Martin Hewitt, Investigator.

By Arthur Morrison.

V.—THE QUINTON JEWEL AFFAIR.

IT was comparatively rarely that Hewitt came into contact with members of the regular criminal class—those, I mean, who are thieves, of one sort or another, by exclusive profession. Still, nobody could have been better prepared than Hewitt for encountering this class when it became necessary. By some means, which I never quite understood, he managed to keep abreast of the very latest fashions in the ever-changing slang dialect of the fraternity, and he was a perfect master of the more modern and debased form of Romany. So much so, that frequently a gipsy who began (as they always do) by pretending that he understood nothing, and never heard of a gipsy language, ended by confessing that Hewitt could *rokker* better than most Romany *chals* themselves.

By this acquaintance with their habits and talk, Hewitt was sometimes able to render efficient service in cases of especial importance. In the Quinton jewel affair Hewitt came into contact with a very accomplished thief.

The case will probably be very well remembered. Sir Valentine Quinton, before he married, had been as poor as only a man of rank with an old country establishment to keep up can be. His marriage, however, with the daughter of a wealthy financier had changed all that, and now the Quinton establishment was carried on on as lavish a scale as might be ; and, indeed, the extravagant habits of Lady Quinton herself rendered it an extremely lucky thing that she had brought a fortune with her.

Among other things, her jewels made quite a collection, and chief among them was the great ruby, one of the very few that were sent to this country to be sold (at an average price of somewhere about £20,000 apiece, I believe) by the Burmese King before the annexation of his country. Let but a ruby be of a great size and colour, and no equally fine diamond can approach its value. Well, this great ruby (which was set in a pendant, by-the-bye), together with a necklace, brooches, bracelets, earrings—indeed, the greater part of Lady Quinton's collection —were stolen. The robbery was effected at the usual time and in the usual way in cases of carefully planned jewellery robberies. The time was early evening—dinner-time, in fact—and an entrance had been made by the window to Lady Quinton's dressing-room, the door screwed up on the inside, and wires artfully stretched about the grounds below, to overset anybody who might observe and pursue the thieves.

On an investigation by London detectives, however, a feature of singularity was brought to light. There had plainly been only one thief at work at Radcot Hall, and no other had been inside the grounds. Alone he had planted the wires, opened the window, screwed the door, and picked the lock of the safe. Clearly this was a thief of the most accomplished description.

Some few days passed, and although the police had made various arrests, they appeared to be all mistakes, and the suspected persons were released one after another. I was talking of the robbery with Hewitt at lunch, and asked him if he had received any commission to hunt for the missing jewels.

"No," Hewitt replied, "I haven't been commissioned. They are offering an immense reward, however — a very pleasant sum, indeed. I have had a short note from Radcot Hall, informing me of the amount, and that's all. Probably they fancy that I may take the case up as a speculation, but that is a great mistake. I'm not a beginner, and I must be commissioned in a regular manner, hit or miss, if I am to deal with the case. I've quite enough commissions going now, and no time to waste hunting for a problematical reward."

But we were nearer a clue to the Quinton jewels than we then supposed.

We talked of other things, and presently rose and left the restaurant, strolling quietly towards home. Some little distance from the Strand, and near our own door, we passed an excited Irishman — without doubt an Irishman, by appearance and talk — who was pouring a torrent of angry complaints in the ears of a policeman. The policeman obviously thought little of the man's grievances, and with an amused smile appeared to be advising him to go home quietly and think no more about it. We passed on and mounted our stairs. Something interesting in our conversation made me stop for a little while at Hewitt's office door on my way up, and while I stood there, the Irishman we had seen in the street mounted the stairs. He was a poorly dressed but sturdy-looking fellow, apparently a labourer in a badly-worn best suit of clothes. His agitation still held

him, and without a pause he immediately burst out :—

"Which of ye jintlemen will be Misther Hewitt, sor?"

"This is Mr. Hewitt," I said. "Do you want him?"

"It's protecshin I want, sor—protecshin.

"IT'S PROTECSHIN I WANT, SOR."

I spake to the polis an' they laff at me, begob. Foive days have I lived in London, an' 'tis nothin' but battle, murdher, an' suddhen death for me here all day an' ivery day. . . An' the polis say I'm dhrunk!"

