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The Middle of Things

BY J. S. FLETCHER.

Author of "Black Money," "Seahaven Keep," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.—(Cont'd.)

The old solicitor nodded, then suddenly pointed to a gold locket which she wore.

"Where did you get that, my dear?" he asked. "Unusual device, isn't it?"

"Mr. Ashton gave it to me, a few weeks ago," answered Miss Wickham. "He said it had belonged to my father."

The old lawyer bent nearer, looked more closely at the locket, and got up. "Elegant old thing!" he said. "Not made yesterday, that! Well, ladies, you will see me to-morrow. In the meantime, if there is anything you want done, our young friend here will be close at hand."

"Viner," observed Pawle when they had left the house, "did you notice what's on the locket Miss Wickham is wearing?"

"What is it?" asked Viner.

"After we came back from Market-stoke," replied Mr. Pawle, "I looked up the Cave-Gray family and their pedigree. That locket bears their device and motto. Viner, as sure as fate, that girl's father was the missing Lord Marketstoke, and Ashton knew the secret! I've made up my mind to a certain course, Viner. To-morrow, after the funeral, I'm going to call on the present Lord Ellingham—his town house is in Hertford Street and ask him if he has heard anything of a mysterious nature relating to his long-missing uncle."

Next day, toward the middle of the afternoon, Mr. Pawle and Viner were walking down Hertford Street when Viner suddenly gripped his companion's arm. He was looking ahead—at the house at which they were about to call. And there, just being shown out by a footman, was the man whom he had seen at the Grey Mare, and with him a tall, good-looking man whom he had never seen before.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRESENT HOLDER.

"What is it?" Pawle asked. "Those fellows are coming away from Lord Ellingham's house. You seem to know them?"

"The clean-shaven man," exclaimed Viner, "is the man I told you of—the man who was in conversation with Ashton at the Grey Mare, the night Mr. Pawle was murdered."

Mr. Pawle turned and looked after the retreating figures.

"You're sure of that?" Pawle asked.

"Certain!" replied Viner. "It is surely a very curious thing that we should find him evidently in touch with Lord Ellingham—considering our recent discoveries. But—what are you going to do?"

"Going in here," affirmed Mr. Pawle. "Have you a card?"

The footman led the callers into a room at the rear of the hall, wherein stood a very young man who was obviously just ready to go out.

"I'm afraid I can't give you very long, Mr. Pawle," he said, glancing at the old lawyer. "I've a most important engagement in half an hour."

"My lord," said Mr. Pawle in his most solemn manner, "I will go straight to the point. We have reason to feel sure, from undoubted evidence, that Mr. John Ashton, a very wealthy man, who had recently come from Australia, to settle here in London, had in his possession certain highly important papers relating to your lordship's family, and that he was murdered for the sake of them!"

Lord Ellingham turned on the old lawyer a stare of utter amazement.

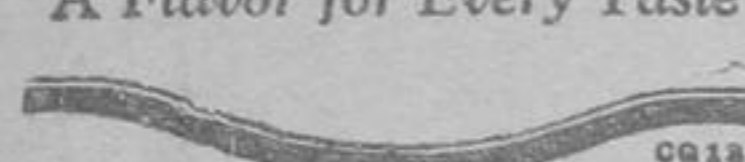


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ISSUE No. 19—26.

return—I am going round to the police."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE outhouse.

Drillford, discovered alone in his office, smiled as Viner and Felpham walked in to see him. There was an irritating I-told-you-so air about him. "What is it that's been found, exactly?" asked Felpham, directly.

Drillford opened a locked drawer, lifted aside a sheet of cardboard, and revealed a fine gold watch and chain and a diamond ring.

"There you are!" said Drillford. "Those belonged to Mr. Ashton; there's his name on the watch and a mark of his inside the ring."

"Were these things loose?" asked Viner.

"Wrapped loosely in the paper they're lying on," replied Drillford.

Viner took the paper out of the drawer, examined it and lifted it to his nose.

