

# THE DORRINGTON DEED-BOX.

BY ARTHUR MORRISON.\*

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Illustrated by STANLEY L. WOOD.

## V.—THE CASE OF MR. LOFTUS DEACON.



**T**HIS was a case that helped to give Dorrington much of that reputation which unfortunately too often enabled him to profit himself far beyond the extent to which his clients intended. It occurred some few years back, and there was such a stir at the time over the mysterious death of Mr. Loftus Deacon that it well paid Dorrington to use his utmost diligence in an honest effort to uncover the mystery. It gave him one of his best advertisements, though indeed it occasioned him less trouble in the unravelling than many a less interesting case. There were scarcely any memoranda of the affair among Dorrington's papers, beyond entries of fees paid, and I have almost entirely relied upon the account given me by Mr. Stone, manager in the employ of the firm owning the premises in which Mr. Deacon died.

These premises consisted of a large building let out in expensive flats, one of the first places built with that design in the West-End of London. The building was one of three, all belonging to the firm I have mentioned, and numbered 1, 2 and 3, Bedford Mansions. They stood in the St. James's district, and Mr. Loftus Deacon's quarters were in No. 2.

Mr. Deacon's magnificent collection of oriental porcelain will be remembered as long as any in the national depositories; much of it was for a long while lent, and, by Mr. Deacon's will, passed permanently into possession of the nation. His collection of oriental arms, however, was broken up and sold, as were also his other innumerable objects of Eastern art—lacquers, carvings and so forth. He was a wealthy man, this Mr. Deacon, a bachelor of sixty, and his whole life was given to his collections. He was currently reported to spend some £15,000

a year on them, and, in addition, would make inroads into capital for special purchases at the great sales. People wondered where all the things were kept. And indeed they had reason, for Mr. Deacon's personal establishment was but a suite of rooms on the ground floor of Bedford Mansions. But the bulk of the collections were housed at various museums—indeed it was a matter of banter among his acquaintances that Mr. Loftus Deacon made the taxpayers warehouse most of his things; moreover, the flat was a large one—it occupied almost the whole of the ground-floor of the building, and it overflowed with the choicest of its tenant's possessions. There were eight large and lofty rooms, as well as the lobby, scullery and so forth, and every one was full. The walls were hung with the most precious *kakemono* and *nishikiyô* of Japan, and glass cabinets stood everywhere, packed with porcelain and faience—celadon, peach-bloom, and blue and white Satsuma, Raku, Ninsei, and Arita—many a small piece worth its weight in gold over and over and over again. At places on the wall, among the *kakemono* and pictures of the *ukiyo*, were trophies of arms. Two suits of ancient Japanese armour, each complete and each the production of one of the most eminent of the Miochin family, were exhibited on stands, and swords stood in many corners and lay in many racks. Innumerable drawers contained specimens of the greatest lacquer ware of Korin, Shunshô, Kajikawa, Koyetsu and Ritsuo, each in its wadded brocade *fukusa* with the light wooden box encasing all. In more glass cabinets stood *netsuké* and *okimono* of ivory, bronze, wood and lacquer. There were a few gods and goddesses, and conspicuous among them two life-sized gilt Buddhas beamed mildly over all from the shelves on which they were raised. By the operation of natural selection it came about that the choicest of all Mr. Deacon's possessions were collected in these rooms. Here were none of the great cum-

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bersome pots, good in their way, but made of old time merely for the European market. Of all that was Japanese every piece was of the best and rarest, consequently, in almost every case, of small dimensions, as is the way of the greatest of the wares of old Japan. And of all the precious contents of these rooms everything was oriental in its origin except the contents of one case, which displayed specimens of the most magnificent goldsmith's and silversmith's work of mediæval Europe. It stood in the room which Mr. Loftus Deacon used as his sitting-room, and more than one of his visitors had wondered that such valuable property was not kept at a banker's. This view, however, always surprised and irritated Mr. Deacon. "Keep it at a banker's?" he would say. "Why not melt it down at once? The things are works of art, things of beauty, and that's why I have them, not merely because they're gold and silver. To shut them up in a strong-room would be the next thing to destroying them altogether. Why not lock the whole of my collections in safes, and never look at them? They are all valuable. But if they are not to be seen I would rather have the money they cost." So the gold and silver stood in its case, to the blinking wonderment of messengers and porters whose errands took them into Mr. Loftus Deacon's sitting-room. The contents of this case were the only occasion, however, of Mr. Deacon's straying from oriental paths in building up his collection. There they stood, but he made no attempt to add to them. He went about his daily hunting, bargaining, cataloguing, cleaning, and exhibiting to friends, but all his new treasures were from the East, and most were Japanese. His chief visitors were travelling buyers of curiosities; little Japanese who had come to England to study medicine and were paying their terms by the sale of heirlooms in pottery and lacquer; porters from Christie's and Foster's; and sometimes men from Copleston's—the odd emporium by the riverside where lions and monkeys, porcelain and savage weapons were bought and sold close by the ships that brought them home. The travellers were suspicious and cunning; the Japanese were bright, polite and dignified, and the men from Copleston's were wiry, hairy and amphibious; one was an enormously muscular little hunchback nicknamed Slackjaw—a quaint and rather repulsive compound of showman, sailor and half-caste rough; and all were like mermen, more or less. These curious people came and went,

and Mr. Deacon went on buying, cataloguing and joying in his possessions. It was the happiest possible life for a lonely old man with his tastes and his means of gratifying them, and it went placidly on till one Wednesday midday. Then Mr. Deacon was found dead in his rooms in most extraordinary and, it seemed, altogether unaccountable circumstances.

There was but one door leading into Mr. Deacon's rooms from the open corridor of the building, and this was immediately opposite the large street door. When one entered from the street one ascended three or four broad marble steps, pushed open one of a pair of glazed swing doors and found oneself facing the door by which Mr. Deacon entered and left his quarters. There had originally been other doors into the corridor from some of the rooms, but those Mr. Deacon had had blocked up, so making the flat entirely self-contained. Just by the glazed swing doors which I have spoken of, and in full view of the old gentleman's door, the hall-porter's box stood. It was glazed on all sides, and the porter sat so that Mr. Deacon's door was always before his eyes, and, so long as he was there it was very unlikely that anybody or anything could leave or enter by that door unobserved by him. It is important to remember this, in view of what happened on the occasion I am writing of. There was one other exterior door to Mr. Deacon's flat, and one only. It gave upon the back spiral staircase, and was usually kept locked. This staircase had no outlet to the corridors, but merely extended from the housekeeper's rooms at the top of the building to the basement. It was little used, and then only by servants, for it gave access only to the rooms on its own side. There was no way from this staircase to the outer street except through the private rooms of the tenants, or through those of the housekeeper.