He gesticulated wildly, and to me it seemed just possible that the police might be right.

"They say I'm dhrunk, sor," he continued, "but, begob, I b'lieve they think I'm mad. An' me being thracked an' folleyed an' dogged an' waylaid an' poisoned an blandandhered an' kidnapped an' murdhered, an' for why I do not know!"

"And who's doing all this?"

"Sthrangers, sor — sthrangers. 'Tis a sthranger here I am mesilf, an' fwhy they do it bates me, onless I do be so like the Prince av Wales or other crowned head they thry to slaughter me. They're layin' for me in the sthreet now, I misdoubt not, and fwhat they may thry next I can tell no more than the Lord Mayor. An' the polis won't listen to me."

This, I thought, must be one of the very common cases of mental hallucination which one hears of every day—the belief of the sufferer that he is surrounded by enemies and followed by spies. It is probably the most usual delusion of the harmless lunatic.

"But what have these people done?" Hewitt asked, looking rather interested, although amused. "What actual assaults have they committed, and when? And who told you to come here?"

"Who towld me, is ut? Who but the payler outside—in the street below? I complained to 'um, an' sez he, 'Ah, you go an' take a slape,' sez he; 'you go an' take a good slape, an' they'll all be gone whin ye wake up.' 'But they'll murdher me,' sez I. 'Oh, no!' sez he, smilin' behind av his ugly face. 'Oh, no, they won't; you take ut aisy, me frind, an' go home.' 'Take ut aisy, is ut, an' go home!' sez I; 'why, that's just where they've been last, a-ruinationin' an' a turnin' av the place upside down, an' me strook on the head onsensible a mile away. Take ut aisy, is ut, ye say, whin all the demons in this unholy place is jumpin' on me ivery minut in places promiscuous till I can't tell where to turn; descendin' an' vanishin' marvellious an' onaccountable? Take ut aisy, is ut?' sez I. 'Well, me frind,' sez he, 'I can't help ye; that's the marvellious an' onaccountable departmint up the stairs forninst ye. Misther Hewitt ut is,' sez he, 'that attinds to the onaccountable departmint, him as wint by a minut ago. You go an' bother him.' That's how I was towld, sor."

Hewitt smiled.

"Very good," he said, "and now what are these extraordinary troubles of yours? Don't declaim," he added, as the Irishman raised his hand and opened his mouth preparatory to another torrent of complaint; "just say in ten words, if you can, what they've done to you."

"I will, sor. Wan day had I been in London, sor; wan day only, an' a low scutt thried to poison me dhrink; next day some udther thief av sin shoved me off av a railway platform undher a train, malicious and purposeful; glory be, he didn't kill me, but the very docther that felt me bones thried to pick me pockut, I du b'lieve. Sunday night I was grabbed outrageous in a darrk turnin', rowled on the groun', half strangled, an' me pockets nigh ripped out av me trousies. An' this very blessed mornin' av light I was strook onsensible an' left a livin' corrpse, an' my lodgin's penethrated an' all the thruck mishandled an' bruk up behind me back. Is that a panjandhery for the polis to laff at, sor?"

Had Hewitt not been there I think I should have done my best to quiet the poor fellow with a few soothing words and to persuade him to go home to his friends. His excited and rather confused manner, his fantastic story of a sort of general conspiracy to kill him, and the absurd reference to the doctor who tried to pick his pocket, seemed to me plainly to confirm my first impression that he was insane. But Hewitt appeared strangely interested.

"Did they steal anything?" he asked.

"Divil a shtick but me door-key, an' that they tuk home an' lift in the door."

Hewitt opened his office door.

"Come in," he said, "and tell me all about this. You come too, Brett."

The Irishman and I followed him into the inner office, where, shutting the door, Hewitt suddenly turned on the Irishman and exclaimed, sharply: "*Then you've still got it?*"

He looked keenly in the man's eyes, but the only expression there was one of surprise.

"Got ut?" said the Irishman. "Got fwhat, sor? Is ut you're thinkin' I've got the horrors, as well as the polis?"

