

# THE DORRINGTON DEED-BOX.

BY ARTHUR MORRISON.\*

(Author of "Adventures of Martin Hewitt.")

Illustrated by SYDNEY COWELL.



## III.—THE CASE OF THE "MIRROR OF PORTUGAL."

HETHER or not this case has an historical interest is a matter of conjecture. If it has none, then the title I have given it is a misnomer. But I think the conjecture that some historical interest attaches to it is by no means an empty one, and all that can be urged against

it is the common though not always declared error that romance expired fifty years at least ago, and history with it.

This makes it seem improbable that the answer to an unsolved riddle of a century since should be found to-day in an inquiry agent's dingy office in Bedford Street, Covent Garden. Whether or not it has so been found the reader may judge for himself, though the evidence stops far short of actual proof of the identity of the "Mirror of Portugal" with the stone wherewith this case was concerned.

But first, as to the "Mirror of Portugal." This was a diamond of much and ancient fame. It was of Indian origin, and it had lain in the possession of the royal family of Portugal in the time of Portugal's ancient splendour. But three hundred years ago, after the extinction of the early line of succession, the diamond, with other jewels, fell into the possession of Don Antonio, one of the half-dozen pretenders who were then scrambling for the throne. Don Antonio, badly in want of money, deposited the stone in pledge with Queen Elizabeth of England, and never redeemed it. Thus it took its place as one of the English Crown jewels, and so remained till the overthrow and

death of Charles the First. Queen Henrietta then carried it with her to France, and there, to obtain money to satisfy her creditors, she sold it to the great Cardinal Mazarin. He bequeathed it, at his death, to the French Crown, and among the Crown jewels of France it once more found a temporary abiding place. But once more it brought disaster with it in shape of a revolution, and again a king lost his head at the executioner's hands. And in the riot and confusion of the great Revolution of 1792 the "Mirror of Portugal," with other jewels, vanished utterly. Where it went to, and who took it, nobody ever knew. The "Mirror of Portugal" disappeared as suddenly and effectually as though fused to vapour by electric combustion.

So much for the famous "Mirror." Whether or not its history is germane to the narrative which follows, probably nobody will ever certainly know. But that Dorrington considered that it was, his notes on the case abundantly testify.

For some days before Dorrington's attention was in any way given to this matter, a poorly-dressed and not altogether prepossessing Frenchman had been haunting the staircase and tapping at the office door, unsuccessfully attempting an interview with Dorrington, who happened to be out, or busy, whenever he called. The man never asked for Hicks, Dorrington's partner; but this was very natural. In the first place it was always Dorrington who met all strangers and conducted all negotiations, and in the second, Dorrington had just lately, in a case regarding a secret society in Soho, made his name much known and respected, not to say feared, in the foreign colony of that quarter; wherefore it was likely that a man who bore evidence of residence in that neighbourhood should come with the name of Dorrington on his tongue.

The weather was cold, but the man's clothes were thin and threadbare, and he had no overcoat. His face was of a broad,

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low type, coarse in feature and small in forehead, and he wore the baggy black linen peaked cap familiar on the heads of men of his class in parts of Paris. He had called unsuccessfully, as I have said, sometimes once sometimes more frequently, on each of three or four days before he succeeded in seeing Dorrington. At last, however, he intercepted him on the stairs, as Dorrington arrived at about eleven in the morning.

"Pardon, m'sieu," he said laying his finger on Dorrington's arm, "it is M. Dorrington—not?"

"Well—suppose it is, what then?" Dorrington never admitted his identity to a stranger without first seeing good cause.

"I 'ave beesness—very great beesness; beesness of a large profit for you if you please to take it. Where shall I tell it?"

"Come in here," Dorrington replied, leading the way to his private room. The man did not look like a wealthy client, but that signified nothing. Dorrington had made profitable strokes after introductions even less promising.

The man followed Dorrington, pulled off his cap, and sat in the chair Dorrington pointed at.

"In the first place," said Dorrington, "what's your name?"

"Ah, yas—but before—all that I tell is for ourselves alone, is it not? It is all in confidence, eh?"

"Yes, yes, of course," Dorrington answered, with virtuous impatience. "Whatever is said in this room is regarded as strictly confidential. What's your name?"

"Jacques Bouvier."

"Living at——?"

"Little Norham Street, Soho."

"And now the business you speak of."

"The beesness is this. My cousin, Léon Bouvier—he is *coquin*—a rascal!"

"Very likely."

"He has a great jewel—it is, I have no doubt, a diamond—of a great value. It is not his! There is no right of him to it! It should be mine. If you get it for me one-quarter of it in money shall be yours! And it is of a great value."

"Where does your cousin live? What is he?"

"Beck Street, Soho. He has a shop—a café—Café des Bons Camarades. And he give me not a crrrust—if I starve!"

It scarcely seemed likely that the keeper of a little foreign café in a back street of Soho would be possessed of a jewel a quarter of whose value would be prize enough to

tempt Dorrington to take a new case up. But Dorrington bore with the man a little longer. "What is this jewel you talk of?" he asked. "And if you don't know enough about it to be quite sure whether it is a diamond or not, what *do* you know?"

"Listen! The stone I have never seen; but that it is a diamond makes probable. What else so much value? And it is much value that gives my cousin so great care and trouble—*cochon*! Listen! I relate to you. My father—he was charcoal-burner at Bonneuil, department of Seine. My uncle—the father of my cousin, also was charcoal-burner. The grandfather—charcoal-burner also; and his father and his grandfather before him—all burners of charcoal, at Bonneuil. Now perceive. The father of my grandfather was of the great Revolution—a young man, great among those who stormed the Bastille, the Tuileries, the Hôtel de Ville, brave, and a leader. Now, when palaces were burnt and heads were falling there was naturally much confusion. Things were lost—things of large value. What more natural? While so many were losing the head from the shoulders, it was not strange that some should lose jewels from the neck. And when these things were lost who might have a greater right to keep them than the young men of the Revolution, the brave, and the leaders, they who did the work?"