That Wednesday morning things had happened precisely in the ordinary way. Mr. Deacon had risen and breakfasted as usual. He was alone, with his newspaper and his morning letters, when his breakfast was taken in and when it was removed. He had remained in his rooms till between twelve and one o'clock. Goods had arrived for him (this was an almost daily occurrence), and one or two ordinary visitors had called and had gone away again. It was Mr. Deacon's habit to lunch at his club, and at about a quarter to one, or thereabout, he had come out, locked his door, and leaving his usual message that

he should be at the club for an hour or two, in case anybody called, he had left the building. At about one, however, he had returned hurriedly, having forgotten some letters. "I didn't give you any letters for post, did I, Beard, before I went out?" he asked the porter. And the porter replied that he had not. Mr. Deacon thereupon crossed the corridor, entered his door, and shut it behind him.

He had been gone but a few seconds, when there arose an outcry from within the rooms—a shout followed in a breath by a loud cry of pain, and then silence. Beard, the porter, ran to the door and knocked, but there was no reply. "Did you call, sir?" he shouted, and knocked again, but still without response. The door was shut, and it had a latch lock with no exterior handle. Beard, who had had an uncle die of apoplexy, was now thoroughly alarmed, and shouted up the speaking-tube for the housekeeper's keys. In course of a few minutes they were brought, and Beard and the housekeeper entered.

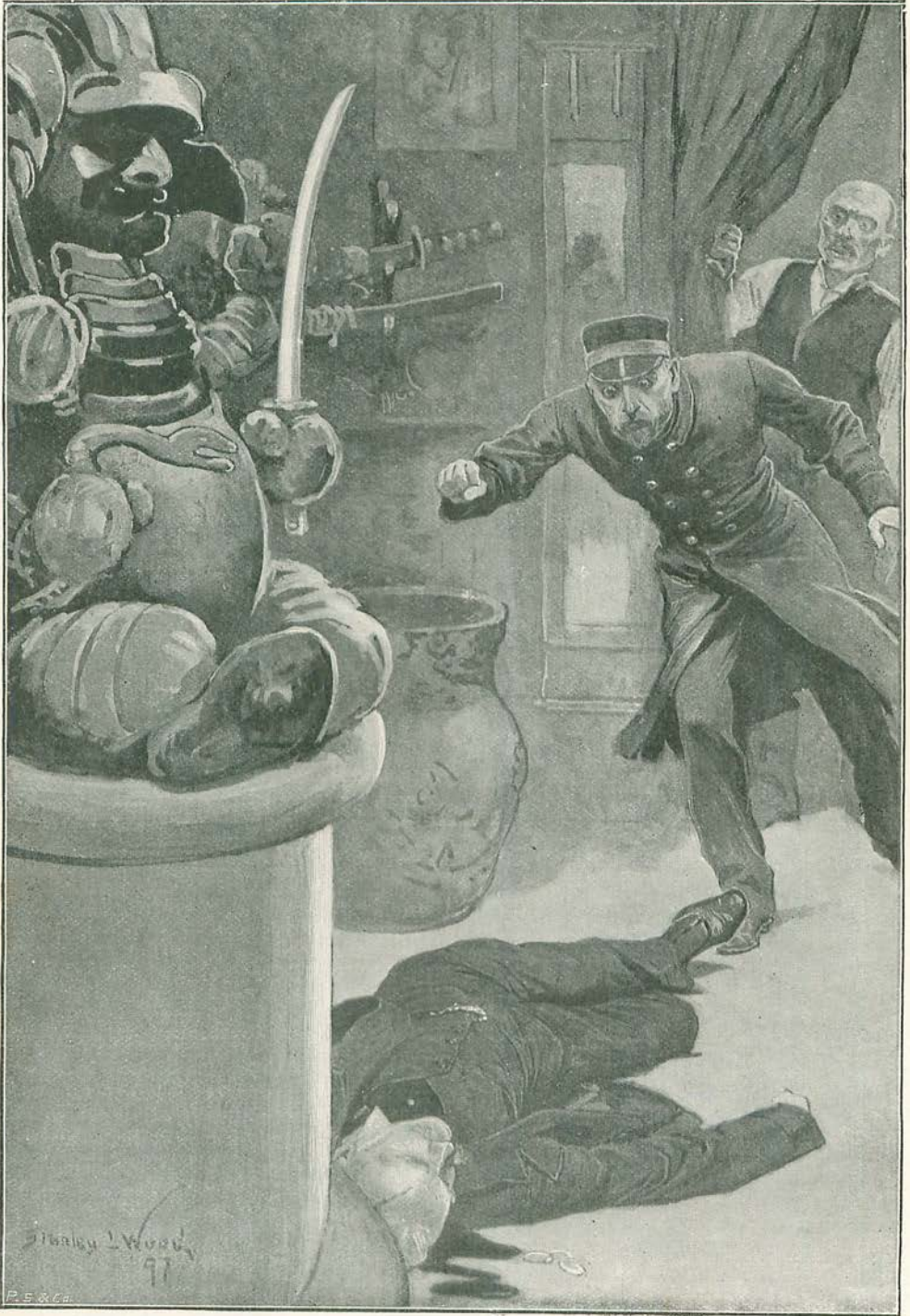
The lobby was as usual, and the sitting-room was in perfect order. But in the room beyond Mr. Loftus Deacon lay in a pool of blood, with two large and fearful gashes in his head. Not a soul was in any one of the rooms, though the two men, first shutting the outer door, searched diligently. All windows and doors were shut, and the rooms were tenantless and undisturbed, except that on the floor lay Mr. Deacon in his blood at the foot of a pedestal whereupon there squatted, with serenely fierce grin, the god Hachiman, gilt and painted, carrying in one of his four hands a snake, in another a mace, in a third a small human figure, and in the fourth a heavy, straight, guardless sword; and all around furniture, cabinets, porcelain, lacquer and everything else lay undisturbed.

At first sight of the tragedy the porter had sent the lift-man for the police, and soon they arrived, and a surgeon with them. For the surgeon there was very little to do. Mr. Deacon was dead. Either of the two frightful gashes in the head would have been fatal, and they had obviously both been delivered with the same instrument—something heavy and exceedingly sharp.

The police now set themselves to close investigation. The porter was certain that nobody had entered the rooms that morning who had not afterwards left. He was sure that nobody had entered unobserved, and he was sure that Mr. Deacon had re-entered

his chambers unaccompanied. Working, therefore, on the assumption that the murderer could not have entered by the front door, the police turned their attention to the back door and the windows. The door to the back staircase was locked, and the key was in the lock and inside. Therefore they considered the windows. There were but three of these that looked upon the street, two in one room and one in another, but these were shut and fastened within. Other rooms were lighted by windows looking upon lighting-wells, some being supplied with reflectors. All these windows were found to be quite undisturbed, and fastened within, except one. This window was in the bedroom, and, though it was shut, the catch was not fastened. The porter declared that it was Mr. Deacon's practice invariably to fasten every shut window, a thing he was always very careful about. Moreover, the window now found unfastened and shut was always left open a foot or so all day, to air the bedroom. More, a housemaid was brought who had that morning made the bed and dusted the room. The window was opened, she said, when she had entered the room, and she had left it so, as she always did. Therefore, shut as it was, but not fastened, it seemed plain that this window must have given exit to the murderer, since no other way appeared possible. Also, to shut the window behind him would be the fugitive's natural policy. The lower panes were of ground glass, and at least pursuit would be delayed.

