

THE DORRINGTON DEED-BOX.

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Illustrated by HAROLD PIFFARD.

VI.—OLD CATER'S MONEY



HE firm of Dorrington & Hicks had not been constructed at the time when this case came to Dorrington's hand. Dorrington had barely emerged from the obscurity that veils his life before some ten years ago, and he was at this time a needier adventurer than he

had been at the period of any other of the cases I have related. Indeed his illicit gains on this occasion would seem first to have set him on his feet and enabled him first to cut a fair exterior figure. Whether or not he had developed to the full the scoundrelism that first brought me acquainted with his trade I do not know; but certain it is that he was involved at the time in transactions wretchedly ill paid, on behalf of one Flint, a ship-stores dealer at Deptford; an employer whose record was never a very clean one. This Flint was one of an unpleasant family. He was nephew to old Cater the wharfinger (and private usurer) and cousin to another Cater, whose name was Paul, and who was also a usurer, though he variously described himself as a "commission agent" or "general dealer." Indeed he was a general dealer, if the term may be held to include a dealer in whatever would bring him gain, and who made no great punctilio in regard to the honesty or other-

wise of his transactions. Indeed all three of these pleasant relatives had records of the shadiest, and all three did whatever in the way of money-lending, mortgaging and blood-sucking came in their way. It is, however, with old Cater—Jerry Cater, he was called—that this narrative is in the first place concerned. I got the story from a certain Mr. Sinclair, who for many years acted as his clerk and debt-collector.

Old Jerry Cater lived in the crooked and decaying old house over his wharf by Bermondsey Wall, where his father had lived before him. It was a grim and strange old house, with long-shut loft-doors in upper floors, and hinged flaps in sundry rooms that, when lifted, gave startling glimpses of muddy water washing among rotten piles below. Not once in six months now did a barge land its load at Cater's Wharf, and no coasting brig ever lay alongside. For, in fact, the day of Cater's Wharf was long past; and it seemed indeed that few more days were left for old Jerry Cater himself. For seventy-eight years old Jerry Cater had led a life useless to himself and to everybody else, though his own belief was that he had profited considerably. Truly, if one counted nothing but the money the old miser had accumulated, then his profit was large indeed; but it had brought nothing worth having, neither for himself nor for others, and he had no wife nor child who might use it more wisely when he should at last leave it behind him; no other relative indeed than his two nephews, each in spirit a fair copy of himself, though in body a quarter of a century younger. Seventy-eight years of every mean and sordid vice and of every virtue that had pecuniary gain for its sole object left Jerry Cater stranded at last in his cheap iron bedstead with its insufficient coverings, with not a sincere friend in the world to sit five minutes by his side. Down below Sinclair, his unhappy clerk, had the accommodation of a wooden table

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and a chair; and the clerk's wife performed what meagre cooking and cleaning service old Cater would have. Sinclair was a man of forty-five, rusty, starved, honest, and very cheap. He was very cheap because it had been his foolishness, twenty years ago, when in city employ, to borrow forty pounds of old Cater to get married with, and to buy furniture, with forty pounds he had of his own. Sinclair was young then, and knew nothing of the ways of the two hundred per cent. money-lender. When he had, by three or four years pinching, paid about a hundred and fifty pounds on account of interest and fines, and only had another hundred or two still due to clear everything off, he fell sick and lost his place. The payment of interest ceased, and old Jerry Cater took his victim, body, soul, wife, sticks, and chairs together. Jerry Cater discharged his own clerk, and took Sinclair, with a saving of five shillings a week on the nominal salary, and out of the remainder he deducted, on account of the debt and ever-accumulating interest, enough to keep his man thin and broken-spirited, without absolutely incapacitating him from work, which would have been bad finance. But the rest of the debt, capital and interest, was made into a capital debt, with usury on the whole. So that for sixteen years or more Sinclair had been paying something every week off the eternally increasing sum, and might have kept on for sixteen centuries at the same rate without getting much nearer freedom. If only there had been one more room in the house, old Cater might have compulsorily lodged his clerk, and have deducted something more for rent. As it was he might have used the office for the purpose, but he could never have brought himself to charge a small rent for it, and a large one would have swallowed most of the rest of Sinclair's salary, thus bringing him below starvation point and impairing his working capacity. But Mrs. Sinclair, now gaunt and scraggy, did all the housework, so that that came very cheap. Most of the house was filled with old bales and rotting merchandise which old Jerry Cater had seized in payment for wharfage dues and other debts, and had held to, because his ideas of selling prices were large, though his notions of buying prices were small. Sinclair was out of doors more than in, dunning and threatening debtors as hopeless as himself. And the household was completed by one Samuel Greer, a squinting man of grease and rags, within ten years of the age of old Jerry Cater himself. Greer was wharf-hand,

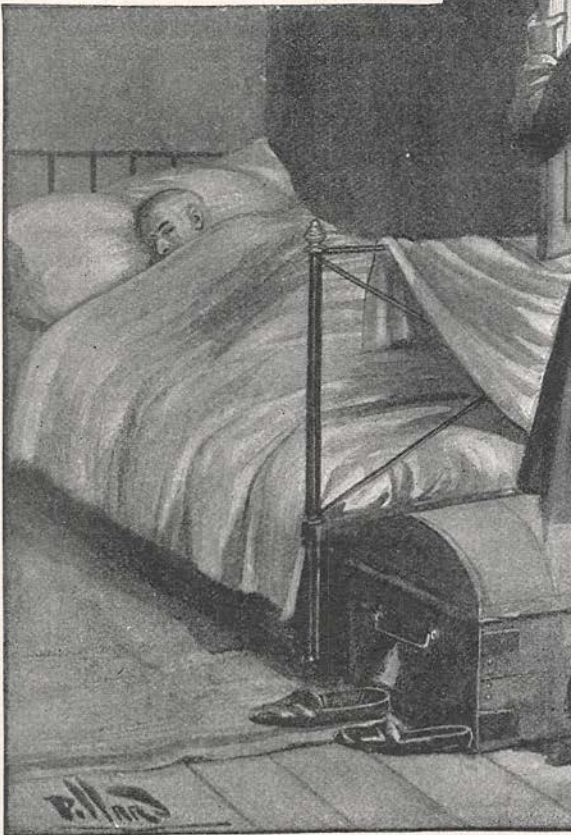
messenger, and personal attendant on his employer, and with less opportunity, was thought to be near as bad a scoundrel as Cater. He lived and slept in the house, and was popularly supposed to be paid nothing at all; though his patronage of the "Ship and Anchor," hard by, was as frequent as circumstances allowed.

