

THE THIRD FINGER A CLUE TO CRIME.

A Christmas Story by William Le Queux.

Last Christmas Eve, just as the midnight bells of St. Mary Abbot's, Kensington, burst forth into a joyous peal, my wandering footsteps led me into Pombribe Square, on my way home from the theatre. The night was damp and cold, a typical December night in London, but the majority of the people were still astir, for on Christmas Eve there is much late shopping in the popular thoroughfares, as the thrifty, over-class housewife always procrastinates in the hope of obtaining her Christmas joint cheaper after midnight.

Having emerged from the eternal gaslight of the underground railway at Notting Hill Gate Station, I crossed the busy High street, abaze with the naphtha lamps of hoarse-voiced costermongers, and passing along that rather select thoroughfare Pombribe G-roads, entered the square, and, crossing it, on my way to Richmond road, Bayswater, where I lived. Suddenly, as I passed along, my attention was attracted by a low, plaintive cry, and turning, I saw in the corner of a dark doorway something white huddled up. It was a child, shivering with cold, and sobbing bitterly; therefore, I stopped, bent, and inquired what was the matter.

"I'm cold," was all the reply I received. She did not raise her head, but continued sobbing.

"Come!" I said, taking her hand and raising her to her feet. "You mustn't remain here or you'll be frozen. Who are you?"

The child, whose tiny hand was icy cold, raised a pair of wide open wondering eyes to mine in hesitation, then replied simply:

"I'm Cissie."

"What's your other name?"

"Matheson."

Even in that dim light of the street lamp it needed no second glance to convince me that she was no ordinary child. Her dress was of a richness quite unusual in children's attire, a prettily made dress of soft white China silk, embellished with many laces and ruffles, neat black silk stockings, and patent leather shoes with shining buckles. She was, I judged, about five years old, or perhaps a trifle more, and her large, refined face and clear blue eyes, while about her shoulders was a wealth of hair of that bright lustrous gold which invariably fades before the teens, were set off by her hair being plaited in a simple and pleasing, and I knew by her pronunciation that she was no ordinary Cockney waif.

"And where do you live?" I inquired tenderly.

"I don't know," she responded, shyly.

"But you haven't been out long, have you? Where's your hat?"

"I've lost it," she replied.

The fact that she had on only thin patent leather slippers, and was hatless, seemed proof that she had escaped from some drawing-room in the vicinity, perhaps from some children's Christmas party. But when I questioned her closely, it was apparent that she had no idea whatever of her place or abode. She was hopelessly lost.

I took her hand and walked with her some distance, but she seemed wary, shivering from head to foot. I took out a handkerchief and tied it over her head, then contemplated handing her over to the first policeman I met. Her description would be telegraphed to every police station, and any inquiry in any part of London would promptly result in her discovery.

When we gained the corner of Westbourne Grove, I turned up and down the thoroughfare in search of a constable; but the child somehow seemed to divine my intention, and said:

"Don't let the policeman have me!" and she again burst into tears.

All children, frightened by their nurses, entertain a deep-rooted horror of the police, therefore I resolved to take her home with me, and on the next day endeavor to trace her friends. On arrival at Richmond Road I handed her over to the care of my landlady, a well-to-do widow, who, if not entirely satisfied with my description, evinced a motherly interest in the pretty foundling.

Nursing her before my fire, Mrs. Soames questioned the mysterious Cissie with a bearing which I felt it best to leave her to. She had taken her out to a party at the house of some person named Johnson, and that on the way there she had been left outside a shop, became lost in a windy, bustling crowd doing their Christmas shopping. Then she had apparently turned into the side street and wandered on until I discovered her.

She had a mother, she told us, but she was dead, and her father, evidently her mother was a lady of good circumstances, for the child's dress was, as Mrs. Soames pointed out, unusually rich, while on her tiny hands were rings and bracelets set with a cipher of two "Cs" in diamonds. It is not often that children possess such a costly ornament as that.