"If you mean that your respectable great-grandfather stole something, you needn't explain it any more," Dorrington said. "I quite understand."

"I do not say stole; when there is a great revolution a thing is anybody's. But it would not be convenient to tell of it at the time, for the new Government might believe everything to be its own. These things I do not know, you will understand—I suggest an explanation, that is all. After the great Revolution, my great-grandfather lives alone and quiet, and burns the charcoal as before. Why? The jewel is too great to sell so soon. So he gives it to his son and dies. He also, my grandfather, still burns the charcoal. Again, why? Because, as I believe, he is too poor, too common a man to go about openly to sell so great a stone. More, he loves the stone, for with that he is always rich; and so he burns his charcoal and lives contented as his father had done, and he is rich and nobody knows it. What then? He has two sons. When he dies, which son does he leave the stone to?"



Each one says it is for himself—that is natural. I say it was for my father. But however that may make itself, my father dies suddenly. He falls in a pit—by accident, says his brother, not by accident, says my mother; and soon after, she dies too. By accident too, perhaps you ask? Oh yes, by accident too, no doubt." The man laughed disagreeably. "So I am left alone, a little boy, to burn charcoal. When I am a bigger boy there comes the great war, and the Prussians besiege Paris. My uncle, he, burning charcoal no more, goes at night, and takes things from the dead Prussians. Perhaps they are not always quite dead when he finds them,—perhaps he makes them so. Be that as it will, the Prussians take him one dark night; and they stand him against a garden wall, and pif! paf! they shoot him. That is all of my uncle, but he dies a rich man, and nobody knows. What does his wife do? She has the jewel, and she has a little money that has been got from the dead Prussians. So when the war is over, she comes to London with my cousin, the bad Léon, and she has the café—Café des Bons Camarades. And Léon grows up, and his mother dies, and he has the Café, and with the jewel is a rich man—nobody knowing; nobody but me. But, figure to yourself; shall I burn charcoal and starve at Bonneuil with a rich cousin in London—rich with a diamond that should be mine? Not so. I come over, and Léon at first, he lets me wait at the café. But I do not want that—there is the stone, and I can never see it, never find it. So one day Léon finds me looking in a box, and—chut! out I go. I tell Léon that I will share the jewel with him or I will tell the police. He laughs at me—there is no jewel, he says—I am mad. I do not tell the police, for that is to lose it altogether. But I come here and I offer you one quarter of the diamond if you shall get it."

"Steal it for you, eh?"

Jacques Bouvier shrugged his shoulders. "The word is as you please," he said. "The jewel is not his. And if there is delay it will be gone. Already he goes each day to Hatton Garden, leaving his wife to keep the Café des Bons Camarades. Perhaps he is selling the jewel to-day! Who can tell? So that it will be well that you begin at once."

"Very well. My fee in advance will be twenty guineas."

"What? Dieu!—I have no money I tell

you! Get the diamond, and there is one quarter—twenty-five per cent.—for you!"

"But what guarantee do you give that this story of yours isn't all a hoax? Can you expect me to take everything on trust, and work for nothing?"

The man rose and waved his arms excitedly. "It is true, I say!" he exclaimed. "It is a fortune! There is much for you, and it will pay! I have no money or you should have some. What can I do? You will lose the chance if you are foolish!"

"It rather seems to me, my friend, that I shall be foolish to give valuable time to grati-



"Sir—you are a ver' big fool!"

fyng your cock-and-bull fancies. See here now. I'm a man of business and my time is fully occupied. You come here and waste half an hour or more of it with a long rigmarole about some valuable article that you say yourself you have never seen, and you don't even know whether it is a diamond or not. You wander at large over family traditions which you may believe yourself or may not. You have no money, and you offer no fee as a guarantee of your *bona fides*, and the sum of the thing is that you ask me to go and commit a theft—to purloin an article you can't even describe, and then to give you three-quarters of the proceeds.



No, my man, you have made a mistake. You must go away from here at once, and if I find you hanging about my door again I shall have you taken away very summarily. Do you understand? Now go away."

"*Mon Dieu!* But ——"

"I've no more time to waste," Dorrington answered, opening the door and pointing to the stairs. "If you stay here any longer you'll get into trouble."

Jacques Bouvier walked out, muttering and agitating his hands. At the top stair he turned and, almost too angry for words, burst out, "Sir—you are a ver' big fool—a fool!" But Dorrington slammed the door.

He determined, however, if he could find a little time, to learn a little more of Léon Bouvier—perhaps to put a man to watch at the *Café des Bons Camarades*. That the keeper of this place in Soho should go regularly to Hatton Garden, the diamond market, was curious, and Dorrington had met and analysed too many extraordinary romances to put aside unexamined Jacques Bouvier's seemingly improbable story. But, having heard all the man had to say, it had clearly been his policy to get rid of him in the way he had done. Dorrington was quite ready to steal a diamond, or anything else of value, if it could be done quite safely, but he was no such fool as to give three-quarters of his plunder—or any of it—to somebody else. So that the politic plan was to send Jacques Bouvier away with the impression that his story was altogether pooh-poohed and was to be forgotten.

## II.

DORRINGTON left his office late that day, and, the evening being clear, though dark, he walked toward Conduit Street by way of Soho; he thought to take a glance at the *Café des Bons Camarades* on his way, without being observed, should Jacques Bouvier be in the vicinity.