Old Jerry Cater was plainly not long for this world. Ailing for months, he at length gave in and took to his bed. Greer watched him anxiously and greedily, for it was his design, when his master went at last, to get what he could for himself. More than once during his illness old Cater had sent Greer to fetch his nephews. Greer had departed on these errands, but never got farther than the next street. He hung about a reasonable time—perhaps in the "Ship and Anchor," if funds permitted—and then returned to say that the nephews could not come just yet. Old Cater had quarrelled with his nephews, as he had with everybody else, some time before, and Greer was resolved, if he could, to prevent any meeting now, for that would mean that the nephews would take possession of the place, and he would lose his chance of convenient larceny when the end came. So it was that neither nephew knew of old Jerry Cater's shaky condition.

Before long, finding that the old miser could not leave his bed—indeed he could scarcely turn in it—Greer took courage, in Sinclair's absence, to poke about the place in search of concealed sovereigns. He had no great time for this, because Jerry Cater seemed to have taken a great desire for his company—whether for the sake of his attendance or to keep him out of mischief was not clear. At any rate, Greer found no concealed sovereigns, nor anything better than might be sold for a few pence at the rag-shop. Until, one day when old Cater was taking alternate fits of restlessness and sleep, Greer ventured to take down a dusty old pickle-jar from the top shelf in the cupboard of his master's bedroom. Cater was dozing at the moment, and Greer, tilting the jar toward the light, saw within a few doubled papers, very dusty. He snatched the papers out, stuffed them into his pocket, replaced the jar, and closed the cupboard door hastily. The door made some little noise, and old Cater turned and woke, and presently he made a shift to sit up in bed. Greer scratched his head as innocently as he could, and directed his divergent eyes to parts of the room as distant from the cupboard as possible.

"Sam'l Greer," said old Cater, in a feeble voice, while his lower jaw waggled and twitched—"Sam'l Greer, I think I'll 'ave some beef-tea." He groped tremulously under his pillow, turning his back to Greer, who tip-toed and glared variously over his master's shoulders. He saw nothing, however, though he heard the chink of money. Old Cater turned, with a shilling in his shaking hand, "Git 'alf a pound o' shin o' beef," he said, "an' go to Green's for it at the other end o' Grange Road, d'ye 'ear? It's—it's a penny a pound cheaper there than it is anywhere nearer, and—and I ain't in so much of a 'urry for it, so the distance don't matter. Go 'long." And old Jerry Cater subsided in a fit of coughing.

Greer needed no second bidding. He was anxious to take a peep at the papers he had secreted. Sinclair was out collecting, or trying to collect, but Greer did not stop to examine his prize before



"Tilting the jar toward the light, he saw within a few doubled papers."

he had banged the street door behind him, lest Cater, listening above, should wonder what detained him. But in a convenient courtyard a hundred yards away he drew out the papers and inspected them eagerly. First, there was the policy of insurance of the house and premises. Then there was a bundle of receipts for the yearly insurance premiums. And then—there was old Jerry Cater's will.

There were two foolscap sheets, written all in Jerry Cater's own straggling handwriting. Greer hastily scanned the sheets, and his dirty face grew longer and his squint intensified as he turned over the second sheet, found nothing behind it, and stuffed the papers back in his pocket. For it was plain that not a penny of old Jerry Cater's money was for his faithful servant, Samuel Greer. "Ungrateful ole wagabone!" mused the faithful servant as he went his way. "Not a blessed 'apenny; not a 'apenny! An' them as don't want it gets it, o' course. That's always the way—it's like a-greasin' of a fat pig. I shall 'ave to get what I can while I can, that's all." And so ruminating he pursued his way to the butcher's in Grange Road.

Once more on his way there, and twice on his way back, Samuel Greer stepped into retired places to look at those papers again, and at each inspection he grew more thoughtful. There might be money in it yet. Come, he must think it over.

The front door being shut, and Sinclair probably not yet returned, he entered the house by a way familiar to the inmates—a latched door giving on to the wharf. The clock told him that he had been gone nearly an hour, but Sinclair was still absent. When he entered old Cater's room upstairs he found a great change. The old man lay in a state of collapse, choking with a cough that exhausted him; and for this there seemed little wonder, for the window was open, and the room was full of the cold air from the river.

"Wot jer bin openin' the winder for?" asked Greer in astonishment. "It's enough to give ye yer death." He shut it and returned to the bedside. But though he offered his master the change from the shilling the old man seemed not to see it, nor to hear his voice.

"Well if you won't—don't," observed Greer with some alacrity, pocketing the coppers. "But I'll bet he'll remember right enough presently." "D'y'ear," he added, bending over the bed, "I've got the beef. Shall I bile it now?"

But old Jerry Cater's eyes still saw nothing, and he heard not, though his shrunken chest and shoulders heaved with the last shudders of the cough that had exhausted him. So Greer stepped lightly to the cupboard and restored the fire policy and the receipts to the pickle-jar. He kept the will.

Greer made preparations for cooking the beef, and as he did so he encountered another phenomenon. "Well, he have bin a goin' of it!" said Greer. "Blow me if he ain't bin readin' the Bible now!"

A large, ancient, worn old Bible, in a rough calf-skin cover, lay on a chair by old Cater's hand. It had probably been the family Bible of the Caters for generations back, for certainly old Jerry Cater would never have bought such a thing. For many years it had accumulated dust on a distant shelf among certain out-of-date account-books, but Greer had never heard of its being noticed before. "Feels he's goin', that's about it," Greer mused as he pitched the Bible back on the shelf to make room for his utensils. "But I shouldn't ha' thought 'e'd take it sentimental like that—readin' the Bible an' lettin' in the free air of 'eaven to make 'im cough 'issel blind."

The beef-tea was set simmering, and still old Cater lay impotent. The fit of prostration was longer than any that had preceded it, and presently Greer thought it might be well to call the doctor. Call him he did accordingly (the surgery was hard by), and the doctor came. Jerry Cater revived a little, sufficiently to recognise the doctor, but it was his last effort. He lived another hour and a half. Greer kept the change, and had the beef-tea as well. The doctor gave his opinion that the old man had risen in delirium and had expended his last strength in moving about the room and opening the window.

II.

SAMUEL GREER found somewhere near two pounds in silver in the small canvas bag under the dead man's pillow. No more money, however, rewarded his hasty search about the bedroom, and when Sinclair returned Greer set off to carry the news to Paul Cater, the dead man's nephew.

The respectable Greer had considered well the matter of the will, and saw his way, he fancied, at least to a few pounds by way of compensation for his loss of employment and the ungrateful forgetfulness of his late employer. The two sheets comprised, in fact, not a simple will merely, but a will and a

codicil, each on one of the sheets, the codicil being a year or two more recent than the will. Nobody apparently knew anything of these papers, and it struck Greer that it was now in his power to prevent anybody learning, unless an interested party were disposed to pay for the disclosure. That was why he now took his way toward the establishment of Paul Cater, for the will made Paul Cater not only sole executor, but practically sole legatee. Wherefore Greer carefully separated the will from the codicil, intending the will alone for sale to Paul Cater. Because, indeed, the codicil very considerably modified it, and might form the subject of independent commerce.