"My uncle gave me that on my birthday because I was a good girl," she explained, in response to my inquiry. "Isn't it pretty?" and she held it to the light, admiring the glitter of the stones.

"Yes," I said. "You ought to be very proud of it."

She laughed, and held out her hands to the warmth of the fire. She was certainly a coquettish little person, and we were both entirely charmed by her manner. With a child's quick perception she knew she had fallen among friends, and her tears had quickly given place to merriment. Indeed, before Mrs. Soames had put her bed she grew quite bright, happy and content.

Next morning, when I was sitting alone, Mrs. Soames, to whom the mystery of the child was intense, entered and triumphantly cried:

"I've found the young lady's address, sir. Look here!"

And she handed to me a piece of

crumpled white buckram, evidently part of an address label, which she had found sewn inside the child's dress. In ink was written, in an educated feminine hand, the words, "Cissie Matheson, No. 66 Clifton Road."

"We've found out where you live," I said, enthusiastically, to the child, as she entered the room at that moment. "It's in Clifton Road."

"Oh, yes," she laughed. "Of course that's the name. What a stupid I am!"

"Do you know what part of London it is?"

"Oh, a long way from here," she answered, but in response to further questions it was plain that she did not know the whereabouts of the thoroughfare.

Suddenly I took down my little red atlas of the county of London, and turning up the index, discovered to my dismay that there were no fewer than six Clifton roads, situated far from one another, namely, at Old Kent Road, Brockley, Camden Town, Malda Vale, New Cross road, and Wimbledon. Then another suggestion occurred to me, and I went along to the Royal Oak and looked at the London directory; but, although I carefully searched the list of householders in each thoroughfare, I could find no such name as Matheson.

I turned and consulted with Mrs. Soames, who advised that I should set forth at once with the foundling and visit all the Clifton roads in order to restore Miss Cissie to her mother.

Mrs. Soames presently unearthed an old map which had belonged many years ago to one of her own children, and smelt strongly of camphor, and with a warm shawl tied about her head, Cissie accompanied me on my search of her home. It was nearly 3 o'clock, and already the yellow light was fading when we entered a handsome Westbourne Grove and drove through the deserted streets up to Clifton Road, Malda Vale, only to find no such name as Matheson known at No. 66. Therefore, in order to visit the streets methodically, we drove up to Camden Town, where we discovered that the street in question contained only twenty houses, and was close to the Cattle Market.

Cissie, huddled at my side, seemed tired out she spoke but little, and it was apparent that she would soon fall asleep. As we turned away toward the Caledonian Road I glanced at the paper whereas I had written the names of the roads, and saw the next was a very long way off—in Old Kent Road, on the opposite side of London. I gave the cabman directions, at which he gave a grunt of ill-will, and we set off to the south while I drew the child nearer to me and rearranged the shawl about her head. The driver entered into consultation with the solitary policeman on the point of duty outside the market, and after a few minutes' delay straight down the Lewisham high-road, turning suddenly into a new suburban district of rather large detached houses, with a large garden—a highly genteel neighborhood, which had extended beyond the confines of Brockley into what was until quite recently open fields. Suddenly, as we passed before a large, artificially gabled house of red brick, standing back behind a well kept lawn, with several monkey trees in front. Hidden from the vulgar gaze at a high angle, in the rear of one of the largest houses in the vicinity, and as I descended and lifted Cissie out she at once recognized the place, saying joyfully:

"That is my home!"

"What is your name?" I wondered what mother will say?

And she left me and bounded up the well rolled gravelled path to the door, where she rang the bell violently.

A neat maid with long strings of cap answered, but next instant a rather handsome, well preserved woman in widow's mourning rushed out into the hall, and with a loud cry of joy snatched up the child, kissing her again and again.

"I thought you were lost, my darling!" she cried through her tears of joy. "The police have been in search of you all day!"

"Then, in the same breath, she thanked me, inquired how and where I had found the little wanderer, and invited me inside.

"Won't you take off your coat and join us at dinner?" she said. "We have only this moment commenced, and we cannot allow you to return without thanking you."