The window looked upon a lighting-well, and the concreted floor of the basement was but fifteen or twenty feet below. Careful inquiries disclosed the fact that a man had been at work painting the joinery about this well-bottom. He was a man of very indifferent character—had in fact "done time"—and he was employed for odd jobs by way of charity, being some sort of connection of a member of the firm owning the buildings. He had, indeed, received a good education, fitted to place him in a very different position from that in which he now found himself, but he was a black sheep. He drank, he gambled and finally he stole. His relatives helped him again and again, but their efforts were useless, and now he was indebted to one of them for his present occupation at a pound a week. The police, of course, knew something of him, and postponed questioning him directly until they had investigated a little further. It might be that Mr. Deacon's death was the work of a conspiracy wherein more than one had participated.



"On the floor lay Mr. Deacon at the foot of a pedestal."

## II.

THE next morning (Thursday) Mr. Henry Colson was an early caller at Dorrington's office. Mr. Colson was a thin, grizzled man of sixty or thereabout, who had been a close friend—the only intimate friend, indeed—of Mr. Loftus Deacon. He was a widower, and he lived in rooms scarce two hundred yards distant from Bedford Mansions, where his friend had died.

"My business, Mr. Dorrington," he said, "is in connection with the terrible death of my old friend Mr. Loftus Deacon, of which you no doubt have heard or read in the morning papers."

"Yes," Dorrington assented, "both in this morning's papers and the evening papers of yesterday."

"Very good. I may tell you that I am sole executor under Mr. Deacon's will. The will indeed is in my possession (I am a retired solicitor), and there happens to be a sum set apart in that will out of which I am to defray any expenses that may arise in connection with his death. It really seems to me that I should be quite justified in using some part of that sum in paying for inquiries to be conducted by such an experienced man as yourself, into the cause of my poor friend's death. At any rate, I wish you to make such inquiries, even if I have to pay the fees myself. I am convinced that there is something very extraordinary—something very deep—in the tragedy. The police are pottering about, of course, and keeping very mysterious as to the matter, but I expect that's simply because they know nothing. They have made no arrest, and perhaps every minute of delay is making the thing more difficult. As executor, of course, I have access to the rooms. Can you come and look at them now?"

"Oh yes," Dorrington answered, reaching for his hat. "I suppose there's no doubt of the case being one of murder? Suicide is not likely, I take it?"

"Oh no—certainly not. He was scarcely the sort of man to commit suicide, I should say. And he was as cheerful as he could be the afternoon before, when I last saw him. Besides, the surgeon says it's nothing of the kind. A man committing suicide doesn't gash himself twice over the head, or even once. And in this case the first blow would have made him incapable of another."

"I have heard nothing about the weapon," Dorrington remarked, as they entered a cab. "Has it been found?"

"That's a difficulty," Mr. Colson answered. "It would seem not. Of course there are numbers of weapons about the place—Japanese swords and what not—any one of which *might* have caused such injuries. But there are no bloodstains on any of them."

"Is any article of value missing?"

"I believe not. Everything seemed to be in its place, so far as I noticed yesterday. But then I was not there long, and was too much agitated to notice very particularly. At any rate the old gold and silver plate had not been disturbed. He kept that in a large case in his sitting-room, and it would certainly be the plate that the murderer would have made for first, if robbery had been his object."

Mr. Colson gave Dorrington the other details of the case, already set forth in this account, and presently the cab stopped before No. 2 Bedford Mansions. The body, of course, had been removed, but otherwise the rooms had not been disturbed. The porter let them into the chambers by aid of the housekeeper's key.

"They don't seem to have found his keys," Mr. Colson explained, "and that will be troublesome for me, I expect, presently. He usually carried them with him, but they were not on the body when it was found."

"That may be important," Dorrington said. "But let us look at the rooms."

They walked through the large apartments one after the other, and Dorrington glanced casually about him as he went. Presently Mr. Colson stopped, struck with an idea. "Ah!" he said, more to himself than to Dorrington. "I will just see."

He turned quickly back into the room they had just quitted, and made for a broad shelf that ran the length of the wall at about the height of an ordinary table. "Yes!" he cried. "It is! It's gone!"

"What is gone?"

"The sword—the Masamuné!"

The whole surface of the shelf, covered with a silk cloth, was occupied by Japanese swords and dirks with rich mountings. Most lay on their sides in rows, but two or three were placed in lacquered racks. Mr. Colson stood and pointed at a rack which was standing alone and swordless. "That is where it was," he said. "I saw it—was talking about it, in fact—the afternoon before. No, it's nowhere about. It's not like any of the others. Let me see." And Mr. Colson, much excited, hurried from room to room wherever swords were kept, searching for the missing specimen.

"No," he said at last, looking strangely startled; "it's gone. And I think we are near the soul of the mystery." He spoke in hushed, uneasy tones, and his eyes gave token of strange apprehension.

"What is it?" Dorrington asked. "What about this sword?"

"Come into the sitting-room." Mr. Colson led Dorrington away from the scene of Mr. Deacon's end, away from the empty sword rack and from under the shadow of the grinning god with its four arms, its snake, and its threatening sword. "I don't think I'm very superstitious," Mr. Colson proceeded, "but I really feel that I can talk more freely about the matter in here."