Beck Street, Soho, was a short and narrow street lying east and west, and joining two of the larger streets that stretch north and south across the district. It was even a trifle dirtier than these by-streets in that quarter are wont to be. The *Café des Bons Camarades* was a little green-painted shop the window whereof was backed by muslin curtains, while upon the window itself appeared in florid painted letters the words "*Cuisine Française*." It was the only shop in the street, with the exception of a small coal and firewood shed at one end, the other buildings consisting of the side wall of a

factory, now closed for the night, and a few tenement houses. An alley entrance—apparently the gate of a stable-yard—stood next the café. As Dorrington walked by the steamy window, he was startled to hear his own name and some part of his office address spoken in excited tones somewhere in this dark alley entrance; and suddenly a man rather well dressed, and cramming a damaged tall hat on his head as he went, darted from the entrance and ran in the direction from which Dorrington had come. A stoutly built Frenchwoman, carrying on her face every indication of extreme excitement, watched him from the gateway, and Dorrington made no doubt that it was in her voice that he had heard his name mentioned. He walked briskly to the end of the short street, turned at the end, and hurried round the block of houses, in hope to catch another sight of the man. Presently he saw him, running, in Old Compton Street, and making in the direction of Charing Cross Road. Dorrington mended his pace, and followed. The man emerged where Shaftesbury Avenue meets Charing Cross Road, and, as he crossed, hesitated once or twice, as though he thought of hailing a cab, but decided rather to trust his own legs. He hastened through the byways to St. Martin's Lane, and Dorrington now perceived that one side and half the back of his coat was dripping with wet mud. Also it was plain, as Dorrington had suspected, that his destination was Dorrington's own office in Bedford Street. So the follower broke into a trot, and at last came upon the muddy man wrenching at the bell and pounding at the closed door of the house in Bedford Street, just as the housekeeper began to turn the lock.

"M'sieu Dorrington—M'sieu Dorrington," the man exclaimed excitedly as the door was opened.

"E's gawn 'ome long ago," the caretaker growled; "you might 'a known that. Oh, 'ere 'e is though—good evenin', sir."

"I am Mr. Dorrington," the inquiry agent said politely. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Ah yes—it is important—at once! I am robbed!"

"Just step upstairs, then, and tell me about it."

Dorrington had but begun to light the gas in his office when his visitor broke out, "I am robbed, M'sieu Dorrington, robbed by my cousin—*coquin!* Rrobbed of everything! Rrobbed I tell you!" He seemed astonished to find the other so little excited by the intelligence.



"Let me take your coat," Dorrington said, calmly. "You've had a downer in the mud I see. Why, what's this? he smelt the collar as he went toward a hat-peg. "Chloroform!"

"Ah yes—it is that rrrascal Jacques! I will tell you. This evening I go into the gateway next my house—Café des Bons Camarades—to enter by the side-door, and—paf!—a shawl is fling across my face from behind—it is pull tight—there is a knee in my back—I can catch nothing with my hand—it smell all hot in my throat—I choke and I fall over—there is no more. I wake up and I see my wife, and she takes me into the house. I am all muddy and tired, but I feel—and I have lost my property—it is a diamond—and my cousin Jacques, he has done it!"

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure? Oh yes—it is certain, I tell you—certain!"

"Then why not inform the police?"

The visitor was clearly taken aback by this question. He faltered, and looked searchingly in Dorrington's face. "That is not always the convenient way," he said. "I would rather that you do it. It is the diamond that I want—not to punish my cousin—thief that he is!"

Dorrington mended a quill with ostentatious care, saying encouragingly as he did so, "I can quite understand that you may not wish to prosecute your cousin—only to recover the diamond you speak of. Also I can quite understand that there may be reasons—family reasons perhaps, perhaps others—which may render it inadvisable to make even the existence of the jewel known more than absolutely necessary. For instance, there may be other claimants, Monsieur Léon Bouvier."

The visitor started. "You know my name then?" he asked. "How is that?"

Dorrington smiled the smile of a sphinx. "M. Bouvier," he said, "it is my trade to know everything—everything." He put the pen down and gazed whimsically at the other. "My agents are everywhere. You talk of the secret agents of the Russian police—they are nothing. It is my trade to know all things. For instance"—Dorrington unlocked a drawer and produced a book (it was but an office diary), and, turning its pages, went on. "Let me see—B. It is my trade, for instance, to know about the Café des Bons Camarades, established by the late Madame Bouvier, now unhappily deceased. It is my trade to know of Madame Bouvier at Bon-neuil, where the charcoal was burnt, and

where Madame Bouvier was unfortunately left a widow at the time of the siege of Paris, because of some lamentable misunderstanding of her husband's with a file of Prussian soldiers by an orchard wall. It is my trade, moreover, to know something of the sad death of that husband's brother—in a pit—and of the later death of his widow. Oh yes. More" (turning a page attentively, as though following detailed notes), "it is my trade to know of a little quarrel between those brothers—it might even have been about a diamond, just such a diamond as you have come about to-night—and of jewels missed from the Tuileries in the great Revolution a hundred years ago." He shut the book with a bang and returned it to its place. "And there are other things—too many to talk about," he said, crossing his legs and smiling calmly at the Frenchman.

During this long pretence at reading, Bouvier had slid farther and farther forward on his chair, till he sat on the edge, his eyes staring wide, and his chin dropped. He had been pale when he arrived, but now he was of a leaden gray. He said not a word.

Dorrington laughed lightly. "Come," he said, "I see you are astonished. Very likely. Very few of the people and families whose *dossiers* we have here" (he waved his hand generally about the room) "are aware of what we know. But we don't make a song of it, I assure you, unless it is for the benefit of clients. A client's affairs are sacred, of course, and our resources are at his disposal. Do I understand that you become a client?"

Bouvier sat a little farther back on his chair and closed his mouth. "A—a—yes," he answered at length, with an effort, moistening his lips as he spoke. "That is why I come."

"Ah, now we shall understand each other," Dorrington replied genially, opening an ink-pot and clearing his blotting-pad. "We're not connected with the police here, or anything of that sort, and except so far as we can help them we leave our client's affairs alone. You wish to be a client, and you wish me to recover your lost diamond. Very well, that is business. The first thing is the usual fee in advance—twenty guineas. Will you write a cheque?"