I was ravenously hungry, therefore the savory smell of roast turkey decided me, and divesting myself of hat and coat, I followed my hostess into the warm dining-room. It was a well and substantially furnished apartment, tastefully decorated, the table shining with silver and pretty with floral decorations. At the head sat a smart, well-groomed man, about 45, in evening dress, who rose and greeted me, being introduced by Mrs. Matheson as Mr. Paul, her brother, and quickly turned to a plate of very excellent soup.

Cissie sat next her mother, little worse for her adventure, and we were quickly a very merry quartette.

Finally I explained how I had found her crying in Pombribe Square, and of my visit to all the Clifton roads in London, whereupon Mrs. Matheson, with tears of joy in her eyes, said:

"I really don't know how to sufficiently thank you, sir. To-day has been a most anxious and terrible day for us. It is the first anniversary of my dear husband's death, and I had lost my only child. You have indeed, made my Christmas a happy one, for I have recovered my darling Cissie, and she stroked the child's soft golden hair with a mother's tender hand."

"This unexpected meeting this evening is," I said, "sufficient reward for any little trouble I've taken. It was perhaps fortunate that I found her, or some thief or other might have stolen her diamond bracelet."

"Oh, my sister has been imagining the most dreadful things all day," her brother laughed. "I felt certain, however, that the precocious Cissie must turn up again before very long."

"Strange though it may seem," I said, "many people lost in London

are never heard of again." Mrs. Matheson exchanged a quick glance with her brother, and the latter, in a rather curious voice, answered:

"Yes, that's so. Hundreds yearly, I've heard it said."

Cissie's account of her straying seemed quite correct, for the nursery governess was called, and explained how she entered the shop in High Street, Notting Hill, and when she came out failed to discover her charge.

Dinner was half way through, when suddenly I heard the sound of wheels outside, as though my cab was going off. I remarked upon it, when Mrs. Matheson, with another glance at her brother, said:

"Oh, I've sent him away. It is unnecessary to keep him here all the evening. You won't go for an hour or so yet."

"But I hope you haven't paid him?" I said, recollecting that his fare would be at least a sovereign.

"Of course," she replied politely. "I couldn't think of allowing you to pay the expenses of finding out where I live."

I protested, but she only laughed, assuring me that she was more indebted to me than the matter of a few shillings. The dinner went off most merrily, I was spending a very cheerful Christmas after all.

Cissie and her mother, at last left the table, and I sat with Paul over an excellent cigar. I found him a very pleasant man.

"We're greatly indebted to you," he said. "My sister has been in a state of grief all day. Servants are such unmitigated idiots."

"Yes," I observed. "It certainly was foolish to leave the child in a crowded street."

"Cissie is her mother's idol. My sister was devoted to her husband, and his untimely death was a terrible blow to her. He was on his way to London from Scotland, spending Christmas with his wife, and was killed in the accident to the Scotch express at Retford."

"Terribly sad," I said, recollecting the appalling accident on the previous Christmas eve, when a train was wrecked outside Retford station.

"Yes," he sighed. "Jack Matheson was such a thoroughly good fellow, too."

And so we chatted on until, having finished our coffee, we rejoined mother and daughter in the pretty drawing room where the logs were brightly burning, the lamp throwing its great shade of crimson silk giving the place a cozy appearance. The place was extremely well furnished, and enclosed in a cozy corner beside the fire, and I sat down to my pipe, and about three pounds tea in my pocket. These people were, no doubt, connoisseurs of jewels, and my pin had attracted them.

In the meantime, flicker shed by the brush handle I dressed completely and made my way to the door, only, however, to find it secured on the outside.

I was a prisoner.

Who, I wondered, was the beautiful girl who had been the previous victim in that room? Had she, like myself, been a guest at dinner, and had she been locked in there, or had that fatal chamber? My knowledge of surgery was sufficient to tell me that the finger I had found had been cut off before death, and the reflection was chilling to the marrow.

