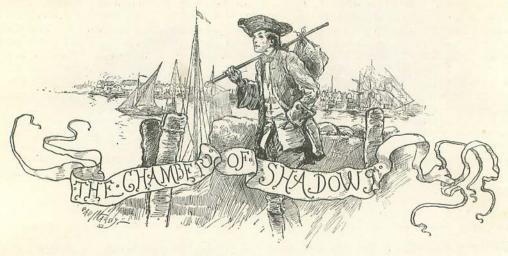
A Romance from a Detective's Case-Book.



By Dick Donovan.

Author of "The Man from Manchester," "Tracked to Doom," "Caught at Last," "Who Poisoned Hetty Duncan?" "A Detective's Triumphs," "In the Grip of the Law," etc., etc.



T was somewhere about the year 1820 that a poor and almost friendless youth named Samuel Trelawney found himself in Liverpool with not even the proverbial sixpence in his

pocket. Fortunately he attracted the notice of a gentleman engaged in the East India This gentleman took such a fancy to Samuel that he offered to send him out to his house in Bombay, where he would receive a commercial training. This was the golden opportunity, and eagerly seized upon by the young man, who, after five years in the East Indies, returned to Liverpool owing to the death of his patron. But this time he was no longer a penniless youth. He had managed to scrape a little money together, and having acquired a thorough knowledge of commercial matters, he set up in business on his own account in a very small way. That was the beginning of the great concern that was to extend its ramifications to the four quarters of the globe.

Under Samuel's able guidance the business continued to grow, and he took in a partner—a Mr. Richard Lindmark. Soon the concern began to assume gigantic proportions, and the partners decided to turn it into a jointstock company. Such a reputation had they gained that the required capital was sub-

scribed three times over.

So much for the history of the firm of Trelawney, Lindmark, and Co. And it is necessary now that some reference should be made to the private history of Mr. Trelawney, who not only retained a very large financial interest in the company, but as managing director had almost the entire control of it. At this period wonder was often expressed why Mr. Trelawney had never married. But there was a tender passage in his life that he carefully concealed from the vulgar gaze of the curious. He had had his little romance. The lady he loved was a lightheaded, frivolous person who, knowing not the treasure she was throwing away, gave him up and bestowed her hand on a handsome but worthless Italian adventurer. not the slightest doubt that Mr. Trelawney had been passionately attached to the lady, and he felt the disappointment with a keenness that the world knew little of. concealing his sorrow as best he could, he took his youngest sister Bertha as his housekeeper. He had bought a charming estate on the Cheshire side of the Mersey, consisting of a mansion standing in about seven acres of grounds. It was known as the "Dingle," and here Mr. Trelawney and his sister Bertha dispensed lavish hospitality. Soon a mystery in connection with this place cropped up, and set the tongues of the gossips wagging. It was this.

Into his house Mr. Trelawney received a boy child with a view to adopting it. Trelawney went from home one day, and after a week's absence he returned late one night, bringing the child, then about four years old, with him. The following morning he called all his household together in his library and said :-

"Being a childless man, and never likely to marry, I intend to adopt this boy, who will be known to you as Jasper Trelawney. You will respect him as my son, for I shall be a father to him, as both his father and

mother are dead."

This was all the explanation and information Mr. Trelawney condescended to give; and being so meagre, it simply aroused curiosity without in any way satisfying it.

The child was a dark-eyed, olive-skinned, curly-headed fellow, who speedily became a favourite. From boy to youth, from youth to young manhood every whim and wish of his was gratified by his over-indulgent foster parents-for Bertha Trelawney was no less attached to him than her brother was.

At his own earnest desire he had been taken into the business of Trelawney, Lindmark, and Co., and though he was not quite as steady and persevering as he might have been, great hopes were formed of him. But now the mystery that had begun when Jasper was brought as a child to the "Dingle" was increased by his sudden and unexplained disappearance. All that was allowed to leak out was this: A servant entered the library one morning suddenly not knowing that anyone was there, but to her amazement she saw Mr. Trelawney seated in a chair, though his face was bowed on the table as if he were overcome with some passion of grief. Grasped and crumpled in his left hand was a letter, and on her knees beside him, and weeping bitterly, her hands clasped on his shoulder, was his sister Bertha. The servant withdrew without disturbing them; but this scene had a strange significance when in the course of a day or two it became known that Jasper Trelawney had gone

Twenty years went by, and Jasper Trelawney was entirely

forgotten by all, perhaps, save his foster parents. Bertha and Mr. Trelawney were growing old, and he had become a silent, reserved, and brooding man. Owing to enfeebled health he was now only nominally the head of the great business which he had been mainly instrumental in building up, but he was said to have wealth almost beyond the dreams of avarice, and so great was the faith of the world in him and his company, that capital to almost any extent might have been obtained.