Hewitt's gaze relaxed. "Sit down, sit down," he said. "You've still got your watch and money, I suppose, since you weren't robbed?"

"Oh, that? Glory be I have ut still, though for how long—or me own head for that matter—in this state of besiegement, I cannot say."

"Now," said Hewitt, "I want a full, true, and particular account of yourself and your doings for the last week. First, your name?"

"Leamy's my name, sor—Michael Leamy."

"Lately from Ireland?"

"Over from Dublin this last blessed Wednesday, and a crooil bad poundherin' ut was in the boat, too—shpakin' av that same."

"Looking for work?"

"That is my purshuit at prisint, sor."

"Did anything noticeable happen before these troubles of yours began—anything here in London or on the journey?"

"Sure," the Irishman smiled, "part av the way I thravelled first-class by favour av the gyard, an' I got a small job before I lift the train."

"How was that? Why did you travel first-class part of the way?"

"There was a station fwhere we shtopped afther a long run, an' I got down to take the cramp out av me joints, an' take a taste av dhrink. I overshtayed somehow, an' whin I got to the train, begob it was on the move. There was a first-class carr'ge door opin right forninst me, an' into that the gyard crams me holus-bolus. There was a juce of a foine jintleman sittin' there, an' he stares at me umbrageous, but I was not dishcommoded, bein' onbashful by natur'. We thravelled along a heap av miles more, till we came near London. Afther we had shtopped at a station where they tuk tickets, we wint ahead again, an' prisintly, as we rips through some udther station, up jumps the jintleman opposite, swearin' hard undher his tongue, an' looks out at the windy. 'I thought this train shtopped here,' sez he."

"Chalk Farm," observed Hewitt, with a nod.

"The name I do not know, sor, but that's fwhat he said. Then he looks at me onaisy for a little, an' at last he sez, 'Wud ye loike a small job, me good man, well paid?'

"'Faith,' sez I, 'tis that will suit me well.'

"'Then, see here,' sez he, 'I should have got out at that station, havin' particular business; havin' missed I must sen' a telegrammer from Euston. Now, here's a bag,' sez he, 'a bag full of imporrtant papers for my solicitor—imporrtant to me, ye ondershtand, not worth the shine av a brass farden to a sowl else—an' I want 'em tuk on to him. Take you this bag,' he sez, 'an' go you straight out wid it at Euston an' get in a cab. I shall stay in the station a bit to see to the telegrammer. Dhrive out av the station, across the road outside, an' wait there five minuts by the clock. Ye ondershtand? Wait five minuts, an' maybe I'll come an' join ye. If I don't, 'twill be bekaze I'm detained onexpected, an' then ye'll dhrive to my solicitor straight. Here's his address, if ye can read writin',' an' he put ut on a piece av paper. He gave me half a crown for the cab, an' I tuk his bag."

"I THOUGHT THIS TRAIN SHTOPPED HERE."

"One moment—have you the paper with the address now?"

"I have not, sor. I missed ut afther the blayguards overset me yesterday; but the solicitor's name was Hollams, an' a liberal jintleman wid his money he was too, by that same token."

"What was his address?"

"'Twas in Chelsea, and 'twas Gold or Golden something, which I know by the good token av fwhat he gave me; but the number I misremember."

Hewitt turned to his directory. "Gold Street is the place, probably," he said, "and it seems to be a street chiefly of private houses. You would be able to point out the house if you were taken there, I suppose?"

"I should that, sor—indade, I was thinkin' av goin' there an' tellin' Misther Hollams all my throubles, him havin' been so kind."

"Now tell me exactly what instructions the man in the train gave you, and what happened."

"He sez, 'You ask for Misther Hollams, an' see nobody else. Tell him ye've brought the sparks from Misther W.'"

I fancied I could see a sudden twinkle in Hewitt's eye, but he made no other sign, and the Irishman proceeded.

"'Sparks?' sez I. 'Yes, sparks,' sez he. 'Misther Hollams will know; 'tis our jokin' word for 'em; sometimes papers is sparks when they set a lawsuit ablaze,' and he laffed. 'But be sure ye say the *sparks from Misther W.*,' he sez again, 'bekase then he'll know ye're jinuine an' he'll pay ye han'some. Say Misther W. sez you're to have your reg'lars, if ye like. D'ye mind that?'