I sank again in the armchair, and was puzzling to devise a way out of the horrible situation, when, of a sudden, without warning, and with a lightning flash, a heavy blow was dealt me right on top of the skull. For a single instant I saw sparks of light dancing before my eyes, and felt myself falling like a log. The ground beneath my feet of unconsciousness fell upon me and I knew no more.

How long I remained in that condition it is impossible to tell. When I awoke, I found myself slowly back to consciousness I found myself lying in a pool of blood and suffering from a frightful wound in the head. I staggered with difficulty to my feet, and by the faint light of the night, I saw some faint rays of daylight showing through cracks in the shutters. In an instant I recollected my scarf-pin, and money, and discovered by the faint light that they were gone.

I went to the dressing table and raised the drapings to make sure that my gawson discovery was a reality. But the body was no longer there, although the still lay along the floor the hideous evidence, the severed finger.

I carefully examined the chair in which I had sat, and found that it was a cunningly contrived device, worked by an electric wire somewhere outside the room, a small steel axe with spiked head emerged from the high back of the chair and descended down to the floor, and upon the head of any unfortunate person sitting there—a truly devilish contrivance.

First arming myself with a heavy iron bar, which I wrestled from the shutters, I went to the door. It had been re-locked, but using the bar as a lever, I soon wrenched it open. The door, I afterward found, was 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The covered with the richest of blueing wool and her brother had flown.

On gaining the street, I wandered about the new, eminently respectable shops, until I reached the High Road. I found a policeman, who directed me to the station, where I detailed my experiences to the inspector on duty. At first he seemed an old sea captain named Martin, above referred to, who did some years ago, and left an old chart among his belongings, which told of a small island in the southern Pacific now down on the regular chart, erroneously rich in guano—New Zealand Herald.

A Lawyer's Conscience.

A man called upon a lawyer the other day and announced that "his rich brother had drawn up a will, and died, and that—" "Ah I see!" interrupted the lawyer; "and you want me to get it set aside. Very well, sir; we'll plead insanity." "Oh, no," he was in a hurry. "You see, the will leaves everything to—" "To his second wife, or some charity or college. Have no fear, my dear sir. I can do the business nicely. We'll plead insanity." "But I intend to do it myself." "Ah! that alters the case somewhat; but I'll prove to the jury that he was afflicted with softening of the brain." "No, pray, don't do that." "But I must do it, or my brother's name will be ruined." "Then I shall have to find a lawyer who can't, for it's drawn up in my favor, and I want to beat the other heirs." "Ah! Certainly! That entirely alters the case. Your brother was sane, sensible, and in perfect health, and all the lawyers in the world can't set aside that will! Sit down, sir."

Judge thyself with the judgment of sincerity, and show will "advocate" with the judgment of charity.—I. B. S.

ever, of black cloth; very unusual, like a funeral pall. Lying upon it I suddenly noticed a red and a gold dust of flame, something which attracted my attention. It was close by the dressing table by the window, and, rising, I stooped and picked it up.

It was cold and curious to the touch, and as I bent to the fire to examine it I let it fall from my grasp with a cry of horror. It was a dead finger—the third finger of a woman's hand.

The discovery appalled me. There was evidently more mystery in that house than I had imagined.

I found I had a finger and a thumb carefully examined it. It was slim well formed, with a carefully kept nail, white and delicate, but had been amputated at the base by an unpractised hand. I gazed upon it in horror and amazement.

The fire had almost died out, and as I sat in the darkness I contemplated the advisability of dressing and escaping from the house. However, on reflection, I resolved first to thoroughly search the room, and then re-investigate the house of mystery.

I found at least a piece of wood, the handle of a small broom used to sweep up the grate; and after some difficulty lit it, obtaining light thereby. Then I searched everywhere—in the wardrobe, cupboards, beneath the bed, everywhere, until I came to the dressing table, prettily draped with muslin over pale blue satin. I lifted those drapings, and what I saw held me horror-stricken.