Fortunate was the man considered who held shares, or could obtain shares, in Trelawney. Lindmark, and Co. It can therefore be understood how those who were interested stood aghast, and how the commercial world was dumfoundered when one day, without any preliminary warning, it was announced that Trelawney, Lindmark, and Co. had failed for an enormous amount, and that everyone interested in the company would be utterly ruined. There was no limited liability then, and many a family, as they read the announcement of the failure, must have felt that misery and poverty



"HIS FACE WAS BOWED ON THE TABLE."

stared them in the face. It was said that the assets were practically nil, while the liabilities were enormous. The great London firm of accountants—Rogers, Millbank, and Farmer—were appointed liquidators, and a few days later Mr. Rogers requested me to call upon him. He was a stern, hard-faced, practical man who seemed to ooze figures at every pore, and who had not one single atom of poetry or sentiment in his nature. He viewed the world, life, and all its associations through an atmosphere of arithmetic.

He informed me that enormous sums had been taken out of the business, and never accounted for, by some person unknown; that bogus bonds to a vast amount had been put upon the market, and, what was still more serious, that the register of the bondholders had been stolen, so as to render it difficult, if not impossible, to detect the bogus bonds from the real ones. It was my task to trace the missing register and to find the thief. There was no suspicion, and no clue. The whole affair seemed an inexplicable mystery.

Having jotted down a few notes, and got all the details from him I could, I took my departure and began to plan out a course of

action.

From the high opinion in which Mr. Trelawney was held I felt that I could not do better than seek an interview with him at the outset, and I therefore lost no time in going down to the "Dingle." The time of year was about the middle of October—chill October. A cold wind was moaning over the land, which was sere and brown; and the deep tints of decay dyed the foliage of the trees. Although the coming winter was thus making itself felt, the "Dingle" looked picturesque and beautiful. The grounds were well wooded, and full of many surprises. There were rockeries, arbours, bowers, and green retreats, where gurgled tiny fountains; and through one portion of the estate flowed a stream of deep water, which ultimately formed a miniature lake, on the banks of which was a boat-house. Ferns grew everywhere in profusion, but they were drooping now to their winter death. I noted that weeds had been allowed to spring up in the paths, as if the master spirit of the place had ceased to interest himself in it. As I made my way up through the wooded grounds and crossed a leaf-strewn lawn in front of the house, I beheld an old, bowed, grey-headed man, dressed in a long coat and wideawake hat. He was pacing to and fro on the gravel path by the main entrance to the house. His

hands were clasped behind his back, and seemingly he was so absorbed that he did not notice me until I was close to him. Then he turned suddenly, and confronted me with an inquiring gaze. His face was pale and haggard, and bore evident traces of mental anguish.

"Mr. Trelawney, I presume?" I said, as I

raised my hat.

"Alas! yes, I am Trelawney," he answered with a sigh. "Once the head of a great and wealthy commercial house; now a ruined, despairing, and broken man. But you are a stranger to me. Permit me to ask your name and business?"

"My name is Donovan. My business has reference to a painful matter in which I hope

for your assistance."

"I am at your service," he answered, mournfully. "Pray, command me. But let us go into the house. It is cold and dreary here."

He led the way through the great hall to the library. A charming room, which-if I may use the expression-was redolent of literature. There were books from floor to ceiling; where books would not go were pictures, all perfect works of art; and where pictures could not be squeezed in there were elegant trifles, such as a man of refined taste loves to gather about him. The window commanded a view over a range of flowerbeds to the stream beyond, which had for a background a dark wood, that was sombre with pines and cedars. Mr. Trelawney motioned me to an easy chair of the most ample proportions, delightfully cushioned; and, as I seated myself, he did the same in a similar chair beside the fire.

"I am here on behalf of the liquidators," I began, as he leaned back, folded his hands,

and waited for me to speak.

"Yes," was the only answer he made; and it was uttered in a sort of dreamy way, as though his thoughts were not with what he said.

"You are aware," I proceeded, as I watched his face, which seemed to be absolutely expressionless at that moment—"you are aware that a very important book is missing?"