"'Aye,' sez I, 'that I'm to have me reg'lars.'

"Well, sor, I tuk the bag and wint out of the station, tuk the cab an' did all as he towld me. I waited the foive minuts, but he niver came, so off I druv' to Misther Hollams, and he threated me han'some, sor."

"Yes, but tell me exactly all he did."

"'Misther Hollams, sor?' sez I. 'Who are ye?' sez he. 'Mick Leamy, sor,' sez I, 'from Misther W. wid the sparks.' 'Oh,' sez he, 'thin come in.' I wint in. 'They're in here, are they?' sez he, takin' the bag. 'They are, sor,' sez I, 'an' Misther W. sez I'm to have me reg'lars.' 'You shall,' sez he. 'What shall we say now—a finnip?' 'Fwhat's that, sor?' sez I. 'Oh,' sez he, 'I s'pose ye're a new hand; five quid—ondershtand that?'"

"Begob, I did ondershtand it, an' moighty plazed I was to have come to a place where they pay five-pun' notes for carryin' bags. So whin he asked me was I new to London an' shud I kape in the same line av business, I towld him I shud for certin, or anythin' else payin' like it. 'Right,' sez he, 'let me know whin ye've got anythin'—ye'll find me all right.' An' he winked frindly. 'Faith, that I know I shall, sor,' sez I, wid the money safe in me pocket; an' I winked him back, conjanial. 'I've a smart family about me,' sez he, 'an' I treat 'em all fair an' liberal.' An' saints, I thought it likely his family ud have all they wanted, seein' he was so free-handed wid a stranger. Thin he asked me where I was livin' in London, and when I towld him nowhere, he towld me av a room in Musson Street, here by Drury Lane, that was to let, in a house his fam'ly knew very well, an' I wint straight there an' tuk ut, an' there I do be stayin' still, sor."

I hadn't understood at first why Hewitt

took so much interest in the Irishman's narrative, but the latter part of it opened my eyes a little. It seemed likely that Leamy had, in his innocence, been made a conveyer of stolen property. I knew enough of thieves' slang to know that "sparks" meant diamonds or other jewels; that "regulars" was the term used for a payment made to a brother thief who gave assistance in some small way, such as carrying the booty; and that the "family" was the time-honoured expression for a gang of thieves.

"This was all on Wednesday, I understand," said Hewitt. "Now tell me what happened on Thursday—the poisoning, or drugging, you know?"

"Well, sor, I was walking out, an' towards the evenin' I lost mesilf. Up comes a man, seemin'ly a sthranger, and shmacks me on the showldher. 'Why, Mick,' sez he, 'it's Mick Leamy, I du b'lieve!'

"'I am that,' sez I, 'but you I do not know.'

"'Not know me?' sez he. 'Why, I wint to school wid ye.' An' wid that he hauls me off to a bar, blarneyin' and minowdherin', an' orders dhrinks.

"'Can ye rache me a poipe-loight?' sez he, an' I turned to get ut, but lookin' back suddent, there was that onblushin' thief av the warl' tippin' a paper full av powdher stuff into me glass."

"What did you do?" Hewitt asked.

"I knocked the dhirty face av him, sor, an' can ye blame me? A mane scutt, thryin' for to poison a well-manin' sthranger. I knocked the face av him, an' got away home."

"Now the next misfortune?"

"Faith, that was av a sort likely to turn out the last av all misfortunes. I wint that day to the Crystial Palace, bein' dishposed for a little shport, seein' as I was new to London. Comin' home at night, there was a juce av a crowd on the station platform, consekins av a late thrain. Shtandin' by the edge av the platform at the fore end, just as the thrain came in, some onvisible murdherer gives me a stupenjus dhrive in the back, an' over I wint on the line, mid-betwixt the rails. The engine came up an' wint half over me widout givin' me a scratch, bekase av my centraleous situation, an' then the porther-men pulled me out, nigh sick wid fright, sor, as ye may guess. A jintleman in the crowd sings out, 'I'm a medical man!' an' they tuk me in the waitin'-room, an' he investigated me, havin' turned everybody else out av the room. There was no bones bruk, glory be, and the docthor-man he was tellin' me so, after feelin' me over, whin I felt his hand in me waistcoat pockut.