I turned and looked behind a small chest, the body of a young, fair-haired woman. One stiff hand was raised above her head, and I saw that the third finger was missing. Her hand rested in order to obtain her rings!

The girl was not more than twenty, pale and beautiful in death, attired handsomely in a desolates dinner dress of rose silk, and, looking at her, I saw that she had been hastily despoiled of her jewelry, her earrings having been torn through the lobes of the ears, and both hands held up in the air, as if she were in a state of agony.

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MYSTERIOUS PACIFIC ISLAND

Some of Them So Small They Are Hard to Locate a Second Time.

Much attention has been given of late to what we may call the strange case of Clipperton Island. It is but more than three miles in circumference, and it lies in the western Pacific something like 800 miles west of Mexico. In the wide expanse of the Pacific ocean it looks like a mere speck, so small as to be of no value, seemingly, save as a refuge for a few of the army of beach combers, who have burst all bounds of habit and have wandered far away in the course of their downward progress. But the ownership of Clipperton Island has of late been claimed by no fewer than four countries—Mexico, the United States, France and Great Britain, and when it is added that the island is a favorite haunt of sea birds and that many tons of valuable guano are waiting to be picked up the reason for this unwonted solicitude, even in an era of land-grabbing, will be apparent.

Clipperton Island is of interest in another direction. It is one of those numerous stretches of land set in the midst of the sea, sunny and other-wise, which, after their first discovery for many years elude all endeavors to locate them again. It has now been, as it were, nailed down in one particular spot in the ocean—that is to say, its exact position has been finally determined by warships sent out for the express purpose of searching for it and settling all doubts as to its existence—and the only thing remaining now is that the question of ownership should be settled. It has been claimed by France, which claims 400 miles southwest of Clipperton, and rich in the same deposits that make that place worth possessing, for which adventurous miners are at this moment looking.

As late as July last a vessel named the Moonlight left Altata, Mexico, on a voyage in search of this latest mysterious island and after 52 days of fruitless labor toward this end. Her captain failed to find the place, and fearing that his provisions and water would run short, returned home to report that the rough coast of old Capt. Martin and his associates were in error or else that some strange seismic phenomenon had caused the lost isle to disappear years ago, perhaps, for all that mortal soul on the Pacific isle is able to do, the romance by the fact that another "Frisco" captain located the place definitely a year or two before and found a small colony there, which colony is still on the island, shipping guano in their own schooners, manned by numbers of their own party, to the leading ports on the Pacific slope of North and South America.

Quite a number of expeditions have of late been made with the object of wresting this valuable secret from the handful of men in whose possession it is, and of participating in the riches of one of these days we will no doubt hear of a sanguinary fight for the supremacy between the present colonists and a party of marauders. Although the stories told about the unknown island vary considerably, they all agree that it exists somewhere about 400 or 500 miles southwest of Clipperton. In a low coral atoll, covered with the richest of blueing phates. The place also has its legends of pirates' treasures, which may or may not have had any foundation in fact. One of the legends of recent date which have been fitted out to look for the island was the Vine expedition. That vessel's owner claims to have secured his knowledge of the place from an old sea captain named Martin, above referred to, who did some years ago, and left an old chart among his belongings, which told of a small island in the southern Pacific now down on the regular chart, erroneously rich in guano—New Zealand Herald.

NOT HANGINGS AT NEWGATE

Legal Executions to Cease at the Famous Prison.

NOTED LIVES ENDED THERE

The announcement that in years to come there are to be no more hangings at Newgate Prison will perhaps come to a great many Americans chiefly as a reminder that Newgate prison still exists. "Newgate Calendar" as a name for the scene of luridness in literature is almost a part of the common currency of speech in both branches of the race that has inherited the great charter and the language of Chaucer and Shakespeare. The sullen gray building at the eastern end of the Holborn viaduct is, moreover, associated with English literature as the author of "Robinson Crusoe," who was once held in durance within its walls. And, lastly, good Americans should not forget that William Penn was a Newgate prisoner in his time.