"Yes," he answered, again in the same dreamy way. "I heard it through Rogers,

Millbank, and Farmer."

"But do you mean to say, Mr. Trelawney," I exclaimed, "that you did not know the register was missing until the liquidators made it known?"

He started into life at this. He sat up, with his long white hands nervously clutching



"HE STARTED INTO LIFE AT THIS."

the ends of the chair-arms; and his pale face lighted up with some inward passion that he was trying hard to conceal.

At this moment the door suddenly opened and a lady entered, but visibly started and drew back as she observed me, and looking at Mr. Trelawney she stammered:—

"I-I-beg your pardon, but I didn't

know you had anyone with you."

"This is a gentleman from London—Mr. Donovan," he exclaimed, as he sprang to his feet; and then introducing her to me he added: "My sister, sir, Miss Bertha Trelawney."

I bowed and she bowed. She was dressed in black; her white hair was neatly arranged beneath a cap; but her face, like her brother's, was pale and lined with thought and care. She seemed greatly agitated and suffering from nervous tremor, and I was sure that she regarded me with mixed feelings of anxiety and fear. I watched her narrowly, and saw her exchange looks with her brother.

"Did you wish to speak to me?" asked her brother, apparently with the object of

cutting short the interview.

"Yes," came the answer in low tones; and, asking me to excuse him for a few minutes, Mr. Trelawney and his sister went out of the room.

In about ten minutes he returned, and he

too seemed agitated.

"When my sister entered," he began as he resumed his seat, "I was about to tell you that the discovery of defalcations and the loss of the register is as much a revelation to me as it is to anyone. There is one thing I think that I may mention, and I do it with all reserve. But it is perhaps better

that the information should come from me than from anyone else. About two years ago-it may be two and a half, I am not quite clear on the subject - I placed a gentleman in the concern as a confidential clerk. His name was David Brinsley. He was the son of an old friend

of mine, who went out to Australia long ago, and died there. David, who had been partly brought up in the colonies, came to England after his father's death and sought me out. As he brought excellent testimonials, I had no hesitation in giving him a position of trust. Three months ago he was taken suddenly ill, and was dead in a few days. I remember now that it was immediately after David's death that I heard something about the register being missing."

"This is a remarkable story, Mr. Trelawney,"

I remarked, pointedly.

"Heaven forbid," he exclaimed, excitedly, "that I should cast aspersions on the character of a dead man; but I mention the incident for what it is worth. It is for you to make such inquiries as you think the matter deserves."

"Certainly," I answered, in a way intended to suggest that I did not think very much about the matter; but the truth was, I was morally certain I had got hold of the key to

the mystery.

As I did not see that any object was to be served by my prolonging the interview then, I took my departure after a few casual questions bearing on the death of David Brinsley. As I left the steps and was crossing the lawn, I turned and looked at the house, and saw at the curtained window of a side room the deathly-white face of a woman, who seemed to be glaring at me. Directly she saw that she was observed, she dropped the curtain which she had been holding aside with her hand, and hurriedly withdrew. This trivial incident was not without its significance for me, and I began to weave out a theory as I pursued my way to Liverpool.

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And one resolve I made was to look upon David Brinsley, alive or dead. Of course if, as Mr. Trelawney said, he was dead and buried, I could not see him alive. But, anyway, I wanted to see that he was as dead as he ought to be if he was really buried.

Necessarily there were certain legal formalities to comply with before my resolve could be put into practical shape. But certain information having been lodged, and all the forms of law been duly observed, an order was issued from the Home Office for the exhumation of the body of David Brinsley,

who in the death certificate was described as a native of Australia; aged forty; and his decease was attributed to "pericardiac inflammation."

The disinterment took place at night after the cemetery gates were closed for the day. A small tent had been put up near the grave, and the oak coffin having been hoisted from the grave, was placed on trestles in the tent; and the undertaker's men proceeded to remove the lid and expose the face of the corpse, which proved to be in

a remarkably good state of preservation. I had taken care to have several persons present who had been acquainted with David Brinsley, and as the lid of the coffin was taken off, I said collectively to these people as they crowded round:—

"Look well at the face of that dead man, and tell me if it is David Brinsley's face."

In reply to this question there arose a unanimous chorus of "Noes."