Bouvier had recovered some of his self-possession, and he hesitated. "It is a large fee," he said.

"Large? Nonsense! It is the sort of fee that might easily be swallowed up in half a day's expenses. And besides—a rich diamond merchant like yourself!"



Bouvier looked up quickly. "Diamond merchant?" he said. "I do not understand. I have lost my diamond—there was but one."

"And yet you go to Hatton Garden every day."

"What!" cried Bouvier, letting his hand fall from the table, "you know that too?"

"Of course," Dorrington laughed, easily; "it is my trade, I tell you. But write the cheque."

Bouvier produced a crumpled and dirty cheque-book and complied, with many pauses, looking up dazedly from time to time into Dorrington's face.

"Now," said Dorrington, "tell me where you kept your diamond, and all about it."

"It was in an old little wooden box—so." Bouvier, not yet quite master of himself, sketched an oblong of something less than three inches long by two broad. "The box was old and black—my grandfather may have made it, or his father. The lid fitted very tight, and the inside was packed with fine charcoal powder with the diamond resting in it. The diamond—oh, it was great; like that—so." He made another sketch, roughly square, an inch and a quarter across. "But it looked even much greater still, so bright, so wonderful! It is easy to understand that my grandfather did not sell it—beside the danger. It is so beautiful a thing, and it is such great riches—all in one little box. Why should not a poor charcoal-burner be rich in secret, and look at his diamond, and get all the few things he wants by burning his charcoal? And there was the danger. But that is long ago. I am a man of beesness, and I desired to sell it, and be rich. And that Jacques—he has stolen it!"

"Let us keep to the point. The diamond was in a box. Well, where was the box?"

"On the outside of the box there were notches—so, and so. Round the box at each place there was a tight, strong, silk cord—that is two cords. The cords were round my neck, under my shirt, so. And the box was under my arm—just as a boy carries his satchel, but high up—in the armpit, where I could feel it at all times. To-night, when I come to myself, my collar was broken at the stud—see—the cords were cut—and all was gone!"

"You say your cousin Jacques has done this. How do you know?"

"Ah! But who else? Who else could know? And he has always tried to steal it. At first, I let him wait at the Café des Bons Camarades. What does he do? He prys

about my house, and opens drawers; and I catch him at last looking in a box, and I turn him out. And he calls me a thief! *Sacré!* He goes—I have no more of him; and so—he does this!"

"Very well. Write down his name and address on this piece of paper, and your own." Bouvier did so. "And now tell me what you have been doing at Hatton Garden."

"Well, it was a very great diamond—I could not go to the first man and show it to sell. I must make myself known."

"It never struck you to get the stone cut in two, did it?"

"Eh? What?—*Nom de chien!* No!" He struck his knee with his hand. "Fool! Why did I not think of that? But still"—he grew more thoughtful—"I should have to show it to get it cut, and I did not know where to go. And the value would have been less."

"Just so—but it's the regular thing to do, I may tell you, in cases like this. But go on. About Hatton Garden, you know."

"I thought that I must make myself known among the merchants of diamonds, and then, perhaps, I should learn the ways, and one day be able to sell. As it was, I knew nothing—nothing at all. I waited, and I saved money in the café. Then, when I could do it, I dressed well and went and bought some diamonds of a dealer—very little diamonds, a little trayful for twenty pounds, and I try to sell them again. But I have paid too much—I can only sell for fifteen pounds. Then I buy more, and sell them for what I give. Then I take an office in Hatton Garden—that is, I share a room with a dealer, and there is a partition between our desks. My wife attends the café, I go to Hatton Garden to buy and sell. It loses me money, but I must lose till I can sell the great diamond. I get to know the dealers more and more, and then to-night, as I go home—" he finished with an expressive shrug and a wave of the hand.

"Yes, yes, I think I see," Dorrington said. "As to the diamond again. It doesn't happen to be a *blue* diamond, does it?"

"No—pure white; perfect."

Dorrington had asked because two especially famous diamonds disappeared from among the French Crown jewels at the time of the great Revolution. One blue, the greatest coloured diamond ever known, and the other the "Mirror of Portugal." Bouvier's reply made it plain that it was certainly not the first which he had just lost.



"Come," Dorrington said, "I will call and inspect the scene of your disaster. I haven't dined yet, and it must be well past nine o'clock now."

They returned to Beck Street. There were gates at the dark entry by the side of the Café des Bons Camarades, but they were never shut, Bouvier explained. Dorrington had them shut now, however, and a lantern

the muddy cobble stones. The pieces of a broken bottle lay in a little heap, and a cork lay a yard away from them. Dorrington smelt the cork, and then collected together the broken glass (there were but four or five pieces) from the little heap. Another piece of glass lay by itself a little way off, and this also Dorrington took up, scrutinising it narrowly. Then he traversed the whole

passage carefully, stepping from bare stone to bare stone, and skimming the ground with the lantern. The mud lay confused and trackless in most places, though the place where Bouvier had been lying was indicated by an appearance of sweeping, caused, no doubt, by his wife dragging him to his feet. Only one other thing beside the glass and the cork did Dorrington carry away as evidence, and that the Bouvier's knew nothing of; for it was the remembrance of the mark of a sharp, small boot-heel in more than one patch of mud between the stones.

"Will you object, Madame Bouvier," he asked, as he handed back the lantern, "to show me the shoes you wore when you found your husband lying out here?"

Madame Bouvier had no objection at all. They were what she was then wearing, and had worn all day. She lifted her foot and exhibited one. There was no need for a second glance. It was a loose easy cashmere boot, with spring sides and heels cut down flat for indoor comfort.

"And this was at what time?"

It was between seven and eight o'clock, both agreed, though they differed a little as to the exact time. Bouvier had recovered when his wife raised him, had entered the house with her, at once discovered his loss, and immediately, on his wife's advice, set out to find Dorrington, whose name the woman had heard spoken of frequently among the visitors to the café in connection with the affair of the secret society already alluded to.