Paul Cater made a less miserly show than had been the wont of his uncle. His house was in a street in Pimlico, the ground-floor front room of which was made into an office, with a wire blind carrying his name in gilt letters. Perhaps it was that Paul Cater carried his covetousness to a greater refinement than his uncle had done, seeing that a decent appearance is a commercial advantage by itself, bringing a greater profit than miserly habits could save.

The man of general dealings was balancing his books when Greer arrived, but at the announcement of his uncle's death he dropped everything. He was not noticeably stricken with grief, unless a sudden seizure of his hat and a roaring aloud for a cab might be considered as indications of affliction; for in truth Paul Cater knew well that it was a case in which much might depend on being first at Bermondsey Wall. The worthy Greer had scarce got the news out before he found himself standing in the street, while Cater was giving directions to a cabman. "Here—you come in too," said Cater, and Greer was hustled into the cab.

It was plainly a situation in which half-crowns should not be too reluctantly parted with. So Paul Cater produced one and presented it. Cater was a strong-faced man of fifty odd, with a tight-drawn mouth that proclaimed everywhere a tight fist; so that the unaccustomed passing over of a tip was a noticeably awkward and unspontaneous performance, and Greer pocketed the money with little more acknowledgment than a growl.

"Do you know where he put the will?" asked Paul Cater with a keen glance.

"Will?" answered Greer, looking him blankly in the face—the gaze of one eye passing over Cater's shoulder and that of the other seeming to seek his boots. "Will? P'raps 'e never made one."

"Didn't he?"

"That 'ud mean, lawfully, as the property would come to you an' Mr. Flint—'arves. Bein' all personal property. So I'd think." And Greer's composite gaze blankly persisted.

"But how do you know whether he made a will or not?"

"'Ow do I know? Ah, well, p'raps I dunno. It's only fancy like. I jist put it to you—that's all. It 'ud be divided atween the two of you." Then, after a long pause, he added, "But lor! it 'ud be a pretty fine thing for you if he did leave a will, and willed it all to you, wouldn't it? Mighty fine thing! Ah' it 'ud be a mighty fine thing for Mr. Flint if there was a will leaving it all to him, wouldn't it? Pretty fine thing!"

Cater said nothing, but watched Greer's face sharply. Greer's face, with its greasy features and its irresponsible squint, was as expressive as a brick. They travelled some distance in silence. Then Greer said musingly, "Ah, a will like that 'ud be a mighty fine thing for you, Mr. Cater—a mighty fine thing! What 'ud you be disposed to give for it now?"

"Give for it? What do you mean? If there's a will there's an end of it. Why should I give anything for it?"

"Jist so—jist so," replied Greer, with a complacent wave of the hand. "Why should you? No reason at all, unless you couldn't find it without givin' something."

"See here, now," said Cater sharply; "let us understand this. Do you mean that there is a will, and you know that it is hidden, and where it is?"

Greer's squint remained impenetrable. "Hidden? Lor!—'ow should I know if it was hidden? I was a-puttin' of a case to you."

"Because," Cater went on, disregarding the reply, "if that's the case, the sooner you out with the information the better it'll be for you. Because there are ways of making people give up information of that sort for nothing."

"Yes—o' course," replied the imperturbable Greer. "O' course there is. An' quite right too. Ah, it's a fine thing is the lawr—a mighty fine thing!"

The cab rattled over the stones of Bermondsey Wall, and the two alighted at the door through which old Jerry Cater was soon to come feet first. Sinclair was back, much disturbed and anxious. At sight of Paul Cater the poor fellow, weak and broken-spirited, left the house as quietly as he might.

For years of grinding habit had inured him to the belief that in reality old Cater had treated him rather well, and now he feared the probable action of the heirs.

"Who was that?" asked Paul Cater of Greer. "Wasn't it the clerk that owed my uncle the money?"

Greer nodded.

"Then he's not to come here again—do you hear? I'll take charge of the books and things. As to the debt—well I'll see about that after. And now look here." Paul Cater stood before Greer and spoke with decision. "About that will, now. Bring it."

Greer was not to be bluffed. "Where from?" he asked innocently.

"Will you stand there and tell me you don't know where it is?"

"Maybe I'd best stand here and tell you what pays me best."

"Pay you? How much more do you want? Bring me that will, or I'll have you in gaol for stealing it!"

"Lor!" answered Greer composedly, conscious of holding another trump as well as the will. "Why, if there *was* anybody as knowed where the will was, and you talked to him as woilent as that 'ere, why, you'd frighten him so much he'd as likely as not go out and get a price from your cousin, Mr. Flint. Whatever was in the will it might pay him to get hold of it."

At this moment there came a furious knocking at the front door. "Why," Greer continued, "I bet that's him. It can't be nobody else—I bet the doctor's told him, or summat."

They were on the first floor landing, and Greer peeped from a broken-shuttered window that looked on the street. "Yes," he said, "that's Mr. Flint sure enough. Now, Mr. Paul Cater, business. Do you want to see that will before I let Mr. Flint in?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Cater furiously, catching at his arm. "Quick, where is it?"

"I want twenty pound."

"Twenty pound! You're mad! What for?"

"All right, if I'm mad, I'll go an' let Mr. Flint in."

The knocking was repeated, louder and longer.

"No," cried Cater, getting in his way. "You know you mustn't conceal a will—that's law. Give it up."

"What's the law that says I must give it up to you, 'stead of yer cousin? If there's a will it may say anythin'—in yer favour or

out of it. If there ain't, you'll git 'alf. The will might give you more, or it might give you less, or it might give you nothink. Twenty pound for first look at it 'fore Flint comes in, and do what you like with it 'fore he knows anythin' about it."

Again the knocking came at the door, this time supplemented by kicks.

"But I don't carry twenty pound about with me!" protested Cater, waving his fists. "Give me the will and come to my office for the money to-morrow!"

"No tick for this sort o' job," answered Greer decisively. "Sorry I can't oblige you—I'm goin' down to the front door." And he made as though to go.

"Well, look here!" said Cater desperately, pulling out his pocket-book. "I've got a note or two, I think —"

"'Ow much?" asked Greer, calmly laying hold on the pocket-book. "Two at least. Two fivers. Well I'll let it go at that. Give us hold." He took the notes, and pulled out the will from his pocket. Flint, outside, battered the door once more.

"Why," exclaimed Cater as he glanced over the sheet, "I'm sole executor and I get the lot! Who are these witnesses?"

"Oh, they're all right. Longshore hands just hereabout. You'll get 'em any day at the 'Ship and Anchor.'"

Cater put the will in his breast-pocket. "You'd best get out o' this, my man," he said. "You've had me for ten pound, and the further you get from me the safer you'll be."

"What?" said Greer with a chuckle. "Not even grateful! Shockin'!" He took his way downstairs, and Cater followed. At the door Flint, a counterpart of Cater, except that his dress was more slovenly, stood ragefully.