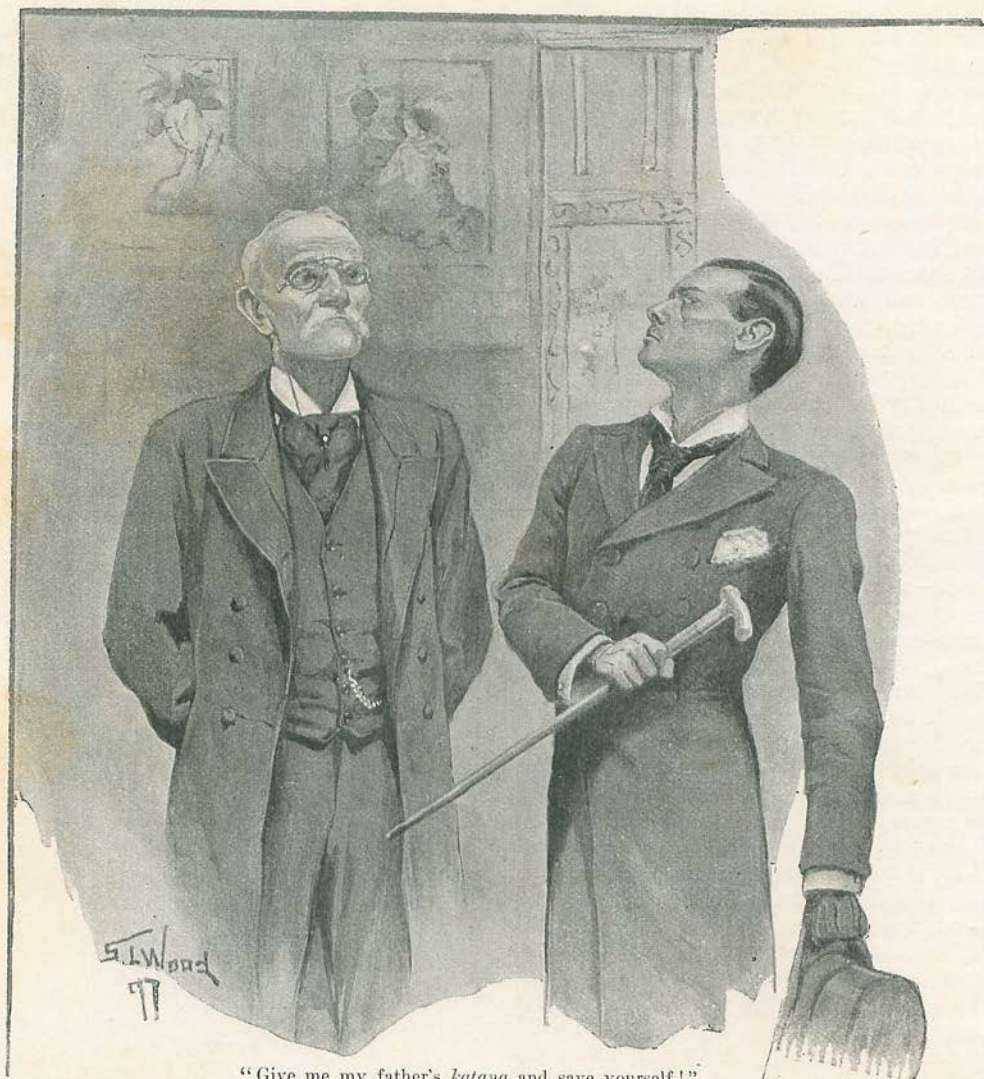
They sat by the table, over against the case of plate, and Mr. Colson went on. "The sword I speak of," he said, "was much prized by my poor friend, who brought it with him from Japan nearly twenty years back—not many years after the civil war there, in fact. It was a very ancient specimen—of the fourteenth century, I think—and the work of the famous swordsmith Masamuné. Masamuné's work is very rarely met with, it seems, and Mr. Deacon felt himself especially fortunate in securing this example. It is the only piece of Masamuné's work in the collection. I may tell you that a sword by one of the great old masters is one of the rarest of all the rarities that come from Japan. The possessors of the best keep them rather than sell them at any price. Such swords were handed down from father to son for many generations, and a Japanese of the old school would have been disgraced had he parted with his father's blade even under the most pressing necessity. The mounts he might possibly sell, if he were in very bad circumstances, but the blade never. Of course, such a thing *has* occurred—and it occurred in this very case, as you shall hear. But as an almost invariable rule the Japanese *samurai* would part with his life by starvation rather than with his father's sword by sale. Such swords would never be stolen, either, for there was a firm belief that a faithful spirit resided in each, which would bring terrible disaster on any wrongful possessor. Each sword had its own name, just as the legendary sword of King Arthur had, and a man's social standing was judged, not by his house nor by his dress, but by the two swords in his girdle. The ancient swordsmiths wore court dress and made votive offerings when they forged their best blades, and the gods were supposed to assist and to watch over the career of the

weapon. Thus you will understand that such an article was apt to become an object almost of worship among the *samurai* or warrior-class in old Japan. And now to come to the sword in question. It was a long sword or *katana* (the swords, as you know, were worn in pairs, and the smaller was called the *wakizashi*), and it was mounted very handsomely with fittings by a great metal worker of the Goto family. The signature of the great Masamuné himself was engraved in the usual place—on the iron tang within the hilt. Mr. Deacon bought the weapon of its possessor, a man



"Kanamaro."

of some distinction before the overthrow of the Shogun in 1868, but who was reduced to deep poverty by the change in affairs. Mr. Deacon came across him in his direst straits, when his children were near to starvation, and the man sold the sword for a sum that was a little fortune to him, though it only represented some four or five pounds of our money. Mr. Deacon was always very proud of his treasure—indeed it was said to be the only blade by Masamuné in Europe; and the two Japanese things that he had always most longed for, I have heard him say, were a Masamuné sword and a piece of violet lacquer—that precious lacquer the secret of making which died long ago. The Masamuné he acquired, as I have been telling you, but the violet lacquer he never once encountered.



"Give me my father's *katana* and save yourself!"

"Six months or so back, Deacon received a visit from a Japanese—taller than usual for a Japanese (I have seen him myself) and with the refined type of face characteristic of some of the higher class of his country. His name was Keigo Kanamaro, his card said, and he introduced himself as the son of Keigo Kiyotaki, the man who had sold Deacon his sword. He had come to England and had found my friend after much inquiry, he said, expressly to take back his father's *katana*. His father was dead, and he desired to place the sword in his tomb, that the soul of the old man might rest in peace, undisturbed by the disgrace that had fallen upon him by the sale of the sword that had been his and his ancestors'

for hundreds of years back. The father had vowed when he had received the sword in his turn from Kanamaro's grandfather, never to part with it, but had broken his vow under pressure of want. He (the son) had earned money as a merchant (an immeasurable descent for a *samurai* with the feelings of the old school), and he was prepared to buy back the Masamuné blade with the Goto mountings for a much higher price than his father had received for it."

"And I suppose Deacon wouldn't sell it?" Dorrington asked.

"No," Mr. Colson replied. "He wouldn't have sold it at any price, I'm sure. Well, Kanamaro pressed him very urgently, and called again and again. He was very gentle-

manly and very dignified, but he was very earnest. He apologised for making a commercial offer, assured Deacon that he was quite aware that he was no mere buyer and seller, but pleaded the urgency of his case. 'It is not here as in Japan,' he said, 'among us, the *samurai* of the old days. You have your beliefs, we have ours. It is my religion that I must place the *katana* in my father's grave. My father disgraced himself and sold his sword in order that I might not starve when I was a little child. I would rather that he had let me die, but since I am alive, and I know that you have the sword, I must take it and lay it by his bones. I will make an offer. Instead of giving you money, I will give you another sword—a sword worth as much money as my father's—perhaps more. I have had it sent from Japan since I first saw you. It is a blade made by the great Yukiyasu, and it has a scabbard and mountings by an older and greater master than the Goto who made those for my father's sword.' But it happened that Deacon already had two swords by Yukiyasu, while of Masamuné he had only the one. So he tried to reason the Japanese out of his fancy. But that was useless. Kanamaro called again and again and got to be quite a nuisance. He left off for a month or two, but about a fortnight ago he appeared again. He grew angry and forgot his oriental politeness. 'The English have the English ways,' he said, 'and we have ours—yes, though many of my foolish countrymen are in haste to be the same as the English are. We have our beliefs, and we have our knowledge, and I tell you that there are things which you would call superstition, but which are very real! Our old gods are not all dead yet, I tell you! In the old times no man would wear or keep another man's sword. Why? Because the great sword has a soul just as a man has, and it knows and the gods know! No man kept another's sword who did not fall into terrible misfortune and death, sooner or later. Give me my father's *katana* and save yourself! My father weeps in my ears at night, and I must bring him his *katana*!' I was talking to poor Deacon, as I have told you, only on Tuesday afternoon, and he told me that Kanamaro had been there again the day before, in a frantic state—so bad, indeed, that Deacon thought of applying to the Japanese legation to have him taken care of, for he seemed quite mad. 'Mind, you foolish man!' he said. 'My gods still live, and they are strong! My father wanders on

the dark path and cannot go to his gods without the swords in his girdle. His father asks of his vow! Between here and Japan there is a great sea, but my father may walk even here, looking for his *katana*, and he is angry! I go away for a little. But my gods know, and my father knows!' And then he took himself off. And now"—Mr. Colson nodded towards the next room and dropped his voice—"now poor Deacon is dead and the sword is gone!"