"Bouvier and his wife stood huddled and staring on the threshold of the side door."

was produced. The paving was of rough cobble stones, deep in mud.

"Do many people come down here in the course of an evening?" Dorrington asked.

"Never anybody but myself."

"Very well. Stand away at your side door."

Bouvier and his wife stood huddled and staring on the threshold of the side door, while Dorrington, with the lantern, explored



He had felt certain that Dorrington would not be at his office, but trusted to be directed where to find him.

"Now," Dorrington asked of Bouvier (the woman had been called away), "tell me some more about your cousin. Where does he live?"

"In Little Norham Street; the third house from this end on the right and the back room at the top. That is unless he has moved just lately."

"Has he been ill recently?"

"Ill?" Bouvier considered. "Not that I can say—no. I have never heard of Jacques being ill." It seemed to strike him as an incongruous and new idea. "Nothing has made him ill all his life—he is too good in constitution, I think."

"Does he wear spectacles?"

"Spectacles? *Mais non!* Never! Why should he wear spectacles? His eyes are good as mine."

"Very well. Now attend. To-morrow you must not go to Hatton Garden—I will go for you. If you see your cousin Jacques you must say nothing, take no notice; let everything proceed as though nothing had happened; leave all to me. Give me your address at Hatton Garden."

"But what is it you must do there?"

"That is my business. I do my business in my own way. Still I will give you a hint. Where is it that diamonds are sold? In Hatton Garden, as you so well know—as I expect your cousin knows if he has been watching you. Then where will your cousin go to sell it? Hatton Garden, of course. Never mind what I shall do there to intercept it. I am to be your new partner, you understand, bringing money into the business. You must be ill and stay at home till you hear from me. Go now and write me a letter of introduction to the man who shares the office with you. Or I will write it if you like, and you shall sign it. What sort of a man is he?"

"Very quiet—a tall man, perhaps English, but perhaps not."

"Ever buy or sell diamonds with him?"

"Once only. It was the first time. That is how I learned of the half-office to let."

The letter was written, and Dorrington stuffed it carelessly into his pocket. "Mr. Hamer is the name, is it?" he said. "I fancy I have met him somewhere. He is short-sighted, isn't he?"

"Oh yes, he is short-sighted. With *pince-nez*."

"Not very well lately?"

"No—I think not. He takes medicine in the office. But you will be careful, eh? He must not know."

"Do you think so? Perhaps I may tell him, though."

"Tell him? *Ciel*—no! You must not tell people! No!"

"Shall I throw the whole case over, and keep your deposit fee?"

"No—no, not that. But it is foolish to tell to people!"

"I am to judge what is foolish and what wise, M. Bouvier. Good evening!"

"Good evening, M. Dorrington; good evening." Bouvier followed him out to the gate. "And will you tell me—do you think there is a way to get the diamond? Have you any plan?"

"Oh yes, M. Bouvier, I have a plan. But as I have said, that is my business. It may be a successful plan, or it may not; that we shall see."

"And—the *dossier*. The notes that you so marvellously have, written out in the book you read. When this business is over you will destroy them, eh? You will not leave a clue?"

"The notes that I have in my books," answered Dorrington, without relaxing a muscle of his face, "are my property, for my own purposes, and were mine before you came to me. Those relating to you are a mere item in thousands. So long as you behave well, M. Bouvier, they will not harm you, and as I said, the confidences of a client are sacred to Dorrington & Hicks. But as to keeping them—certainly I shall. Once more—good evening!"

Even the stony-faced Dorrington could not repress a smile and something very like a chuckle as he turned the end of the street and struck out across Golden Square towards his rooms in Conduit Street. The simple Frenchman, only half a rogue—even less than half—was now bamboozled and put aside as effectually as his cousin had been. Certainly there was a diamond, and an immense one; if only the Bouvier tradition were true, probably the famous "Mirror of Portugal"; and nothing stood between Dorrington and absolute possession of that diamond, but an ordinary sort of case such as he dealt with every day. And he had made Bouvier pay a fee for the privilege of putting him completely on the track of it! Dorrington smiled again.

His dinner was spoilt by waiting, but he troubled little of that. He spread before him, and examined again, the pieces of glass



and the cork. The bottle had been a druggist's ordinary flat bottle, graduated with dose-marks, and altogether seven inches high, or thereabout. It had, without a doubt, contained the chloroform wherewith Léon Bouvier had been assaulted, as Dorrington had judged from the smell of the cork. The fact of the bottle being corked showed that the chloroform had not been bought all at once—since in that case it would have been put up in a stoppered bottle. More probably it had been procured in very small quantities (ostensibly for toothache, or something of that kind) at

had been scraped off; all except a small piece at the bottom edge by the right hand side, whereon might be just distinguished the greater part of the letters N, E. The piece of glass that had lain a little way apart from the bottle was not a part of it, as a casual observer might have supposed. It was a fragment of a concave lens, with a channel ground in the edge.