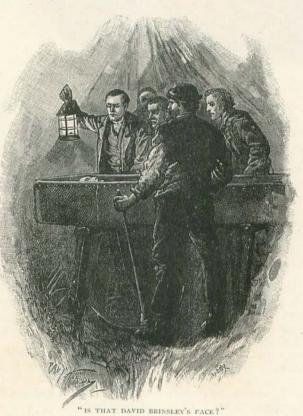
Perhaps I smiled a little to myself in spite of the "solemn presence of the dead," but a man may be pardoned for smiling, even under such circumstances, when he knows that he has achieved a triumph.

Although the plot had apparently thickened, I had picked up some important clues, and diligently set to work to follow them up. Remembering what took place between Mr. Trelawney and his sister on the occasion of my visit to the "Dingle," I felt certain that his secrets were her secrets, and believing, rightly or wrongly, that in her I should find more pliable material to work upon than in him, I decided to seek an interview with her in her brother's absence.

and made my plans accordingly. I went down to the "Dingle" one night, when, as I had previously ascertained would be the case, Mr. Trelawney was absent, and I sent word to Miss Trelawney that I desired to see her on a matter of urgent importance. She received me in the diningroom; a large, heavily-wainscoted and somewhat gloomy chamber, looking very gloomy and very ghostly on this occasion. for the fire had smouldered down to a hand-

ashes; and as a current of air that entered from some unseen aperture caused the flame of the large suspended lamp, by which the room was lighted, to flicker and flare, shadows moved to and fro, and chased each other over the table and up the walls, and dived and disappeared into recesses and corners only to immediately reappear again. It was a chamber of shadows, weird and suggestive, and it brought to my mind the line:—

What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue! As I stood dreaming dreams, a door at the



end of the room opened, and Bertha Trelawney entered like a shadow, and we stood face to face. She seemed to me to have grown two or three years older, and she wore a look of ineffable mental suffering.

"You wish to see me?" she murmured,

faintly.

"I do, madam," I answered, as I offered her a chair, into which she sank like a mechanical figure. "I am sorry to disturb you at this hour; sorry, too, to intrude upon your sorrow, for you have a sorrow, and a

skeleton haunts

you."

"What do you mean?" she asked, as she shuddered, sighed, and looked nervously around the room.

"I must ask you another question by way of answer to yours," I said. "Did you know David Brinsley?"

"I have seen him," she replied, after some moments of hesi-

tancy.

"Do you believe him to be dead?" The question startled

She rose to her feet suddenly; her eyes flashed, and her pale cheeks flushed a little. Pointing at me, and looking altogether as if she was some imperious ruler

uttering a stern decree, she said, hoarsely:—
"Go! quit the house. I'll answer no

more questions."

Bearing in mind that it is best to leave an angry woman, like a sleeping dog, alone; and as Miss Bertha Trelawney had so far played into my hands that I felt further questioning then would be supererogation, I bowed as gracefully as I could, and said:—

"Certainly, madam, I will comply with your request," and bidding her good-night,

which elicited no response, I withdrew; but I was conscious that I took forth from that chamber of shadows a link that would prove an important one in the chain I was patiently trying to piece together. The circumstances of the hour necessarily made me thoughtful, and almost unconsciously I found myself going down the leaf-strewn path beneath the avenue of trees that led to the lodge-gate, when suddenly I was aroused by the sound of someone approaching.

I immediately stepped off the path and

a mongst the trees, where I stood concealed. The approaching person proved to be Mr. Trelawney.

I followed with the intention of accosting him, but ere he had gone very far his sister met him. She had evidently been on the watch. She without was bonnet, but had wrapped a shawl around her head. She seized his arm eagerly, and I heard her say, in a tone pregnant with anxiety and grief:-

"Oh, Samuel! I am so glad you have come. That dreadful man Donovan has been here, and it seems to me as if he had tugged at my very heart-strings and rifled



"SHE SAID, HOARSELY, 'GO!'

my brain. I must not—dare not—see him again, for he makes me weak and powerless, when I should be strong and defiant."

"What do you mean?" demanded her

brother, hotly.

What answer she made to this I know not, for they had passed beyond the radius of my hearing. Yet something—instinct or prescience, call it what you will—prompted me to linger about the house, as if in a vague and undefined way I expected the trees or

the stones to make some revelation. Presently a blaze of light suddenly appeared in an upper chamber. A white blind was drawn at the window, and on this blind the shadow of Mr. Trelawney was thrown, the outlines of his features being plainly visible. Then came another shadow—that of Miss Trelawney. The shadows blended, separated, formed fantastic pictures, and moved in a grotesque way, as shadows of living beings will when thrown on to a screen by a strong light.