"Ah, cousin," said Cater, standing on the threshold and preventing his entrance, "this is a very sad loss!"

"Sad loss!" Flint replied with disgust. "A lot you think of the loss—as much as I do, I reckon. I want to come in."

"Then you shan't!" Cater replied, with a prompt change of manner. "You shan't! I'm sole executor, and I've got the will in my pocket." He pulled it out sufficiently far to show the end of the paper, and then pushed it back again. "As executor I'm in charge of the property, and responsible. It's vested in me till the will's put into effect. That's law. And it's a bad thing for anybody to interfere with an executor. That's law too."

Flint was angry, but cautious. "Well," he said, "you're uncommon high, with your will and your executor's law and your 'sad loss,' I must say. What's your game?"

For answer Cater began to shut the door.

"Just you look out!" cried Flint. "You haven't heard the last of this! You may be executor or it may be a lie. You may have the will or you may not; anyway I know better than to run the risk of putting myself in the wrong now. But I'll watch you, and I'll watch this house, and I'll be about when the will comes to be proved! And if that ain't done quick, I'll apply for administration myself, and see the thing through!"

III.

SAMUEL GREER sheered off as the cousinly interview ended, well satisfied with himself. Ten pounds was a fortune to him, and he meant having a good deal more. He did nothing further till the following morning, when he presented himself at the shop of Jarvis Flint.

"Good mornin', Mr. Flint," said Samuel Greer, grinning and squinting affably. "I couldn't help noticin' as you had a few words yesterday with Mr. Cater after the sad loss."

"Well?"

"It 'appens as I've seen the will as Mr. Cater was talkin' of, an' I thought p'raps it 'ud save you makin' mistakes if I told you of it."

"What about it?" Jarvis Flint was not disposed to accept Greer altogether on trust.

"Well it *do* seem a scandalous thing, certainly, but what Mr. Cater said was right. He *do* take the personal property, subject to debts, an' he *do* take the freehold prim'ses. An' he is the 'xecutor."

"Was the will witnessed?"

"Yes—the two waterside chaps well known thereabouts."

"Was it made by a lawyer?"

"No—all in the lamented corpse's 'and-writin'."

"Umph!" Flint maintained his hard stare in Greer's face. "Anything else?"

"Well, no, Mr. Flint, sir, p'raps not. But I wonder if there might be sich a thing as a codicil?"

"Is there?"

"Oh, I was a-wonderin', that's all. It might make a deal o' difference in the will, mightn't it? And p'raps Mr. Cater mightn't know anythink about the codicil."

"What do you mean? Is there a codicil?"

"Well, reely, Mr. Flint," answered Greer with a deprecatory grin, "reely it ain't business to give information for nothink, is it?"

"Business or not, if you know anything you'll find you'll have to tell it. I'm not going to let Cater have it all his own way, if he *is* executor. My lawyer 'll be on the job before you're a day older, my man, and you won't find it pay to keep things too quiet."

"But it can't pay worse than to give information for nothink," persisted Greer. "Come, now, Mr. Flint, s'pose (I don't say there is, mind—I only say *s'pose*), s'pose there *was* a codicil, and s'pose that codicil meant a matter of a few thousand pound in your pocket. An' s'pose some person could tell you where to put your hand on that codicil, what might you be disposed to pay that person?"

"Bring me the codicil," answered Flint, "and if it's all right I'll give you—well, say five shillings."

Greer grinned again and shook his head. "No, reely, Mr. Flint," he said, "we can't do business on terms like them. Fifty pound down in my hand now, and it's done. Fifty 'ud be dirt cheap. And the longer you are a-considerin'—well, you know, Mr. Cater might get hold of it and then, why, s'pose it got burnt and never 'eard of agen?"

Flint glared with round eyes. "You get out!" he said. "Go on! Fifty pound, indeed! Fifty pound, without my knowin' whether you're telling lies or not! Out you go! I know what to do now, my man!"

Greer grinned once more, and slouched out. He had not expected to bring Flint to terms at once. Of course the man would drive him away at first, and, having got scent of the existence of the codicil, and supposing it to be somewhere concealed about the old house at Bermondsey Wall, he would set his lawyer to warn his cousin that the thing was known, and that he, as executor, would be held responsible for it. But the trump card, the codicil itself, was carefully stowed in the lining of Greer's hat, and Cater knew nothing about it. Presently Flint, finding Cater obdurate, would approach the wily Greer again, and then he could be squeezed. Meanwhile the hat-lining was as safe a place as any in which to keep the paper. Perhaps Flint might take a fancy to have him waylaid at night and searched, in which case a pocket would be an unsafe repository.

Flint, on his part, was in good spirits. Plainly there *was* a codicil, favourable to

himself. Certainly he meant neither to pay Greer for discovering it—at any rate no such sum as fifty pounds—nor to abate a jot of his rights. Flint had a running contract with a shady solicitor, named Lugg, in accordance with which Lugg received a yearly payment and transacted all his legal business—consisting chiefly of writing threatening letters to unfortunate debtors. Also, as I think I

instructions to watch him closely, to make him drunk if possible, and to get at his knowledge of the codicil by any means conceivable.

IV.

On the morning of the day after his talk with Flint, Samuel Greer ruminated doubtfully on the advisability of calling on the ship-store dealer again, or waiting in dignified silence till Flint should approach him. As he ruminated he rubbed his chin, and so rubbing it found it very stubbly. He resolved on the luxury of a penny shave, and, as he walked the street, kept his eyes open for a shop where the operation was performed at that price. Mr. Flint, at any rate, could wait till his chin was smooth. Presently, in a turning by Abbey Street, Bermondsey, he came on just such a barber's shop as he wanted. Within, two men were being shaved already, and another waiting; and Greer felt himself especially fortunate in that three more followed at his heels. He was ahead of their turns, anyhow. So he waited patiently.

The man whose turn was immediately before his own did not appear to be altogether sober. A hiccough shook him from time to time; he grinned with a dull glance at a comic paper held upside down in his hand, and when he went to take his turn at a chair his walk was unsteady. The barber had to use his skill to avoid cutting him, as he opened his mouth to make remarks at awkward times. Then

Greer's turn came, and when his shave was half completed he saw the unsteady customer rise, pay his penny and go out.

"Beginnin' early in the mornin'!" observed one customer.

The barber laughed. "Yes," he said. "He wants to get a proper bust on before he goes to bed, I s'pose."

Samuel Greer's chin being smooth at last,



When he went to take his turn at a chair his walk was unsteady."

have mentioned, Dorrington was working for him at the time, and working at very cheap rates. Flint resolved, to begin with, to set Dorrington and Lugg to work. But first Dorrington—who, as a matter of fact, was in Flint's back office during the interview with Greer. Thus it was that in an hour or two Dorrington found himself in active pursuit of Samuel Greer, with in-

he rose and turned to where he had hung his hat. His jaw dropped, and his eyes almost sprang out to meet each other as he saw—a bare peg! The unsteady customer had walked off with the wrong hat—his hat, and—the paper concealed inside!