"I wonder if Hyde really did put those things there," he said, "how Hyde came to be carrying about with him these sheets of paper which had certainly been used before for the wrapping of chemicals or drugs? These papers have at some time been used to wrap some strong-smelling drug."

"No doubt of it!" said Felpham, who was applying the papers to his nose.

"That's a mere detail," remarked Drillford impatiently.

"Now, another question," continued Viner. "Where's Ashton's purse? You know that when his clothing was examined, almost immediately after his death, all his effects were gone—watch, chain, rings, pocketbook, purse. If Hyde took everything from his victim, as you say he did, he would have had a purse full of ready money. But—he was starving when he went to the pawnbrokers! Hyde told you the truth—he never had anything but the ring."

"Good!" muttered Felpham. "Another thing, Inspector," continued Viner: "Do you believe that Hyde, placed in the position he is, would be such a fool as to tell you about that particular shed if he'd really hidden those things there? The mere idea is absurd—ridiculous!"

"You'd have that to prove!" retorted Drillford.

"We shall prove a good many things that'll surprise you," said Viner quietly.

He motioned Felpham to follow, and going outside, turned in the direction of the Harrow Road.

"I'm going to have a look at the place where these things were found," he said. "Come with me."

They walked along until they came to the shop on Harrow Road.

The greengrocer, a dull-looking fellow, showed no great interest on hearing what his callers wanted. He led Viner and Felpham round to the yard and opened the door of the shed.

"I reckon that's where the fellow got a bit of a sleep that night," he said. "There was nothing to prevent him getting in here."

"Where did you find those valuables this morning?" asked Viner.

The greengrocer pointed to a shelf in a corner above the bundle of sack- ing. "There!" he answered. "In turning some boxes over I came across the parcel, wrapped in paper."

"Just folded in the papers that you handed to the police?" suggested Viner.

"Well, there was more paper about 'em than what I gave to Inspector Drillford," said the greengrocer.

He pointed to some loose sheets of paper which lay on the sack- ing, and Viner went forward and picked them up.

He slipped some silver into the greengrocer's hand and led Felpham away. Once out of sight of the shop, he pulled out the papers which he had picked out of the corner in the shed and held them in front of his companion's eyes.

"We did some good in coming up here, after all, Felpham!" he said, with a grim smile. "Now, then, look at these things. That's a piece of newspaper from out of a copy of the Melbourne Argus of September 6th

last. Likely thing for Hyde to be carrying in his pocket, eh? Here's a sheet of brown wrapping-paper with the name and address of a famous firm of wholesale druggists on one side—printed. It's another likely thing for Hyde to possess, and to carry about, isn't it? This gives me a new theory to work on."

Viner, by the time he went to bed, had evolved an idea, and it was still developing when he set out next morning to accompany Mr. Pawle to Lord Ellingham's solicitors.



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Job's Patience.

"Job was a medical man, you know." "I don't know—explain." "Haven't you ever heard of the patience of Job?"

Love's Labor Lost.

Slowly and carefully the young man strode up and down the little lane at the back of his house pushing the perambulator before him.

He had fixed a weird kind of book-rest to the handles, and was perusing the latest novel at the same time.

Presently a window was opened and a voice hailed him from the house. "Henry! Henry!" it called.

But Henry heeded not. An hour later the same voice called again. "What do you want?" asked Henry, glancing up from the book. "I'm busy."

"I know, dear," answered the voice. "But it's time to take baby out now. You've been airing Harriet's doll most of the afternoon!"

It is the inevitable end of guilt that it places its own punishment on a chance which is sure to occur—L. E. London.

Minard's Liniment for Burns.

A Poem Worth Knowing.

"Ships That Pass in the Night." This is one of the shortest and most beautiful of the poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the New England poet, whose popularity has never waned in this country. He is not regarded as one of the world's supreme poets, but his appeal, which is a simple one, is to the multitude and not only to the few.

Ships that pass in the night and speak each other in passing— Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness; So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another. Only a look and a voice; then darkness again and a silence.

Blue sponges have appeared. They harmonize nicely with the color scheme of the cold-bath devotee.

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