Those pictures on the blind were riddles, and lorg I stayed trying to read them, until the light was extinguished and all was darkness there. I still lingered-still vaguely expecting a revelation—when the stillness of the night was broken by the harsh grating of the opening of a door. It was not the main door, but a side entrance. Concealing myself behind a clump of bushes, I watched and waited, and in a few minutes there came forth a man and woman, carrying what seemed a large box between them. As I recognised in that man and woman Mr. Trelawney and his sister, the movements of the shadow pictures I had seen on the blind were intelligible enough. The Trelawneys

had been engaged up in that room packing something up. The something was in the box, and they were going to dispose of it. The box was heavy apparently, and they rested occasionally. As they moved off I followed cautiously. The revelation was coming at last. They went towards the stream of which I have spoken, and when they reached it they slid the box into the water; and I heard the gurgle and splash it made as it sank to the bottom.

Having given their secret into the safe keeping, as they supposed, of this dark stream, the Trelawneys returned to the house, and I went to the spot where the box had been thrown in, and noted the place by fixing a piece of stick in the bank. Then I hurried away, and obtained the assistance of a constable in plain clothes, and, provided with a boat-hook and a rope, I and my companion returned to the "Dingle" grounds. I easily discovered the marked spot on the banks of the stream, and in a short time we had fished up the box. We lost no time in conveying it to a house in the neighbourhood, where I temporarily rented rooms.

The box was an ordinary common deal wine case of the capacity of two dozen

bottles, and the lid had been carefully screwed down, necessitating the use of a screw-driver to remove it. The hour was very late-long after midnight-but I had no idea of seeking rest until I learnt what the contents were of that case. Being a stranger in the house, I knew not where to look for a screwdriver. But, placing the box on the table. with two tallow candles on the mantelpiece to give light, my companion and I, by means of a brokenbladed table - knife, combined with infinite patience, managed to draw those screws, and thus release the lid. The box was lined with tin, and, inside, securely wrapped in an india



"WE FISHED IT UP.

rubber sheet tied with string, was a parcel, which we proceeded to open with feverish eagerness; and, when the wrapping was removed, lo! the missing register of bondholders was before us!

That "Dingle" stream, fatal to the hopes and desires of the Trelawneys, had thus revealed part, at least, of their secret; but there was still more to learn, though I never doubted for a moment that I should learn it in due course.

Having snatched a few brief hours of rest, I proceeded to London with the recovered register in my possession, and went at once to Mr. Rogers.

The sentiments which this hard-headed man of figures displayed were by no means in accord with my own feelings, but under the circumstances I had no alternative but to carry out his imperious mandate to arrest Samuel Trelawney without delay.

Two days later I was once more journeying down to the "Dingle," with the warrant for Trelay ney's arrest in my pocket. It was late when I arrived at my destination, and the light of the short, bitter November day was fading away. On my inquiring for Mr. Trelawney I was shown into an ante-room, and presently Miss Trelawney came to me. I was struck by some change that was apparent in her. She was neatly dressed in black, and her white hair seemed to have become whiter. In her eyes was a look of infinite plaintiveness, and in her face-from which the lines of anxiety and care seemed to have been smoothed away-was an expression that I can only indicate as that of divine resignation. She might, indeed, have sat as a model to some great painter for a picture of a Madonna. In a low voice, in which rang the music of sorrow, she said:-

"I have been expecting your coming. You wish to see my brother?"

"I do, madam, for I have an unpleasant duty to perform."

She smiled sadly as she replied: "If you will follow me I will take you to him."

She led the way across the hall, stopping for a moment at the table to light a tall wax candle that stood there in a silver candle-stick, then proceeding, with silent footfalls, she went into the great dining-room—the chamber of shadows, as I have called it—and holding the candle above her head she approached the table, on which something was laid covered over with a sheet. She drew the sheet partly down, saying in her soft, low way: "Here is my brother, Mr. Donovan."

A solemn silence ensued as I gazed upon the dead face of Samuel Trelawney—a face that looked as if it had just been carved by some cunning sculptor to represent supreme tranquillity. Kindly death had smoothed away all the wrinkles, and had wreathed a faint smile about the lips, as if the weary man, with the eloquence of dead dumbness, was saying, "Behold, I sleep the eternal sleep, and the law's vengeance can smite me no more."