“Lor!” cried the dismayed Greer, “he’s took my hat!”

All the shopful of men set up a guffaw at this. “Take ’is then,” said one. “It’s a blame sight better one than yourn!”

But Greer, without a hat, rushed into the street, and the barber, without his penny, rushed after him. “Stop ’im!” shouted Greer distractedly. “Stop thief!”

Thus it was that Dorrington, at this time of a far less well-groomed appearance than was his later wont, watching outside the barber’s, observed the mad bursting forth of Greer, followed by the barber. After the barber came the customers, one grinning furiously beneath a coating of lather.

“Stop ’im!” cried Greer. “’E’s got my ’at! Stop ’im!”

“You pay me my money,” said the barber, catching his arm. “Never mind yer ’at—you can ’ave ’is. But just you pay me first.”

“Leave go! You’re responsible for lettin’ ’im take it, I tell you! It’s a special ’at—valuable; leave go!”

Dorrington stayed to hear no more. Three minutes before he had observed a slightly elevated navy emerge from the shop and walk solemnly across the street under a hat manifestly a size or two too small for him. Now Dorrington darted down the turning which the man had taken. The hat was a wretched thing, and there must be some special reason for Greer’s wild anxiety to recover it, especially as the navy must have left another, probably better, behind him. Already Dorrington had conjectured that Greer was carrying the codicil about with him, for he had no place else to hide it, and he would scarcely have offered so confidently to negotiate over it if it had been in the Bermondsey Wall house, well in reach of Paul Cater. So Dorrington followed the elevated navy with all haste. He might never have seen him again were it not that the unconscious bearer of the fortunes of Flint (and, indeed, of the fortunes of Dorrington) hesitated for a little while whether or not to enter the door of a public-house near St. Saviour’s Dock. In the end he decided to go on, and it was just as he had started that Dorrington sighted him again.

The navy walked slowly and gravely on,

now and again with a swerve to the wall or the curb, but generally with a careful and laboured directness. Presently he arrived at a dock bridge, with a low iron rail. An incoming barge attracted his eye, and he stopped and solemnly inspected it. He leaned on the low rail for this purpose, and as he did so the hat, all too small, fell off. Had he been standing two yards nearer the centre of the bridge it would have dropped into the water. As it was it fell on the quay, a few feet from the edge, and a dockman, coming toward the steps by the bridge-side, picked it up and brought it with him.

“Here y’are, mate,” said the dockman, offering the hat.

The navy took it in lofty silence, and inspected it narrowly. Then he said, “’Ere—wot’s this? This ain’t my ’at!” And he glared suspiciously at the dockman.

“Ain’t it?” answered the dockman carelessly. “Aw right then, keep it for the bloke it b’longs to. I don’t want it.”

“No,” returned the navy with rising indignation, “but I want mine, though! Wotcher done with it? Eh? It ain’t a rotten old un like this ’ere. None o’ yer ’alf-larks. Jist you ’and it over, come on!”

“’And wot over?” asked the dockman, growing indignant in his turn. “You drops yer ’at over the bridge like some kid as can’t take care of it, and I brings it up for ye. ’Stead o’ sayin’ ‘thank yer,’ like a man, y’ asks me for another ’at! Go an’ bile yer face!” And he turned on his heel.

“No ye don’t!” bawled the navy, dropping the battered hat and making a complicated rush at the other’s retreating form. “Not much! You gimme my ’at!” And he grabbed the dockman anywhere, with both hands.

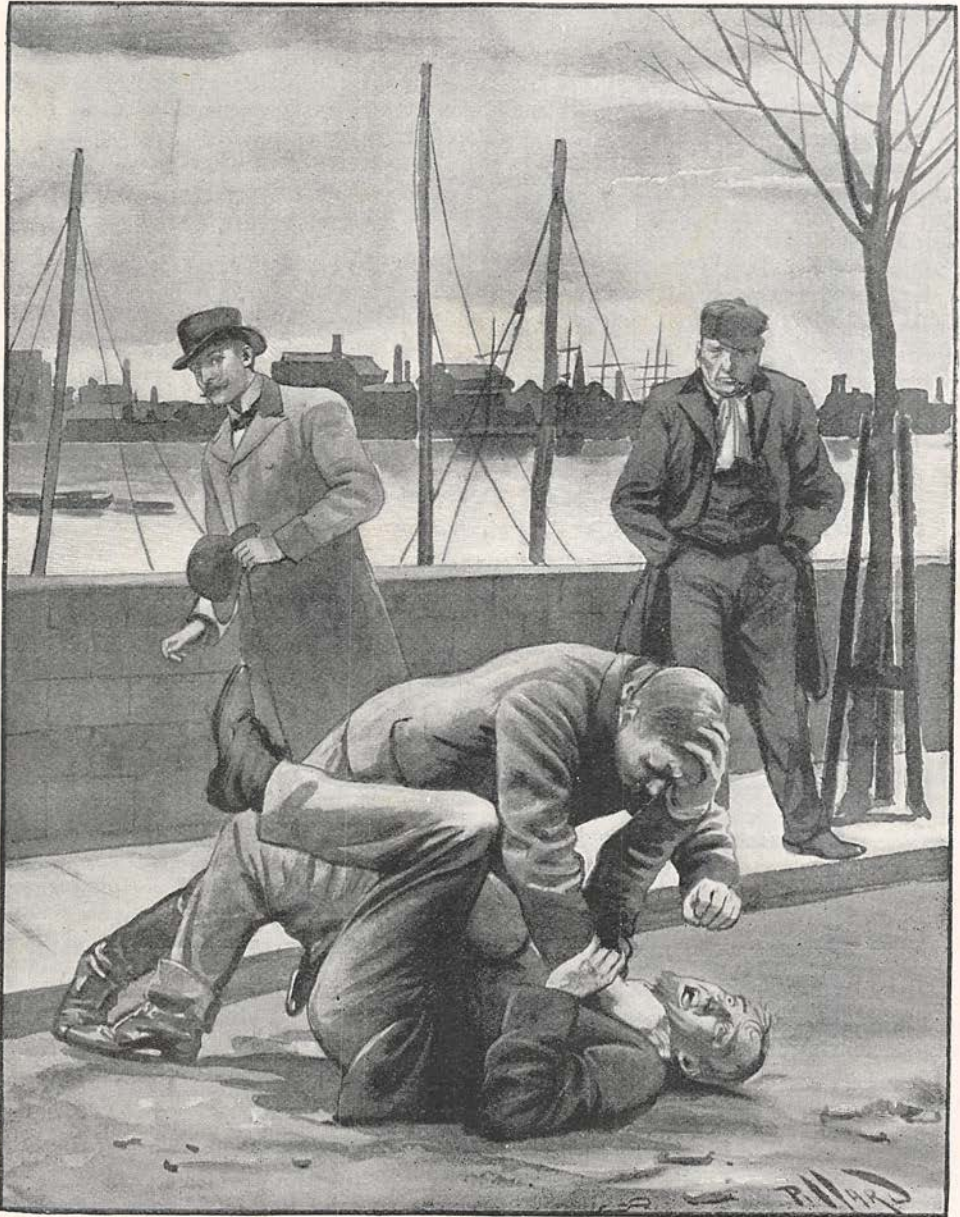
The dockman was as big as the navy, and no more patient. He immediately punched his assailant’s nose; and in three seconds a mingled bunch of dockman and navy was floundering about the street. Dorrington saw no more. He had the despised hat in his hand, and, general attention being directed to the action in progress, he hurried quietly up the nearest court.