"Kanamaro has not been seen about the place, I suppose, since the visit you speak of, on Monday?" Dorrington asked.

"No. And I particularly asked as to yesterday morning. The hall-porter swears that no Japanese came to the place."

"As to the letters now. You say that when Mr. Deacon came back, after having left, apparently to get his lunch, he said he came for forgotten letters. Were any such letters afterwards found?"

"Yes—there were three, lying on this very table, stamped ready for postage."

"Where are they now?"

"I have them at my chambers. I opened them in the presence of the police in charge of the case. There was nothing very important about them—appointments and so forth, merely—and so the police left them in my charge, as executor."

"Nevertheless I should like to see them. Not just now, but presently. I think I must see this man presently—the man who was painting in the basement below the window that is supposed to have been shut by the murderer in his escape. That is if the police haven't frightened him."

"Very well, we'll see after him as soon as you like. There was just one other thing—rather a curious coincidence, though of course there can't be anything in such a superstitious fancy—but I think I told you that Deacon's body was found lying at the feet of the four-handed god in the other room?"

"Yes."

"Just so." Mr. Colson seemed to think a little more of the superstitious fancy than he confessed. "Just so," he said again. "At the feet of the god, and immediately under the hand carrying the sword; it is not wooden, but an actual steel sword, in fact."

"I noticed that."

"Yes. Now that is a figure of Hachiman, the Japanese god of war—a recent addition to the collection and a very ancient specimen. Deacon bought it at Copleston's only a few days ago—indeed it arrived here on Wednesday morning. Deacon was telling



me about it on Tuesday afternoon. He bought it because of its extraordinary design, showing such signs of Indian influence. Hachiman is usually represented with no more than the usual number of a man's arms, and with no weapon but a sword. This is the only image of Hachiman that Deacon ever saw or heard of with four arms. And after he had bought it he ascertained that this was said to be one of the idols that carry with them ill-luck from the moment they leave their temples. One of Copleston's men confided to Deacon that the lascar seamen and stokers on board the ship that brought it over swore that everything went wrong from the moment that Hachiman came on board—and indeed the vessel was nearly lost off Finisterre. And Copleston himself, the man said, was glad to be quit of it. Things had disappeared in the most extraordinary and unaccountable manner, and other things had been found smashed (notably a large porcelain vase) without any human agency, after standing near the figure. Well," Mr. Colson concluded, "after all that, and remembering what Kanamaro said about the gods of his country who watch over ancient swords, it *does* seem odd, doesn't it, that as soon as poor Deacon gets the thing he should be found stricken dead at its feet?"

Dorrington was thinking. "Yes," he said presently, "it is certainly a strange affair altogether. Let us see the odd-job man now—the man who was in the basement below the window. Or rather, find out where he is and leave me to find him."

Mr. Colson stepped out and spoke with the hall-porter. Presently he returned with news. "He's gone!" he said. "Bolted!"

"What—the man who was in the basement?"

"Yes. It seems the police questioned him pretty closely yesterday, and he seized the first opportunity to cut and run."

"Do you know what they asked him?"

"Examined him generally, I suppose, as to what he had observed at the time. The only thing he seems to have said was that he heard a window shut at about one o'clock. Questioned further, he got into confusion and equivocation, more especially when they mentioned a ladder which is kept in a passage close by where he was painting. It seems they had examined this before speaking to him, and found it had been just recently removed and put back. It was thick with dust, except just where it had been taken hold of to shift, and there the hand-

marks were quite clean. Nobody was in the basement but Dowden (that is the man's name), and nobody else could have shifted that ladder without his hearing and knowing of it. Moreover, the ladder was just the length to reach to Deacon's window. They asked if he had seen anybody move the ladder, and he most anxiously and vehemently declared that he had not. A little while after he was missing, and he hasn't reappeared."

"And they let him go!" Dorrington exclaimed. "What fools!"

"He *may* know something about it, of course," Colson said dubiously; "but with that sword missing, and knowing what we do of Kanamaro's anxiety to get it at any cost, and—and"—he glanced toward the other room, where the idol stood—"and one thing and another, it seems to me we should look in another direction."

"We will look in all directions," Dorrington replied. "Kanamaro may have enlisted Dowden's help. Do you know where to find Kanamaro?"

"Yes. Deacon has had letters from him, which I have seen. He lived in lodgings near the British Museum."

"Very well. Now, do you happen to know whether a night porter is kept at this place?"

"No, there is none. The outer door is shut at twelve. Anybody coming home after that must ring up the housekeeper by the electric bell."

"The tenants do not have keys for the outer door?"

"No; none but keys to their own rooms."

"Good. Now, Mr. Colson, I want to think things over a little. Would you care to go at once and ascertain whether or not Kanamaro is still at the address you speak of?"

"Certainly I will. Perhaps I should have told you that, though he knows me slightly, he has never spoken of his father's sword to me, and does not know that I know anything about it. He seems, indeed, to have spoken about it to nobody but Deacon himself. He was very proud and reticent in the matter; and now that Deacon is dead, he probably thinks nobody alive knows of the matter of the sword but himself. If he is at home what shall I do?"

"In that case keep him in sight and communicate with me, or with the police. I shall stay here for a little while. Then I shall get the hall-porter (if you will instruct him before you go) to show me the ladder

and the vicinity of Dowden's operations. Also, I think I shall look at the back staircase."

"But that was found locked, with the key inside."

"Well, well, there *are* ways of managing that, as you would know if you knew as much about housebreaking as I do. But we'll see."

### III.

MR. COLSON took a cab for Kanamaro's lodgings. Kanamaro was not in, he found, and he had given notice to leave his rooms. The servant at the door thought that he was going abroad, since his boxes were being packed, apparently for that purpose. The servant did not know at what time he would be back.

Mr. Colson thought for a moment of reporting these facts at once to Dorrington, but on second thoughts he determined to hurry to the City and make inquiry at some of the shipping offices as to the vessels soon to leave for Japan. On the way, however, he bethought him to buy a shipping paper and gather his information from that. He found what he wanted from the paper, but he kept the cab on its way, for he happened to know a man in authority at the Anglo-Malay Company's office, and it might be a good thing to take a look at their passenger list. Their next ship for Yokohama was to sail in a few days.

But he found it unnecessary to see the passenger list. As he entered one of the row of swing doors which gave access to the large general and inquiry office of the steamship company he perceived Keigo Kanamaro leaving by another. Kanamaro had not seen him. Mr. Colson hesitated for a moment, and then turned and followed him.

