because I liked the taste of it, and I kept on because I soon found it was doing me good.

"I eat it regularly at breakfast, frequently at luncheon, and again before going to bed—and have no trouble in 'sleeping on it.' It has relieved my constipation, my headaches have practically ceased, and I am in better physical condition at the age of 63 than I was at 40.

"I give Grape-Nuts credit for restoring my health, if not saving my life, and you can make no claim for it too strong for me to endorse." Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

Read the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs. "There's a reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

TWO CRITICS.

A speaker oft proclaimed aloud
That he could always hold a crowd;
He felt that he could prove it:
But of a paper's work, said he,
"The paper is no use to me;
For I am far above it."

An editor desired to find
In that great speaker's cultured mind
Some gems for future leaders:
But in the speaker's sounding brass
He only found what is like gas,
Despised by thoughtful readers.

The paper had no voice to plead:
The speaker had no power to read
With profit from another:
And then because they failed to see
That each the other's friend should be
They criticized each other.

T. WATSON.

Iona Station, Ont., 1911.

If a girl meets a man who desn't admire her she imagines that he is a confirmed woman hater.

Men have no idea what funny ideas women harbor until they get married.

BONDS

For a trustee investment in Ontario a most satisfactory selection could be made from these high-grade offerings:

City of Toronto 4's, due 1944.
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On the Farm

THE FORMATION OF THE SOIL.

Vegetation begins with the very simplest forms of plants, such as lichens and mosses, and is, of course, very scanty at first. These plants on dying become a part of the soil, all of the plant nutrients used by them being thus returned, writes Mr. Alfred Vivian.

Food that has once been used by plants is very readily made available to succeeding crops through the process of decay. The soil is now able to produce a larger crop, as it contains the plant food in the previous growth in addition to that added through the agencies detailed above

In this way the growth gradually becomes more abundant. The plants upon decaying give rise to humus, and this increases the fertility of the land both by being a source of plant food and by increasing the water-retaining power. Humus is a very important factor in fertility. During the decomposition of the plants, acid substances are formed which act upon the rocks in such a way as to make more of the plant food available.

One of the products of decay or fermentation is carbonic acid, and this is dissolved in the soil water, and this gas-containing water is an important help in disintegrating the rocks.

As the nutritive materials increase from these various causes the lower simpler forms of plant life are gradually replaced by those which are more highly organized.

With the advent of plants, like our common crops, which bear roots, other factors in the formation of soils are introduced. The roots secrete an acid substance that has a solvent effect on the mineral matter of the soil, and the roots themselves also assist mechanically in breaking down the rocks.

All are familiar with the tremendous force exerted by plants in breaking apart rocks and stones if once their tender rootlets obtain a foothold in a crevice.

The roots penetrate the soil sometimes to great depths, and as they decay after the death of the plant, they leave little channels in the soil which serve to carry down water laden with carbonic acid, as well as to introduce the oxygen of the air, that, in its turn, is a factor in bringing about chemical changes in the soil, which assist in making plant food available.

Sooner or later in the process of soil formation, plants of the pulse family, (leguminous plants), such as clover, vetches, lupines, etc., are introduced.

If you dig up some of these plants you will find little nodules or tubercles on their roots. These nodules are the homes of numerous bacteria, which enable the plants to derive part of their food from the nitrogen of the atmosphere.

This peculiar property of leguminous plants is of great importance, for it is undoubtedly nature's principal method of increasing the supply of nitrogen in the ground.

The nitrogen compounds accumulated by these plants eventually become a part of the soil through their decay, thus adding to its fertility.

It will readily be understood that the various agencies concerned in the formation of the soil do not act separately nor necessarily in any such order as that in which they have been discussed.

As a matter of fact all the processes described take place simultaneously. The lower plants do not wait for the rocks to be pulverized, for we see such organisms as the lichens growing on rocks from which one would think it impossible to obtain food.

If the lichen is removed, grooves or furrows will be found on the surface of the stone, due to the action of the plant.

Nor are all soils formed directly from the original rocks, for one of the effects of weathering, etc., is to separate such rocks as the granite into simpler substances, with the result, for example, that huge deposits of limestone are formed in one place, and in another whole hills of sandstone.

The soil is almost constantly moving, for some of the same agencies which form soils are continually carrying them away. Running water grinds the rocks, but at the same time transports the fine particles to lower levels. It cuts deep valleys in the surface of the earth and carries away the debris, depositing it at various distances from its source.

This study of the formation of the soil then suggests two things that the farmer can do to prevent the exhaustion of the fertility.

The first is to treat the soil as to assist and hasten nature in the process of converting the plant food into available forms by means of good tillage.

The second is to return to the soil by means of manure and fertilizers an amount of plant food equivalent to that removed by the crop.

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