V.

SAMUEL GREER, having got clear of the barber’s by paying his penny, was in much perplexity, and this notwithstanding his acquisition of the navy’s hat, a very decent bowler, which covered his head generously and rested on his ears. What should be the

move now? His hat was clean gone, and the codicil with it. To find it again would be a hopeless task, unless by chance the navy should discover his mistake and

At first the barber was vastly amused and told the story to his customers, who laughed. Then the barber got angry at the continual worrying, and at the close of the day's



"In three seconds a mingled bunch of dockman and navy was floundering about the street."

return to the barber's to make a rectification of hats. So Samuel Greer went once more to the barber's, and for the rest of the day called again and again fruitlessly.

barbering he earned his night's repose by pitching Samuel Greer neck and crop into the gutter. Samuel Greer gathered himself up disconsolately, surrounded his head with

the navy's hat, and shuffled off to the "Ship and Anchor."

At the "Ship and Anchor" he found one Barker, a decayed and sodden lawyer's clerk out of work. Greer's temporary affluence enabling him to stand drinks, he was presently able, by putting artfully hypothetical cases, to extract certain legal information from Barker. Chiefly he learned that if a will or a codicil were missing, it might nevertheless be possible to obtain probate of it by satisfying the court with evidence of its contents and its genuineness. Here, at any rate, was a certain hope. He alone, apparently, of all persons, knew the contents of the codicil and the names of the witnesses; and since it was impossible to sell the codicil, now that it was gone, he might at least sell his evidence. He resolved to offer his evidence for sale to Flint at once, and take what he could get. There must be no delay, for possibly the navy might find the paper in the hat and carry it to Flint, seeing that his name was beneficially mentioned in it, and his address given. Plainly the hat would not go back to the barber's now. If the drunken navy had found out his mistake he probably had not the least notion where he had been, nor where the hat had come from, else he would have returned it during the day, and recovered his own superior property. So Samuel Greer went at once, late as it was, and knocked up Mr. Flint.

Flint congratulated himself, feeling sure that Greer had thought better of his business and had come to give his information for anything he could get. Greer, on his part, was careful to conceal the fact that the codicil had been in his possession, and had been lost. All he said was that he had seen the codicil, that its date was nine months later than that of the will, and that it benefited Jarvis Flint to the extent of some ten thousand pounds; leaving Flint to suppose, if he pleased, that Cater the executor had the codicil, but would probably suppress it. Indeed this was the conclusion that Flint immediately jumped at.

And the result of the interview was this: Flint, with much grudging and reluctance, handed over as a preliminary fee the sum of one pound, the most he could be screwed up to. Then it was settled that Greer should come on the morrow and consult with Flint and his solicitor Lugg, the object of the consultation being the construction of a consistent tale and a satisfactory *soi-disant* copy of the codicil, which

Greer was to swear to, if necessary, and armed with which Paul Cater might be confronted and brought to terms.

It may be wondered why, ere this, Flint had not received the genuine codicil itself, recovered by Dorrington from Greer's hat. The fact was that Dorrington, as was his wont, was playing a little game of his own. Having possessed himself of the codicil, he was now in a position to make the most from both sides, and in a far more efficient manner than the clumsy Greer. People of Jarvis Flint's sordid character are apt, with all their sordid keenness, to be wonderfully shortsighted in regard to what might seem fairly obvious to a man of honest judgment. Thus it never occurred to Flint that a man like Dorrington, willing, for a miserable wage, to apply his exceptional subtlety to the furtherance of his employer's rascally designs, would be at least as ready to swindle that master on his own account when the opportunity offered; would be, in fact, the more ready, in proportion to the stinginess wherewith his master had treated him.

Having found the codicil, Dorrington's procedure was not to hand it over forthwith to Flint. It was this: first, he made a careful and exact copy of the codicil; then he procured two men of his acquaintance, men of good credit, to read over the copy, word for word, and certify it as being an exact copy of the original by way of a signed declaration written on the back of the copy. Then he was armed at all points.

He packed the copy carefully away in his pocket-book, and with the original in his coat-pocket, he called at the house in Bermondsey Wall, where Paul Cater had taken up his quarters to keep guard over everything till the will should be proved. So it happened that while Samuel Greer, Jarvis Flint and Lugg the lawyer were building their scheme, Dorrington was talking to Paul Cater at Cater's Wharf.

On the assurance that he had business of extreme importance, Cater took Dorrington into the room in which the old man had died. Cater was using this room as an office in which to examine and balance his uncle's books, and the corpse had been carried to a room below to await the funeral. Dorrington's clothes at this time, as I have hinted, were not distinguished by the excellence of cut and condition that was afterwards noticeable; in point of fact, he was seedy. But his assurance and his presence of mind were fully developed, and it was this very

transaction that was to put the elegant appearance within his reach.

"Mr. Cater," he said, "I believe you are sole executor of the will of your uncle, Mr. Jeremiah Cater, who lived in this house."

Cater assented.

"That will is one extremely favourable to yourself. In fact, by it you become not only sole executor, but practically sole legatee."

"Well?"

"I am here as a man of business and as a man of the world to give you certain information. There is a codicil to that will."

Cater started. Then he shrugged his



"There is the codicil."

shoulders and shook his head as though he knew better.

"There is a codicil," Dorrington went on imperturbably, "executed in strict form, all in the handwriting of the testator, and dated nine months later than the will. That codicil benefits your cousin, Mr. Jarvis Flint, to the extent of ten thousand pounds. To put it in another way, it deprives *you* of ten thousand pounds."

Cater felt uneasy, but he did his best to maintain a contemptuous appearance. "You're rushing ahead pretty fast," he said, "talking about the terms of this codicil, as you call it. What I want to know is, where is it?"

"That," replied Dorrington smilingly, "is a question very easily answered. The codicil is in my pocket." He tapped his coat as he spoke.

Paul Cater started again, and now he was plainly discomposed. "Very well," he said with some bravado, "if you've got it you can show it to me, I suppose."