All this, however, hardly helps the citizen of a newer country to realize that the prison is still standing and in excellent repair. As a jail it has existed on the present site ever since the eleventh century, and that, as lawyers know, is 400 years earlier than the period "beyond which the memory of man runneth not to the contrary." But the Newgate of the Plantagenets, in which Robert Baldock, the great chancellor of Edward III. died, disappeared centuries ago. It was in 1419 that the famous Dick Whittington, to whom the bells of Hithgate sang so persuasively:

"Turn again, Whittington,
Thrice Lord Mayor of London,
Built the 'New Gate' of the Old
Bailey of the city. That and the
buildings which grew on to it in the
course of ages were destroyed by fire
in the reign of Charles II. The present
building is in the main that which
was reconstructed on the site of
Whittington's gate tower and dun-
geon in the year 1770.

Ten years later than this date the more modern interior of Newgate became the scene of the famous hanging of "Barnaby Rudge," Lord George Gordon himself was consigned to a cell there after his riots, which shows that his mob had only just succeeded in their efforts to tear the jail to pieces. What damage they did was repaired soon afterwards and the structure has remained unaltered to its exterior ever since. For a long time after this Newgate was the scene of most of the famous hangings in English history. That crossing where the prison and the Old Bailey stand, with the Church of St. Sepulchre a little to the west-northeast of the viaduct, has been the scene of many an early morning gathering, when crowds began to establish claims to every square foot of ground soon after midnight. It certainly seems that the London masses have dearly loved a hanging in the past, however much that primitive trait may have been civilized out of them in the present.

That old mixture of the terrible and the comic, "The Execution," in which the author of "The Ingoldsby Legends" mixes up the adventures of "My Lord, Tom Noddy" and "Sir Carnaby Jenks, of the Blues," with the horror and agonies of a public judicial killing, is probably the best extant account of the thing as it used to be left to posterity by contemporary. It is well to remember that in those days an Englishman could get himself hanged without taking the life of a fellow man. One of the capital offenses for which hundreds have received their legal reckoning at Newgate was forgery, and one of the most famous hangings that ever took place on the scaffold outside that famous west window was the execution of Fauntleroy—not the little lord-forgeries on a magnificent scale. Fauntleroy was hanged in 1827, and in the succeeding thirteen years there were only two hangings for the same crime, and then forgery ceased to be a capital offence.

RECALLING A FAMOUS MURDER.

One of the most memorable executions that have taken place at Newgate within the memory of any person living, and one of the last public executions in the British Isles, was that of a German named Mueller for the murder of a Mr. Briggs in a compartment in a railway carriage. The motive for the crime was robbery. It was said that Mueller took this means to raise money to emigrate from Europe to this country. The circumstances of the murder drew attention to one of the many disadvantages of the British system of securing privacy in travelling by having the railroad cars cut up into sections, capable of holding ten passengers each. It was in this way that the murderer was enabled to secure the privacy absolutely necessary for the success of his scheme—or of the first part of it. His further progress was interrupted by his own imprudence in stealing the dead man's hat instead of contenting himself with the more valuable and less easily traced booty. Mueller, being a German, did not fully realize how unusual in England was a certain style of hat, like the ordinary silk hat of the period, but with a much lower crown. He took a hatter to take a piece out of the dead man's hat; the queer, foreign looking hat and the evidence of the hatter helped powerfully to convict him.

Public feeling seems to have been unusually stirred by the murder of Briggs, and the appeal of the King of Prussia to the Queen in behalf of the murderer only stirred up more popular indignation. It is also recorded that seats at windows giving a good view of the great function sold for 800 apiece. But even in this tragically popular case some indignation was expressed. The continental fashion of a hat into which Mueller had converted his victim's headgear was ever after an object of jeering when seen in public, being vulgarly named "the Mueller cut-down."—New York Tribune.

Large Salaries.

The biggest salary on record was paid to George Gould. For his work he received \$1,000,000. The account went down to \$1,000,000. The salary was \$1,000,000. The salary was \$1,000,000. The salary was \$1,000,000.

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