And now Mr. Colson became suddenly seized with a burning fancy to play the subtle detective on his own account. Plainly Kanamaro feared nothing, walking about thus openly, and taking his passage for Japan at the chief office of the first line of steamships that anybody would think of who contemplated a voyage to Japan, instead of leaving the country, as he might have done, by some indirect route, and shipping for Japan from a foreign port. Doubtless, he still supposed that nobody knew of his errand in search of his father's sword. Mr. Colson quickened his pace and came up beside the Japanese.

Kanamaro was a well-made man of some five feet eight or nine—remarkably tall for

a native of Dai Nippon. His cheek-bones had not the prominence noticeable in the Japanese of the lower classes, and his pale oval face and aquiline nose gave token of high *sizoku* family. His hair only was of the coarse black that is seen on the heads of all Japanese. He perceived Mr. Colson, and stopped at once with a grave bow.

"Good morning," Mr. Colson said. "I saw you leaving the steamship office, and wondered whether or not you were going to leave us."

"Yes—I go home to Japan by the next departing ship," Kanamaro answered. He spoke with an excellent pronunciation, but with the intonation and the suppression of short syllables peculiar to his countrymen who speak English. "My beesness is finished."

Mr. Colson's suspicions were more than strengthened—almost confirmed. He commanded his features, however, and replied, as he walked by Keigo's side, "Ah! your visit has been successful, then?"

"It has been successful," Kanamaro answered, "at a very great cost."

"At a very great cost?"

"Yes—I did not expect to have to do what I have done—I should once not have believed it possible that I *could* do it. But"—Kanamaro checked himself hastily and resumed his grave reserve—"but that is private beesness, and not for me to disturb you with."

Mr. Colson had the tact to leave that line of fishing alone for a little. He walked a few yards in silence, and then asked, with his eyes furtively fixed on the face of the Japanese, "Do you know of the god Hachiman?"

"It is Hachinan the warrior; him of eight flags," Kanamaro replied. "Yes, I know, of course."

He spoke as though he would banish the subject. But Mr. Colson went on—

"Did he preside over the forging of ancient sword-blades in Japan?" he asked.

"I do not know of preside—that is a new word. But the great workers of the steel, those who made the *katana* in the times of Yoshitsuné and Taiko-Sama, they hung curtains and made offerings to Hachiman when they forged a blade—yes. The great Muramasa and the great Masamuné and Sanénori—they forged their blades at the foot of Hachiman. And it is believed that the god Inari came unseen with his hammer and forged the steel too. Though Hachiman is Buddhist and Inari is Shinto. But these are not things to talk of. There is

one religion, which is yours, and there is another religion, which is mine, and it is not good that we talk together of them. There are things that people call superstition when they are of another religion, though they may be very true."

They walked a little farther, and then Mr. Colson, determined to penetrate Kanamaro's mask of indifference, observed—

"It's a very sad thing this about Mr. Deacon."

"What is that?" asked Kanamaro, stolidly.

"Why, it is in all the newspapers!"

"The newspapers I do not read at all."

"Mr. Deacon has been killed—murdered in his rooms! He was found lying dead at the feet of Hachiman the god."

"Indeed!" Kanamaro answered politely, but with something rather like stolid indifference. "That is very sad. I am sorry. I did not know he had a Hachiman."

"And they say," Mr. Colson pursued, "that *something* has been taken!"

"Ah, yes," Kanamaro answered, just as coolly; "there were many things of much value in the rooms." And after a little while he added, "I see it is a little late. You will excuse me, for I must go to lunch at my lodgings. Good day."

He bowed, shook hands, and hailed a cab. Mr. Colson heard him direct the cabman to his lodgings, and then, in another cab, Mr. Colson made for Dorrington's office.

Kanamaro's stolidity, the lack of anything like surprise at the news of Mr. Deacon's death, his admission that he had finished his business in England successfully—these things placed the matter beyond all doubt in Mr. Colson's mind. Plainly he felt so confident that none knew of his errand in England, that he took things with perfect coolness, and even ventured so far as to speak of the murder in very near terms—to say that he did not expect to have to do what he had done, and would not have believed it possible that he *could* do it—though, to be sure, he checked himself at once before going farther. Certainly Dorrington must be told at once. That would be better than going to the police, perhaps, for possibly the police might not consider the evidence sufficient to justify an arrest, and Dorrington may have ascertained something in the meantime.

Dorrington had not been heard of at his office since leaving there early in the morning. So Mr. Colson saw Hicks, and arranged that a man should be put on to watch Kana-

maro, and should be sent instantly, before he could leave his lodgings again. Then Mr. Colson hurried to Bedford Mansions.

There he saw the housekeeper. From him he learned that Dorrington had left some time since, promising either to be back or to telegraph during the afternoon. Also, he learned that Beard, the hall-porter, was in a great state of indignation and anxiety as a consequence of the discovery that he was being watched by the police. He had got a couple of days leave of absence to go and see his mother, who was ill, and he found his intentions and destination a matter of pressing inquiry. Mr. Colson assured the housekeeper that he might promise Beard a speedy respite from the attentions of the police, and went to his lunch.

#### IV.

AFTER his lunch Mr. Colson called and called again at Bedford Mansions, but neither Dorrington nor his telegram had been heard of. At something near five o'clock, however, when he had made up his mind to wait, restless as he was, Dorrington appeared, fresh and complacent.

"Hope you haven't been waiting long?" he asked. "Fact is I got no opportunity for lunch till after four, so I had it then. I think I'd fairly earned it. The case is finished."

"Finished? But there's Kanamaro to be arrested. I've found——"

"No, no—I don't think anybody will be arrested at all; you'll read about it in the evening papers in an hour, I expect. But come into the rooms. I have some things to show you."

"But I assure you," Mr. Colson said as he entered the door of Deacon's rooms, "I assure you that I got as good as a confession from Kanamaro—he let it slip in ignorance of what I knew. Why do you say that nobody is to be arrested?"

"Because there's nobody alive who is responsible for Mr. Deacon's death. But come—let me show you the whole thing; it's very simple."

He led the way to the room where the body had been found, and paused before the four-armed idol. "Here's our old friend Hachiman," he said, "whom you half fancied might have had something to do with the tragedy. Well, you were right. Hachiman had a good deal to do with it, and with the various disasters at Copleston's, too. I will show you how."

The figure, which was larger than life-size, had been set up temporarily on a large packing-case, hidden by a red cloth covering. Hachiman was represented in the familiar Japanese kneeling-sitting position, and the carving of the whole thing was of an intricate and close description. The god was represented as clad in ancient armour, with a large and loose cloak depending from his shoulders and falling behind in a wilderness of marvellously and deeply carved folds.

"See here," Dorrington said, placing his fingers under a projecting part of the base of the figure, and motioning Mr. Colson to do the same. "Lift. Pretty heavy, eh?"

The idol was, indeed, enormously heavy, and it must have required the exertions of several strong men to place it where it was. "It seems pretty solid, doesn't it?" Dorrington continued. "But look here." He stepped to the back of the image, and, taking a prominent fold of the cloak in one hand, with a quick pull and a simultaneous rap of the other fist two feet above, a great piece of the carved drapery lifted on a hinge near the shoulders, displaying a hollow interior. In a dark corner within a small bottle and a fragment of rag were just visible.