"Nothing easier," Dorrington responded affably. He stepped to the fireplace and took the poker. "You won't mind my holding the poker while you inspect the paper, will you?" he asked politely. "The fact is, the codicil is of such a nature that I fear a man of your sharp business instincts might be tempted to destroy it, there being no other witness present, unless you have the assurance (which I now give you) that if you as much as touch it I shall stun you with the poker. There is the codicil, which you may read with your hands behind you." He spread the paper out on the table, and Cater bent eagerly and read it, growing paler as his eye travelled down the sheet.

Before raising his eyes, however, he collected himself, and as he stood up he said, with affected contempt, "I don't care a brass farthing for this thing! It's a forgery on the face of it."

"Dear me!" answered Dorrington placidly, recovering the paper and folding it up; "that's very disappointing to hear. I must take it round to Mr. Flint and see if that is his opinion."

"No, you mustn't!" exclaimed Cater desperately. "You say that's a genuine document. Very well. I'm still executor, and you are bound to give it to me."

"Precisely," Dorrington replied sweetly. "But in the strict interests of justice I think Mr. Flint, as the person interested, ought to have a look at it first, *in case* any accident should happen to it in your hands. Don't you?"

Cater knew he was in a corner, and his face betrayed it.

"Come," said Dorrington in a more business-like tone. "Here is the case in a nutshell. It is my business, just as it is yours, to get as much as I can for nothing. In pursuance of that business I quietly got hold of this codicil. Nobody but yourself knows I have it, and as to *how* I got it you needn't ask, for I shan't tell you. Here is

the document, and it is worth ten thousand pounds to either of two people, yourself and Mr. Flint, your worthy cousin. I am prepared to sell it at a very great sacrifice—to sell it dirt cheap, in fact, and I give you the privilege of first refusal, for which you ought to be grateful. One thousand pounds is the price, and that gives you a profit of nine thousand pounds when you have destroyed the codicil—a noble profit of nine hundred per cent. at a stroke! Come, is it a bargain?”

“What?” ejaculated Cater, astounded. “A thousand pounds?”

“One thousand pounds exactly,” replied Dorrington complacently, “and a penny for the receipt stamp—if you want a receipt.”

“Oh,” said Cater, “you’re mad! A thousand pounds! Why, it’s absurd!”

“Think so?” remarked Dorrington, reaching for his hat. “Then I must see if Mr. Flint agrees with you, that’s all. He’s a man of business, and I never heard of his refusing a certain nine hundred per cent. profit yet. Good-day!”

“No, stop!” yelled the desperate Cater. “Don’t go. Don’t be unreasonable now—say five hundred and I’ll write you a cheque.”

“Won’t do,” answered Dorrington, shaking his head. “A thousand is the price, and not a penny less. And not by cheque, mind. I understand all moves of that sort. Notes or gold. I wonder at a smart man like yourself expecting me to be so green.”

“But I haven’t the money here.”

“Very likely not. Where’s your bank? We’ll go there and get it.”

Cater, between his avarice and his fears, was at his wits’ end. “Don’t be so hard on me, Mr. Dorrington,” he whined. “I’m not a rich man, I assure you. You’ll ruin me!”

“Ruin you? What *do* you mean? I give you ten thousand pounds for one thousand, and you say I ruin you! Really, it seems too ridiculously cheap. If you don’t settle quickly, Mr. Cater, I shall raise my terms, I warn you!”

So it came about that Dorrington and Cater took cab together for a branch bank in Pimlico, whence Dorrington emerged with one thousand pounds in notes and gold, stowed carefully about his person, and Cater with the codicil to his uncle’s will, which half an hour later he had safely burnt.

VI.

So much for the first half of Dorrington’s operation. For the second half he made no immediate hurry. If he had been aware of

Samuel Greer’s movements and Lugg’s little plot he might have hurried, but as it was he busied himself in setting up on a more respectable scale by help of his newly-acquired money. But he did not long delay. He had the attested copy of the codicil, which, properly backed with evidence, would be as good as the original in a court of law. The astute Cater, wise in his own conceit, just as was his equally astute cousin Flint, had clean overlooked the possibility of such a trick as this. And now all Dorrington had to do was to sell the copy for one more thousand pounds to Jarvis Flint.

It was on the morning of old Jerry Cater’s funeral that he made his way to Deptford to do this, and he chuckled as he reflected on the probable surprise of Flint (who doubtless wondered what had become of his sweated inquiry agent) when confronted with his offer. But when he arrived at the ship-store shop he found that Flint was out, so he resolved to call again in the evening.

At that moment Jarvis Flint, Samuel Greer and Lugg the lawyer were at the house in Bermondsey Wall attacking Paul Cater. Greer, foreseeing probable defiance by Cater from a window, had led the party in by the wharf door and so had taken Cater by surprise. Cater was in a suit of decent black, as befitted the occasion, and he received the news of the existence of a copy of the codicil he had destroyed with equal fury and apprehension.

“What do you mean?” he demanded. “What do you mean? I’m not to be bluffed like this! You talk about a codicil—where is it? Where is it, eh?”

“My dear sir,” said Lugg peaceably—he was a small, snuffy man—“we are not here to make disturbances or quarrels, or breaches of the peace; we are here on a strictly business errand, and I assure you it will be for your best interests if you listen quietly to what we have to say. Ahem! It seems that Mr. Samuel Greer here has frequently seen the codicil——”

“Greer’s a rascal—a thief—a scoundrel!” cried the irate Cater, shaking his fist in the thick of Greer’s squint. “He swindled me out of ten pounds! He——”

“Really, Mr. Cater,” Lugg interposed, “you do no good by such outbursts, and you prevent my putting the case before you. As I was saying, Mr. Greer has frequently seen the codicil, and saw it, indeed, on the very day of the late Mr. Cater’s decease. You may not have come across it, and, indeed, there may be some temporary difficulty in

finding the original. But fortunately Mr. Greer took notes of the contents and of the witnesses' names, and from those notes I have been able to draw up this statement, which Mr. Greer is prepared to subscribe to, by affidavit or declaration, if by any chance you may be unable to produce the original codicil."

Cater, seeing his thousand pounds to Dorrington going for nothing, and now confronted with the fear of losing ten thousand pounds more, could scarce speak for rage. "Greer's a liar, I tell you!" he spluttered out. "A liar, a thief, a scoundrel! His word—his affidavit—his oath—anything of his—isn't worth a straw!"

"That, my dear sir," Lugg proceeded equably, "is a thing that may remain for the probate court, and possibly a jury, to decide upon. In the meantime permit me to suggest that it will be better for all parties—cheaper, in fact—if this matter be settled out of court. I think, if you will give the matter a little calm and unbiassed thought, you will admit that the balance of strength is altogether with our case. Would you like to look at the statement? Its effect, you will see, is, roughly speaking, to give my client a legacy of say about ten thousand pounds in value. The witnesses are easily produced, and really, I must say, for my part, if Mr. Greer, who has nothing to gain or lose either way, is prepared to take the serious responsibility of swearing a declaration —"

"I don't believe he will!" cried Cater, catching at the straw. "I don't believe he will! Mind, Greer," he went on, "there's penal servitude for perjury!"