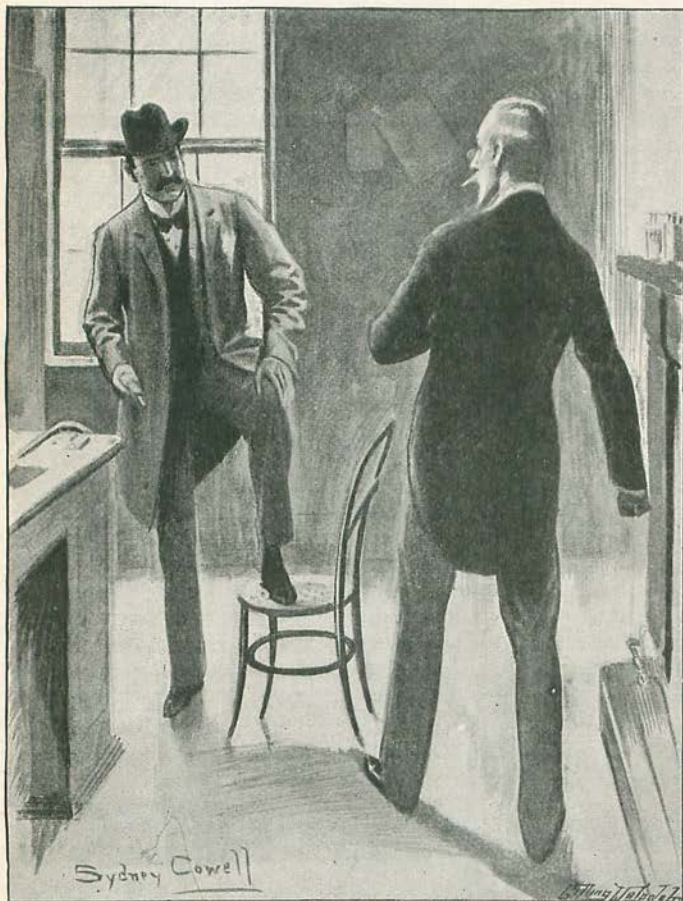
### III.

At ten precisely next morning, as usual, Mr. Ludwig Hamer mounted the stairs of the house in Hatton Garden, wherein he rented half a room as office. He was a tall, fair man, wearing thick convex *pince-nez*. He spoke English like a native, and, indeed, he called himself an Englishman, though there were those who doubted the Britishness of his name. Scarce had he entered his office when Dorrington followed him.

The room had never been a very large one, and now a partition divided it in two, leaving a passage at one side only, by the window. On each side of this partition stood a small pedestal table, a couple of chairs, a copying-press, and the other articles usual in a meagrely furnished office. Dorrington strode past Bouvier's half of the room and came upon Hamer as he was hanging his coat on a peg. The letter of introduction had been burnt, since Dorrington had only asked for it in order to get Hamer's name and the Hatton Garden address without betraying to Bouvier the fact that he did not already know all about it.

"Good morning, Mr. Hamer," said Dorrington, loudly. "Sorry to see you're not well"—he pointed familiarly with his stick at a range of medicine bottles on the mantelpiece—"but it's very trying weather, of course. You've been suffering from toothache, I believe?"

Hamer seemed at first disposed to resent



"But now Dorrington had a revolver in his hand, though his manner was as genial as ever."

different druggists, and put together in this larger bottle, which had originally been used for something else. The bottle had been distinguished by a label—the usual white label affixed by the druggist, with directions as to taking the medicine—and this label



the loudness and familiarity of this speech, but at the reference to toothache he started suddenly and set his lips.

"Chloroform's a capital thing for toothache, Mr. Hamer, and for—for other things. I'm not in your line of business myself, but I believe it has even been used in the diamond trade."

"What do you mean?" asked Hamer, flushing angrily.

"Mean? Why, bless me—nothing more than I said. By the way, I'm afraid you dropped one of your medicine bottles last night. I've brought it back, though I'm afraid it's past repair. It's a good job you didn't quite clear the label off before you took it out with you, else I might have had a difficulty." Dorrington placed the fragments on the table. "You see you've just left the first letter of 'E.C.' in the druggist's address, and the last 'N' of Hatton Garden, just before it. There doesn't happen to be any other Garden in E.C. district that I know of, nor does the name of any other thoroughfare end in N—they are mostly streets, or lanes, or courts, you see. And there seems to be only one druggist in Hatton Garden—capital fellow, no doubt—the one whose name and address I observe on those bottles on the mantelpiece."

Dorrington stood with his foot on a chair, and tapped his knee carelessly with his stick. Hamer dropped into the other chair and regarded him with a frown, though his face was pale. Presently he said, in a strained voice, "Well?"

"Yes; there is something else, Mr. Hamer, as you appear to suggest. I see you're wearing a new pair of glasses this morning; pity you broke the others last night, but I've brought the piece you left behind." He gathered up the broken bottle, and held up the piece of concave lens. "I think, after all, it's really best to use a cord with *pince-nez*. It's awkward, and it catches in things, I know, but it saves a breakage, and you're liable to get the glasses knocked off, you know—in certain circumstances."

Hamer sprang to his feet with a snarl, slammed the door, locked it, and turned on Dorrington. But now Dorrington had a revolver in his hand, though his manner was as genial as ever.

"Yes, yes," he said; "best to shut the door, of course. People listen, don't they? But sit down again. I'm not anxious to hurt you, and, as you will perceive, you're quite unable to hurt me. What I chiefly came to say is this; last evening my client,

M. Léon Bouvier, of this office and the Café des Bons Camarades, was attacked in the passage adjoining his house by a man who was waiting for him, with a woman—was it really Mrs. Hamer? but there, I won't ask—keeping watch. He was robbed of a small old wooden box, containing charcoal and—a diamond. My name is Dorrington—firm of Dorrington & Hicks, which you may have heard of. That's my card. I've come to take away that diamond."

Hamer was pale and angry, but, in his way, was almost as calm as Dorrington. He put down the card without looking at it. "I don't understand you," he said. "How do you know I've got it?"

"Come, come, Mr. Hamer," Dorrington replied, rubbing the barrel of his revolver on his knee, "that's hardly worthy of you. You're a man of business, with a head on your shoulders—the sort of man I like doing business with, in fact. Men like ourselves needn't trifle. I've shown you most of the cards I hold, though not all, I assure you. I'll tell you, if you like, all about your little tour round among the druggists with the convenient toothache, all about the evenings on which you watched Bouvier home, and so on. But, really, need we, as men of the world, descend to such peddling detail?"

"Well, suppose I have got it, and suppose I refuse to give it you. What then?"

"What then? But why should we talk of unpleasant things? You won't refuse, you know."

"Do you mean you'd get it out of me by help of that pistol?"