"See there," said Dorrington, "there wouldn't be enough room in there for you or me, but a small man—a Japanese priest of the old time, say—could squat pretty comfortably. And see!"—he pointed to a small metal bolt at the bottom of the swing drapery—"he could bolt himself safely in when he got there. Whether the priest went there to play the oracle, or to blow fire out of Hachiman's mouth and nose I don't know, though no doubt it might be an interesting subject for inquiry; perhaps he did both. You observe the chamber is lined

with metal, which does something toward giving the thing its weight, and there are cunning little openings among the armour-joints in front which would transmit air and sound—even permit of a peep out. Now Mr. Deacon might or might not have found out this back door after the figure had been



"Slackjaw."

a while in his possession, but it is certain that he knew nothing of it when he bought it. Copleston knew nothing of it, though the thing has stood in his place for months. You see it's not a thing one would notice at once—I never should have done so if I hadn't been looking for it." He shut the part, and the joints, of irregular outline, fell

into the depths of the folds, and vanished as if by magic.

"Now," Dorrington went on, "as I told you, Copleston knew nothing of this, but one of his men found it out. Do you happen to have heard of one Samuel Castro, nicknamed 'Slackjaw,' a hunchback whom Copleston employed on odd jobs?"

"I have seen him here. He called, sometimes with messages, sometimes with parcels. I should probably have forgotten all about him were it not that he was rather an extraordinary creature, even among Copleston's men, who are all remarkable. But did he —"

"He murdered Mr. Deacon, I think," Dorrington replied, "as I fancy I can explain to you. But he won't hang for it, for he was drowned this afternoon before my eyes, in an attempt to escape from the police. He was an extraordinary creature, as you have said. He wasn't English—a half-caste of some sort, I think—though his command of language, of the riverside and dock description, was very free; it got him his nickname of Slackjaw among the longshoremen. He was desperately excitable, and he had most of the vices, though I don't think he premeditated murder in this case—nothing but robbery. He was immensely strong, although such a little fellow, and sharp in his wits, and he might have had regular work at Copleston's if he had liked, but that wasn't his game—he was too lazy. He would work long enough to earn a shilling or so, and then he would go off to drink the money. So he was a sort of odd on-and-off man at Copleston's—just to run a message or carry something or what not when the regular men were busy. Well, he seems to have been smart enough—or perhaps it was no more than an accident—to find out about Hachiman's back, and he used his knowledge for his own purposes. Copleston couldn't account for missing things in the night—because he never guessed that Castro, by shutting himself up in Hachiman about closing time, had the run of the place when everybody had gone, and could pick up any trifle that looked suitable for the pawnshop in the morning. He could sleep comfortably on sacks or among straw, and thus save the rent of lodgings, and he could accept Hachiman's shelter again just before Copleston turned up to start the next day's business. Getting out, too, after the place was opened, was quite easy, for nobody came to the large store-rooms till something was wanted, and in a large place with many

doors and gates, like Copleston's, unperceived going and coming was easy to one who knew the ropes. So that Slackjaw would creep quietly out, and in again by the front door to ask for a job. Copleston noticed how regular he had been every morning for the past few months, and thought he was getting steadier! As to the things that got smashed, I expect Slackjaw knocked them over, getting out in the dark. One china vase, in particular, had been shifted at the last moment, probably after he was in his hiding-place, and stood behind the image. That was smashed, of course. And these things, coming after the bad voyage of the ship in which he came over, very naturally gave poor Hachiman an unlucky reputation.

"Probably Slackjaw was sorry at first when he heard that Hachiman was bought. But then an idea struck him. He had been to Mr. Deacon's rooms on errands, and must have seen that fine old plate in the sitting-room. He had picked up unconsidered trifles at Copleston's by aid of Hachiman—why not acquire something handsome at Deacon's in the same way? The figure was to be carried to Bedford Mansions as soon as work began on Wednesday morning. Very well. All he had to do was to manage his customary sojourn at Copleston's over Tuesday night, and keep to his hiding-place in the morning. He did it. Perhaps the men swore a bit at the weight of Hachiman, but as the idol weighed several hundredweights by itself, and had not been shifted since it first arrived, they most likely perceived no difference. Hachiman, with Slackjaw comfortably bolted inside him (though even *he* must have found the quarters narrow) jolted away in the wagon, and in course of time was deposited where it now stands.

"Of course all I have told you, and all I am about to tell you, is no more than conjecture—but I think you will say I have reasons. From within the idol Slackjaw could hear Mr. Deacon's movements, and no doubt when he heard him take his hat and stick and shut the outer door behind him, Hachiman's tenant was glad to get out. He had never had so long and trying a sojourn in the idol before, though he *had* provided himself this time with something to keep his spirits up—in that little flat bottle he left behind. Probably, however, he waited some little time before emerging, for safety's sake. I judge this because I found no signs of his having started work, except a single small knife-mark on the plate case. He must have no more than begun

when Mr. Deacon came back for his letters. First, however, he went and shut the bedroom window, lest his movements might be heard in some adjacent rooms; the man who was painting said he heard that, you remember. Well, hearing Mr. Deacon's key in the lock, of course he made a rush for his hiding-place—but there was no time to get in and close up before Mr. Deacon could hear the noise. Mr. Deacon, as he entered, heard the footsteps in the next room, and went to see. The result you know. Castro, perhaps, crouched behind the idol, and hearing Mr. Deacon approaching, and knowing discovery inevitable, in his mad fear and excitement, snatched the nearest weapon and struck wildly at his pursuer. See! here are half a dozen heavy, short Japanese swords at hand, any one of which might have been used. The thing done, Castro had to think of escape. The door was impossible—the hall-porter was already knocking there. But the man had no key—he could be heard moving about and calling for one. There was yet a little time. He wiped the blade of the weapon, put it back in its place, took the keys from the dead man's pocket and regained his concealment in the idol. Whether or not he took the keys with the idea of again attempting theft when the room was left empty I don't know—most likely he thought they would aid him in escape. Any way, he didn't attempt theft, but lay in his concealment—and a pretty bad time he must have had of it—till night. Probably his nerve was not good enough for anything more than simple flight. When all was quiet, he left the rooms and shut the door behind him. Then he lurked about corridors and basements till morning, and when the doors were opened, slipped out unobserved. That's all. It's pretty obvious, once you know about Hachiman's interior."

"And how did you find out?"