"Yes," Greer answered, speaking for the first time, with a squint and a chuckle, "so there is. And for stealin' an' suppressin' dockyments, I'm told. I'm ready to make that ere declaration."

"I don't believe he is!" Cater said, with an attempt to affect indifference. "And anyhow, I needn't take any notice of it till he does."

"Well," said Lugg accommodatingly, "there need be no difficulty or delay about that. The declaration's all written out, and I'm a commissioner to adminster oaths. I think that's a Bible I see on the shelf there, isn't it?" He stepped across to where the old Bible had lain since Greer flung it there, just before Jerry Cater's death. He took the book down and opened it at the title-page. "Yes," he said, "a Bible; and now—why—what? what?"

Mr. Lugg stood suddenly still and stared at the fly-leaf. Then he said quietly, "Let me see, it was on Monday last that Mr. Cater died, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Late in the afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Then, gentlemen, you must please prepare yourselves for a surprise. Mr. Cater evidently made another will, revoking all previous wills and codicils, on the very day of his death. And here it is!" He extended the Bible before him, and it was plain to see that the fly-leaf was covered with the weak, straggling handwriting of old Jerry Cater—a little weaker and a little more straggling than that in the other will, but unmistakably his.

Flint stared, perplexed and bewildered, Greer scratched his head and squinted blankly at the lawyer. Paul Cater passed his hand across his forehead and seized a tuft of hair over one temple as though he would pull it out. The only book in the house that he had not opened or looked at during his stay was the Bible.

"The thing is very short," Lugg went on, inclining the writing to the light. "*This is the last will and testament of me, Jeremiah Cater, of Cater's Wharf. I give and bequeath the whole of the estate and property of which I may die possessed, whether real or personal, entirely and absolutely to—to —* what is the name? Oh yes—*to Henry Sinclair my clerk —*"

"What?" yelled Cater and Flint in chorus, each rising and clutching at the Bible. "Not Sinclair! No! Let me see!"

"I think, gentlemen," said the solicitor, putting their hands aside, "that you'll get the information quickest by listening while I read. *—to Henry Sinclair my clerk. And I appoint the said Henry Sinclair my sole executor. And I wish it to be known that I do this, not only by way of reward to an honest servant, and to recompense him for his loss in loan transactions with me, but also to mark my sense of the neglect of my two nephews. And I revoke all former wills and codicils.*' Then follows date and signature and the signatures of witnesses—both apparently men of imperfect education."

"But you're mad—it's impossible!" exclaimed Cater, the first to find his tongue. "He *couldn't* have made a will then—he was too weak. Greer knows he couldn't."

Greer, who understood better than anybody else present the allusion in the will

to the nephews' neglect, coughed dubiously, and said, "Well he did get up while I was out. An' when I got back he had the Bible beside him, an' he seemed pretty well knocked up with something. An' the winder was wide open—I expect he opened it to holler out as well as he could to some chaps on the wharf or somewhere to come up by the wharf door and do the witnessing. An' now I think of it, I expect he sent me out a-purpose, in case—well, in case if I knowed I might get up to summat with the will. He told me not to hurry. An' I expect he about used 'isselv up with the writin' an' the hollerin' and the cold air an' what not."

Cater and Flint, greatly abashed, exchanged a rapid glance. Then Cater, with a preliminary cough, said hesitatingly, "Well now, Mr. Lugg, let us consider this. It seems quite evident to me—and no doubt it will to you, as my cousin's solicitor—it seems quite evident to me that my poor uncle could not have been in a sound state of mind when he made this very ridiculous will. Quite apart from all questions of genuineness, I've no doubt that a court would set it aside. And in view of that it would be very cruel to allow this poor man Sinclair to suppose himself to be entitled to a great deal of money, only to find himself disappointed and ruined after all. You'll agree with that, I'm sure. So I think it will be best for all parties if we keep this thing to ourselves, and just tear out that fly-leaf and burn it, to save trouble. And on my part I shall be glad to admit the copy of the codicil you have produced, and no doubt my cousin and I will be prepared to pay you a fee which will compensate you for any loss of business in actions—eh?"

Mr. Lugg was tempted, but he was no fool. Here was Samuel Greer at his elbow, knowing everything, and without a doubt, no matter how well bribed, always ready to make more money by betraying the arrangement to Sinclair. And that would mean inevitable ruin to Lugg himself, and probably a dose of gaol. So he shook his head virtuously and said, "I couldn't think of anything of the sort, Mr. Cater, not for an instant. I am a solicitor, and I have my strict duties. It is my duty immediately to place this will in the hands of Mr. Henry Sinclair, as sole executor. I wish you a good-day, gentlemen."

And so it was that old Jerry Cater's money came at last to Sinclair. And the result was a joyful one, not only for Sinclair and his wife, but also for a number of poor debtors whose "paper" was part of the property. For Sinclair knew the plight of these wretches by personal experience, and was merciful, as neither Flint nor Paul Cater would have been. The two witnesses to the Bible will turned out to be bargemen. They had been mightily surprised at being hailed from Jerry Cater's window by the old man himself, already looking like a corpse. They had come up, however, at his request, and had witnessed the will, though neither knew anything of its contents. But they were ready to testify that it was written in a Bible, because no other paper was available in the room, that they saw Cater sign it, and that the attesting signatures were theirs. They had helped the old man back into bed, and next day they heard that he was dead.

As for Dorrington, he had a thousand pounds to set him up in a gentlemanly line of business and villainy. Ignorant of what had happened, he attempted to tap Flint for another thousand pounds as he had designed, but was met with revilings and an explanation. Seeing that the game was finished, Dorrington laughed at both the cousins and turned his attention to his next case.

And old Jerry Cater's funeral was attended, as nobody would have expected, by two very genuine mourners—Paul Cater and Jarvis Flint. But they mourned, not the old man, but his lost fortune, and Paul Cater also mourned a sum of one thousand and ten pounds of his own. They had followed Lugg to the door when he walked off with the Bible, in hope to persuade him, but he saw a wealthy client in prospect in Mr. Henry Sinclair, and would not allow his virtue to be shaken.

Samuel Greer walked away from the old house in moody case. Plainly there were no more pickings available from old Jerry Cater's wills and codicils. As he trudged by St. Saviour's Dock he was suddenly confronted by a large navy with a black eye. The navy stooped and inspected a peacock's feather-eye that adorned the band of the hat Greer was wearing. Then he calmly grabbed and inspected the hat itself, inside and outside. "Why, blow me if this ain't my 'at!" said the navy. "Take that, ye dirty squintin' thief! And that too! And that!"