"Well," said Dorrington, deliberately, "the pistol is noisy, and it makes a mess, and all that, but it's a useful thing, and I *might* do it with that, you know, in certain circumstances. But I wasn't thinking of it—there's a much less troublesome way."

"Which?"

"You're a slower man than I took you for, Mr. Hamer—or perhaps you haven't quite appreciated *me* yet. If I were to go to that window and call the police, what with the little bits of evidence in my pocket, and the other little bits that the druggists who sold the chloroform would give, and the other bits in reserve, that I prefer not to talk about just now—there would be rather an awkwardly complete case of robbery with violence, wouldn't there? And you'd have to lose the diamond after all, to say nothing of a little rest in gaol and general ruination."

"That sounds very well, but what about your client? Come now, you call me a man



of the world, and I am one. How will your client account for the possession of a diamond worth eighty thousand pounds or so? He doesn't seem a millionaire. The police would want to know about him as well as about me, if you were such a fool as to bring them in. Where did *he* steal it, eh?"

Dorrington smiled and bowed at the question. "That's a very good card to play, Mr. Hamer," he said, "a capital card, really. To a superficial observer it might look like winning the trick. But I think I can trump it." He bent farther forward and tapped the table with the pistol-barrel. "Suppose I don't care one solitary dump what becomes of my client? Suppose I don't care whether he goes to gaol or stays out of it—in short, suppose I prefer my own interests to his?"

"Ho! ho!" Hamer cried. "I begin to understand. You want to grab the diamond for yourself then?"

"I haven't said anything of the kind, Mr. Hamer," Dorrington replied, suavely. "I have simply demanded the diamond which you stole last night, and I have mentioned an alternative."

"Oh yes, yes, but we understand one another. Come, we'll arrange this. How much do you want?"

Dorrington stared at him stonily. "I—I beg your pardon," he said, "but I don't understand. I want the diamond you stole."

"But come now, we'll divide. Bouvier had no right to it, and he's out. You and I, perhaps, haven't much right to it, legally, but it's between us, and we're both in the same position."

"Pardon me," Dorrington replied, silkily, but there you mistake. We are *not* in the same position, by a long way. You are liable to an instant criminal prosecution. I have simply come, authorised by my client, who bears all the responsibility, to demand a piece of property which you have stolen. That is the difference between our positions, Mr. Hamer. Come now, a policeman is just standing opposite. Shall I open the window and call him, or do you give in?"

"Oh, I give in, I suppose," Hamer groaned. "But you're a deal too hard. A man of your abilities shouldn't be so mean."

"That's right and reasonable," Dorrington answered briskly. "The wise man is the man who knows when he is beaten, and saves further trouble. You may not find me so mean after all, but I must have the stone first. I hold the trumps, and I'm not

going to let the other player make conditions. Where's the diamond?"

"It isn't here—it's at home. You'll have to get it out of Mrs. Hamer. Shall I go and wire to her?"

"No no," said Dorrington, "that's not the way. We'll just go together, and take Mrs. Hamer by surprise, I think. I mustn't let you out of sight, you know. Come, we'll get a hansom. Is it far?"

"Bessborough Street, Pimlico. You'll find Mrs. Hamer has a temper of her own."

"Well, well, we all have our failings. But before we start, now, observe." For a moment Dorrington was stern and menacing. "You wriggled a little at first, but that was quite natural. Now you've given in; and at the first sign of another wriggle I stop it once and for all. Understand? No tricks, now."

They entered a hansom at the door. Hamer was moody and silent at first, but under the influence of Dorrington's gay talk he opened out after a while. "Well," he said, "you're far the cleverest of the three, no doubt, and perhaps in that way you deserve to win. It's mighty smart for you to come in like this, and push Bouvier on one side and me on the other, and both of us helpless. But it's rough on me after having all the trouble."

"Don't be a bad loser, man!" Dorrington answered. "You might have had a deal more trouble and a deal more roughness too, I assure you."

"Oh yes, so I might. I'm not grumbling. But there's one thing has puzzled me all along. Where did Bouvier get that stone from?"

"He inherited it. It's the most important of the family jewels, I assure you."

"Oh, skittles! I might have known you wouldn't tell me, even if you knew yourself. But I should like to know. What sort of a duffer must it have been that let Bouvier do him for that big stone—Bouvier of all men in the world? Why, he was a record flat himself—couldn't tell a diamond from a glass marble, I should think. Why, he used to buy peddling little trays of rotters in the Garden at twice their value! And then he'd sell them for what he could get. I knew very well he wasn't going on systematically dropping money like that for no reason at all. He had some axe to grind, that was plain. And after a while he got asking *timid* questions as to the sale of big diamonds, and how it was done, and who bought them, and all that. That put me on it at once. All this



buying and selling at a loss was a blind. He wanted to get into the trade to sell stolen diamonds, that was clear; and there was some value in them too, else he couldn't afford to waste months of time and lose money every day over it. So I kept my eye on him. I noticed, when he put his overcoat on, and thought I wasn't looking, he would settle a string of some sort round his neck, under his shirt-collar, and feel to pack up something close under his armpit. Then I just watched him home, and saw the sort of shanty he lived in. I mentioned these things to Mrs. H., and she was naturally indignant at the idea of a chap like Bouvier having something valuable in a dishonest way, and agreed with me that if possible it ought to be got from him, if only in the interests of virtue." Hamer laughed jerkily. "So at any rate we determined to get a look at whatever it was hanging round his neck, and we made the arrangements you know about. It seemed to me that Bouvier was pretty sure to lose it before long, one way or another, if it had any value at all, to judge by the way he was done in other matters. But I assure you I nearly fell down like Bouvier himself when I saw what it was. No wonder we left the bottle behind where I'd dropped it, after soaking the shawl—I wonder I didn't leave the shawl itself, and my hat, and everything. I assure you we sat up half last night looking at that wonderful stone!"