As I gently drew the sheet up again, over the marble-like figure, I turned to Miss Trelawney, who was apparently unmoved, and looked at her inquiringly for information. She walked towards the door, and I followed her back to the ante-room, where, sinking into a chair, she said:—

"Since my dear brother has entered into his longed-for rest, there is no further necessity for concealment. He has fallen a sacrifice to his faithfulness and love for a worthless woman. Years and years ago he gave his heart to one who knew not how to appreciate She deceived him for the sake of a roué and gambler, whom she married. A few years of terrible bitterness; then, neglected and friendless, she lay on her death-bed. her extremity she sent for my brother, to pray to him for his forgiveness. was freely granted, and he vowed over her dead body that he would be a father to her orphan boy. Heaven knows how truly he kept that vow. But the boy had the seeds of wickedness within him so firmly rooted, that all the sweet and loving influences that were brought to bear proved of no avail, and he returned what was done for him with base ingratitude. But my poor brother was blind to all the lad's faults, and well-nigh broke his heart when he disappeared, leaving no trace behind him.

"Years afterwards he came back, a povertystricken, disgraced man. My brother listened kindly to his story of shame and wrong-doing, and on his promising reformation and for his dead mother's sake he forgave him, and under the name of David Brinsley placed him in a responsible position in the business. It was only to prove, however, the uselessness of scattering seed on barren soil. David Brinsley, the vagabond in heart, became a thief and forger, and the enormous sums out of which he cheated the business were squandered in gambling and dissipation. Yet, notwithstanding all this, my foolish brother said, 'He is the son of the woman I loved, and he must be saved.' I urged him with all the eloquence I could command to

have him arrested, but his answer was: 'No; for his mother's sake, I will save him.'

"Brinsley at this time was living with some people who had a son much about his own age, and very like him in build. This son was taken ill, and, after being seen once by a doctor, died. The doctor gave a certificate, but he was told that the name of the deceased was David Brinsley. The parents of the dead man were heavily bribed by my misguided brother to allow this fraud to be perpetrated, and they removed immediately after the funeral, while David Brinsley lay in concealment here, but ultimately fled to Spain. In order to hide the extent of this wretched man's defalcations, my brother caused the register to be secretly removed from the office and brought here, but he could never bring himself to destroy it. He always said that some day it must be restored. From that moment his life became a terror to him. On the night that I so abruptly entered the room when you and Samuel were together, I was in a state of horrible distress, for I had just discovered that David Brinsley had gone out and nobody knew where he had

gone to. He returned, however, at a very late hour; and subsequently I heard from a private source that yo had caused the body of the supposed David Brinsley to be exhumed. I knew then that it was no longer possible to keep our I infearful secret. sisted on Brinsley leaving the house for ever, and, disguised as a clergyman, he went to Spain.

"After your last visit I urged my brother to return the register to the office, but he said he would not do that until he was assured

that Brinsley was out of the reach of the law; though, vielding to my entreaties, he consented, with a view to its more effectual concealment, to hide it in the stream. The next morning we found it had been removed, and guessing that you had set a watch upon us, and fearing the dreadful exposure that would ensue, my dear brother's brain gave way, and, unable to endure the misery of his position any longer, he drowned himself in the stream which had failed to keep his secret. It is all over now; the sorrow, the suffering, and heart-ache are ended; and after the fitful fever of life, which for him ought to have been almost without a care had it not been for the deception of the woman he loved, he sleeps well. In a little while I shall join him, and realize that peace that the world cannot give."

Such was Miss Trelawney's sad story, which I proved to be correct in every detail. And when I repeated it in substance to Mr. Rogers, he growled and said:—

"Ah! it is ten thousand pities that he has cheated the law."

As I have said, Mr. Rogers was an un-

sentimental man, and judged everything and everybody from his own matter - of - fact point of view. But I, while admitting that Trelawney was weak and foolish in a worldly sense, could hardly repress a sigh; and was tempted to say, "Judge not harshly, lest ye be judged harshly in return." Altogether it was a pathetic tale of a man's love, a woman's fickleness, and full of a great moral lesson which we who are not without some vein of sentiment may take to heart.



[Next month will appear the first of the new series of "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes." Admirers of that eminent detective are also informed that "The Sign of Four," the story of the wonderful adventure by which he gained his reputation, can now be obtained at this office. Price 3s. 6d.]