"'An' fwhat's this, sor?' sez I. 'Do you be lookin' for your fee that thief's way?'

"He laffed, and said, 'I want no fee from ye, me man, an' I did but feel your ribs'—though on me conscience he had done that undher me waistcoat already. An' so I came home."

"What did they do to you on Saturday?"

"Saturday, sor, they gave me a whole holiday, and I began to think less av things; but on Sunday night, in a dark place, two blayguards tuk me throat from behind, nigh choked me, flung me down, an' wint through all me pockets in about a quarter av a minut."

"And they took nothing, you say?"

"Nothing, sor. But this mornin' I got my worst dose. I was trapesing along distreshful an' moighty sore, in a street just away off the Strand here, whin I obsarved the docthor-

"TIPPIN' A PAPER FULL AV POWDHER STUFF."

man that was at the Crystial Palace station a-smilin' an' beckonin' at me from a door.

"'How are ye now?' sez he. 'Well,' sez I, 'I'm moighty sore an' sad bruised,' sez I. 'Is that so?' sez he. 'Shtep in here.' So I shtepped in, an' before I could wink there dhropped a crack on the back av me head that sent me off as unknowledgeable as a corrpse. I knew no more for a while, sor, whether half an hour or an hour, an thin I got up in a room av the place marked 'To Let.' 'Twas a house full av offices by the same token, like this. There was a sore bad lump on me head—see ut, sor?—an' the whole warl' was shpinnin' roun' rampageous. The things out av me pockets were lyin' on the flure by me—all barrin' the key av me room. So that the demons had been through me posseshins again, bad luck to 'em."

"You are quite sure, are you, that everything was there, except the key?" Hewitt asked.

"Certin, sor. Well, I got along to me room, sick an' sorry enough, an' doubtsome whether I might get in wid no key. But there was the key in the open door, an' by this an' that, all the shtuff in the room—chair, table, bed an' all—was shtandin' on their heads twisty-ways, an' the bed-clothes an' everythin' else; such a disgraceful stramash av conglomerated thruck as ye niver dhreamt av. The chist av drawers was lyin' on uts face, wid all the dhrawers out an' emptied on the flure. 'Twas as though an arrmy had been lootin', sor!"

"But still nothing was gone?"

"Nothin' so far as I investigated, sor. But I didn't shtay—I came out to spake to the polis, an' two av them laffed at me—wan afther another!"

"It has certainly been no laughing matter for you. Now, tell me, have you anything in your possession—documents, or valuables, or anything—that any other person, to your knowledge, is anxious to get hold of?"

"I have not, sor—divil a document. As to valuables—thim an' me is the cowldest av sthrangers."

"Just call to mind, now, the face of the man who tried to put powder in your drink and that of the doctor who attended to you in the railway station. Were they at all alike, or was either like anybody you have seen before?"

Leamy puckered his forehead and thought. "Faith," he said, presently, "they were a bit alike, though wan had a beard an' the udther whiskers only."

"Neither happened to look like Mr. Hollams, for instance?"

Leamy started. "Begob, but they did! They'd ha' been mortal like him if they'd been shaved." Then, after a pause, he suddenly added: "Holy saints! is ut the fam'ly he talked av?"

Hewitt laughed. "Perhaps it is," he said. "Now, as to the man who sent you with the bag. Was it an old bag?"

"Bran' cracklin' new—a brown leather bag."

"Locked?"

"That I niver thried, sor. It was not my consarn."

"True. Now, as to this Mr. W. himself"—Hewitt had been rummaging for some few minutes in a portfolio, and finally produced a photograph, and held it before the Irishman's eyes—"Is that like him?" he asked.

"IS THAT LIKE HIM?"

"Shure, it's the man himself! Is he a frind av yours, sor?"

"No, he's not exactly a friend of mine," Hewitt answered, with a grim chuckle. "I fancy he's one of that very respectable *family* you heard about at Mr. Hollams's. Come along with me now, to Chelsea, and see if you can point out that house in Gold Street. I'll send for a cab."