"No doubt. I shall have a good look at it myself, I assure you. Here is Bessborough Street. Which is the number?"

They alighted, and entered a house rather smaller than those about it. "Ask Mrs. Hamer to come here," said Hamer, gloomily, to the servant.

The men sat in the drawing-room. Presently Mrs. Hamer entered—a shortish, sharp, keen-eyed woman of forty-five. "This is Mr. Dorrington," said Hamer, "of Dorrington & Hicks, private detectives. He wants us to give him that diamond."

The little woman gave a sort of involuntary bounce, and exclaimed. "What? Diamond? What d'ye mean?"

"Oh, it's no good, Maria," Hamer answered, dolefully. "I've tried it every way myself. One comfort is we're safe, as long as we give it up. Here," he added, turning to Dorrington, "show her some of your evidence—that'll convince her."

Very politely Dorrington brought forth, with full explanations, the cork and the broken glass; while Mrs. Hamer, biting hard at her thin lips, grew shinier and

redder in the face every moment, and her hard gray eyes flashed fury.

"And you let this man," she burst out to her husband, when Dorrington had finished, "you let this man leave your office with these things in his possession after he had shown them to you, and you as big as he is and bigger! Coward!"

"My dear, you don't appreciate Mr. Dorrington's forethought, hang it! I made preparations for the very line of action you recommend, but he was ready. He brought out a very well kept revolver, and he has it in his pocket now!"

Mrs. Hamer only glared, speechless with anger.

"You might just get Mr. Dorrington a whisky and soda, Maria," Hamer pursued, with a slight lift of the eyebrows which he did not intend Dorrington to see. The woman was on her feet in a moment.

"Thank you, no," interposed Dorrington, rising also, "I won't trouble you. I'd rather not drink anything just now, and, although I fear I may appear rude, I can't allow either of you to leave the room. In short," he added, "I must stay with you both till I get the diamond."

"And this man Bouvier," asked Mrs. Hamer, "what is his right to the stone?"

"Really, I don't feel competent to offer an opinion, do you know," Dorrington answered sweetly. "To tell the truth, M. Bouvier doesn't interest me very much."

"No go, Maria!" growled Hamer. "I've tried it all. The fact is we've got to give Dorrington the diamond. If we don't he'll just call in the police—then we shall lose diamond and everything else too. He doesn't care what becomes of Bouvier. He's got us, that's what it is. He won't even bargain to give us a share."

Mrs. Hamer looked quickly up. "Oh, but that's nonsense!" she said. "We got the thing. We ought at least to say halves."

Her sharp eyes searched Dorrington's face, but there was no encouragement in it. "I am sorry to disappoint a lady," he said, "but this time it is my business to impose terms, not to submit to them. Come, the diamond!"

"Well, you'll give us something, surely?" the woman cried.

"Nothing is sure, madam, except that you will give me that diamond, or face a policeman in five minutes!"

The woman realised her helplessness. "Well," she said, "much good may it do you. You'll have to come and get it—I'm





"There's your diamond, you dirty thief!"



keeping it somewhere else. I'll go and get my hat."

Again Dorrington interposed. "I think we'll send your servant for the hat," he said, reaching for the bell-rope. "I'll come wherever you like, but I shall not leave you till this affair is settled, I promise you. And, as I reminded your husband a little time ago, you'll find tricks come expensive."

The servant brought Mrs. Hamer's hat and cloak, and that lady put them on, her eyes ablaze with anger. Dorrington made the pair walk before him to the front door, and followed them into the street. "Now," he said, "where is this place? Remember, no tricks!"

Mrs. Hamer turned toward Vauxhall Bridge. "It's just over by Upper Kennington Lane," she said. "Not far."

She paced out before them, Dorrington and Hamer following, the former affable and business-like, the latter apparently a little puzzled. When they came about the middle of the bridge, the woman turned suddenly. "Come, Mr. Dorrington," she said, in a more subdued voice than she had yet used, "I give in. It's no use trying to shake you off, I can see. I have the diamond with me. Here."

She put a little old black wooden box in his hand. He made to open the lid, which fitted tightly, and at that moment the woman, pulling her other hand free from under her cloak, flung away over the parapet something that shone like fifty points of electric light.

"There it goes!" she screamed aloud, pointing with her finger. "There's your diamond, you dirty thief! You bully! Go after it now, you spy!"

The great diamond made a curve of glitter and disappeared into the river.

For the moment Dorrington lost his cool temper. He seized the woman by the arm. "Do you know what you've done, you wild cat?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I do!" the woman screamed, almost foaming with passion, while boys began to collect, though there had been but few people on the bridge. "Yes, I do! And now you can do what you please, you thief! you bully!"

Dorrington was calm again in a moment. He shrugged his shoulders and turned away. Hamer was frightened. He came at Dorrington's side and faltered, "I—I told you she had a temper. What will you do?"

Dorrington forced a laugh. "Oh, nothing," he said. "What can I do? Locking you up now wouldn't fetch the diamond back. And besides I'm not sure that Mrs. Hamer won't attend to your punishment faithfully enough." And he walked briskly away.

"What did she do, Bill?" asked one boy of another.

"Why, didn't ye see? She chucked that man's watch in the river."

"Garn! that wasn't his watch!" interrupted a third, "it was a little glass tumbler. I see it!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Have you got my diamond?" asked the agonised Léon Bouvier of Dorrington a day later.

"No, I have not," Dorrington replied drily. "Nor has your cousin Jacques. But I know where it is, and you can get it as easily as I."

"*Mon Dieu!* Where?"

"At the bottom of the river Thames, exactly in the centre, rather to the right of Vauxhall Bridge, looking from this side. I expect it will be rediscovered in some future age, when the bed of the Thames is a diamond-field."

The rest of Bouvier's savings went in the purchase of a boat, and in this, with a pail on a long rope, he was very busy for some time afterward. But he only got a great deal of mud into his boat.