"When you left me here I considered the thing. I put aside all suspicions of motive, the Japanese and his sword and the rest of it, and addressed myself to the bare facts. Somebody *had* been in these rooms when Mr. Deacon came back, and that somebody had murdered him. The first thing was to find how this person came, and where he came from. At first, of course, one thought of the bedroom window, as the police had done. But reflection proved this unlikely. Mr. Deacon had entered his front door, was inside a few seconds, and then was murdered close by the figure of Hachiman. Now if anybody had entered by the window for

purposes of robbery, his impulse on hearing the key in the outer door (and such a thing could be heard all over the rooms, as I tested for myself)—his impulse, I say, would be to retreat by the way he had come, that is by the window. If, then, Mr. Deacon had overtaken him before he could escape, the murder might have taken place just as it had done, but it would have been *in the bedroom*, not in a room in the opposite direction. And any thief's attention would naturally be directed at first to the gold plate—indeed, I detected a fresh knife-mark in the door of the case, which I will show you presently. Now, as you see by the arrangement of the rooms, the retreat from the plate case to the bedroom window would be a short one, whereas the murderer must in fact have taken a longer journey in the opposite direction. Why? Because he had *arrived* from that direction, and his natural impulse was to retreat by the way he had come. This might have been by the door to the back stairs, but a careful examination of this door and its lock and key convinced me that it had not been opened. The key was dirty, and to have turned it from the opposite side would have necessitated the forcible use of a pair of thin hollow pliers (a familiar tool to burglars), and these must have left their mark on the dirty key. So I turned back to the idol. *This* was the spot the intruder had made for in his retreat, and the figure had been brought into the place the very morning of the murder. Also, things had disappeared from its vicinity at Copleston's. More—it was a large thing. What if it were hollow? One has heard of such things having been invented by priests anxious for certain effects. Could not a thief smuggle himself in that way?

"The suggestion was a little startling, for if it were the right one the man might be hiding there at that moment. I gave the thing half an hour's examination, and in the end found what I have shown you. It was not the sort of thing one would have found out without looking for it. Look at it even now. Although you have seen it open, you couldn't point to the joints."

Dorrington opened it again. "Once open," he went on, "the thing was pretty plain. Here is the rag—perhaps it was Castro's pocket-handkerchief—used to wipe the weapon. It is stained all over, and cut, as you will observe, by the sharp edge. Also, you may see a crumb or two—Slack-jaw had brought food with him, in case of a long imprisonment. But chiefly observe

the bottle. It is a flat, high-shouldered, 'quartern' bottle, such as publicans sell or lend to their customers in poor districts, and as usual it bears the publican's name—J. Mills. It's a most extraordinary thing, but it seems the fate of almost every murderer, no matter how cunning, to leave some such damning piece of evidence about, foolish as it may seem afterward. I've known it in a dozen cases. Probably Castro, in the dark and in his excitement, forgot it when he quitted his hiding-place. At any rate it helped me, and made my course plain. Clearly this man, whoever he was, had come from Copleston's. Moreover he was a small man, for the space he had occupied would be too little even for a man of middle height. Also he bought drink of J. Mills, a publican; if J. Mills carried on business near Copleston's so much the easier my task would seem. Before I left, however, I went to the basement and inspected the ladder, the removal of which had caused the police so much exercise. Then it was plain why Dowden had cleared out. All his prevarication and uneasiness were explained at once, as the police might have seen if they had looked *behind* the ladder as well as at it. For it had been lying lengthwise against the wooden partition which formed the back of the compartments put up to serve the tenants as wine-cellars. Dowden had taken three planks out of this partition, and so arranged that they could be slipped in their places and out again without attracting attention. What he had been taking through the holes he thus made I won't undertake to say, but I will make a small bet that some of the tenants find their wine short presently! And so Dowden, never an industrious person, and never at one job long, thought it best to go away when he found the police asking why the ladder had been moved."

"Yes, yes—it's very surprising, but no doubt you're right. Still, what about Kanamaro and that sword?"

"Tell me exactly what he said to you to-day."

Mr. Colson detailed the conversation at length.

Dorrington smiled. "See here," he said, "I have found out something else in these rooms. What Kanamaro said he meant in another sense to what you supposed. I wondered a little about that sword, and made a little search among some drawers in consequence. Look here. Do you see this box standing out here on a nest of drawers? That is quite unlike Mr. Deacon's orderly ways.

The box contains a piece of lacquer, and it had been shifted from its drawer to make room for a more precious piece. See here." Dorrington pulled out a drawer just below where the box stood, and took from it another white wood box. He opened this box and removed a quantity of wadding. A rich brocade *fukusa* was then revealed, and, loosening the cord of this, Dorrington displayed a Japanese writing-case, or *suzuribako*, aged and a little worn at the corners, but all of lacquer of a beautiful violet hue.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Colson. "Violet lacquer!"

"That is what it is," Dorrington answered, "and when I saw it I judged at once that Deacon had at last consented to part with his Masamuné blade in exchange for that even greater rarity, a fine piece of the real old violet lacquer. I should imagine that Kanamaro brought it on Tuesday evening—you will remember that you saw Mr. Deacon for the last time alive in the afternoon of that day. Beard seems not to have noticed him, but in the evening hall-porters are apt to be at supper, you know—perhaps even taking a nap, now and then!"

"Then *this* is how Kanamaro 'finished his business'!" Mr. Colson observed. "And the 'very great cost' was probably what he had to pay for this."

"I suppose so. And he would not have believed it possible that he *could* get a piece of violet lacquer, in any circumstances."

"But," Mr. Colson objected, "I still don't understand his indifference and lack of surprise when I told him of poor Deacon's death."

"I think that is very natural in such a man as Keigo Kanamaro. I don't profess to know a very great deal about Japan, but I know that a *samurai* of the old school was trained from infancy to look on death, whether his own or another's, with absolute indifference. They regarded it as a mere circumstance. Consider how cold-bloodedly their *hari-kiri*, their legalised suicide, was carried out!"

As they left the rooms and made for the street Mr. Colson said, "But now I know nothing of your pursuit of Castro."

Dorrington shrugged his shoulders. "There is little to say," he said. "I went to Copleston and asked him if any one of his men was missing all day on Wednesday. None of his regular men were, it seemed, but he had seen nothing that day of an odd man named Castro, or Slackjaw, although he had been very regular for some time before;

and, indeed, Castro had not yet turned up. I asked if Castro were a tall man. No, he was a little fellow, and a hunchback, Copleston told me. I asked what public-house one might find him at, and Copleston mentioned the 'Blue Anchor'—kept, as I had previously ascertained from the directory, by J. Mills. That was enough. With everything standing as it was, a few minutes' talk with the inspector in charge at the nearest police-station was all that was necessary. Two men were sent to make the arrest, and the people at the 'Blue Anchor' directed us to Martin's Wharf, where we found Castro. He had been drinking, but he knew enough to make a bolt the moment he saw the policemen coming on the wharf. He dropped on to a dummy barge and made off from one barge to another in what seemed an aimless direction, though he may

have meant to get away at the stairs a little lower down the river. But he never got as far. He muddled at one jump and fell between two barges. You know what a suck under there is when a man falls among barges like that. A strong swimmer with all his senses has only an off chance, and a man with bad whisky in his head—well, I left them dragging for Slackjaw when I came away."

As they turned the corner of the street they met a newsboy running. "Paper—speshal!" he cried. "The West-End murder—speshal! Suicide of the murderer!"

Dorrington's conjecture that Kanamaro had called to make his exchange on Tuesday evening proved correct. Mr. Colson saw him once more on the day of his departure, and told him the whole story. And then Keigo Kanamaro sailed for Japan to lay the sword in his father's tomb.



"DISTURBED!"