He made for the outer office, and I went with him.

"What is all this, Hewitt?" I asked; "a gang of thieves with stolen property?"

Hewitt looked in my face and replied: "*It's the Quinton ruby!*"

"What? The ruby? Shall you take the case up, then?"

"I shall. It is no longer a speculation."

"Then do you expect to find it at Hollams's house in Chelsea?" I asked.

"No, I don't, because it isn't there—else why are they trying to get it from this unlucky Irishman? There has been bad faith in Hollams's gang, I expect, and Hollams has missed the ruby and suspects Leamy of having taken it from the bag."

"Then who is this Mr. W. whose portrait you have in your possession?"

"See here." Hewitt turned over a small pile of recent newspapers and selected one, pointing at a particular paragraph. "I kept that in my mind, because to me it seemed to be the most likely arrest of the lot," he said.

It was an evening paper of the previous Thursday, and the paragraph was a very short one, thus:—

"The man Wilks, who was arrested at Euston Station yesterday, in connection with the robbery of Lady Quinton's jewels, has been released, nothing being found to incriminate him."

"How does that strike you?" asked Hewitt. "Wilks is a man well known to the police—one of the most accomplished burglars in this country, in fact. I have had no dealings with him as yet, but I found means, some time ago, to add his portrait to my little collection, in case I might want it, and to-day it has been quite useful."

The thing was plain now. Wilks must have been bringing his booty to town, and calculated on getting out at Chalk Farm, and thus eluding the watch which he doubtless felt pretty sure would be kept (by telegraphic instruction) at Euston, for suspicious characters arriving from the direction of Radcot. His transaction with Leamy was his only possible expedient to save himself from being hopelessly taken with the swag in his possession. The paragraph told me why Leamy had waited in vain for "Mr. W." in the cab.

"What shall you do now?" I asked.

"I shall go to the Gold Street house and find out what I can, as soon as this cab turns up."

There seemed a possibility of some excitement in the adventure, so I asked, "Will you want any help?"

Hewitt smiled. "I *think* I can get through it alone," he said.

"Then may I come to look on?" I said. "Of course, I don't want to be in your way, and the result of the business, whatever it is, will be to your credit alone. But I am curious."

"Come, then, by all means. The cab will be a four-wheeler, and there will be plenty of room."

Gold Street was a short street of private houses of very fair size, and of a half-vanished pretension to gentility. We drove slowly through, and Leamy had no difficulty in pointing out the house wherein he had been paid five pounds for carrying a bag. At the end the cab turned the corner and stopped, while Hewitt wrote a short note to an official of Scotland Yard.

"Take this note," he instructed Leamy, "to Scotland Yard in the cab, and then go home. I will pay the cabman now."

"I will, sor. An' will I be protected?"

"Oh, yes. Stay at home for the rest of the day, and I expect you'll be left alone in future. Perhaps I shall have something to tell you in a day or two; if I do, I'll send. Good-bye."

The cab rolled off, and Hewitt and I strolled back along Gold Street. "I think," Hewitt said, "we will drop in on Mr. Hollams for a few minutes while we can. In a few hours I expect the police will have him, and his house, too, if they attend promptly to my note."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Not to my knowledge, though I may know him by some other name. Wilks I know by sight, though he doesn't know me."

"What shall we say?"

"That will depend on circumstances. I may not get my cue till the door opens, or even till later. At worst, I can easily apply for a reference as to Leamy—who, you remember, is looking for work."

But we were destined not to make Mr. Hollams's acquaintance, after all. As we approached the house, a great uproar was heard from the lower part giving on to the

area, and suddenly a man, hatless, and with a sleeve of his coat nearly torn away, burst through the door, and up the area steps, pursued by two others. I had barely time to observe that one of the pursuers carried a revolver, and that both hesitated and retired on seeing that several people were about the street, when Hewitt, gripping my arm and exclaiming, "That's our man!" started at a run after the fugitive.

We turned the next corner and saw the man thirty yards before us, walking, and pulling up his sleeve at the shoulder, so as to conceal the rent. Plainly he felt safe from further molestation.

"That's Sim Wilks," Hewitt explained, as we followed, "the 'juce av a foine jintleman' who got Leamy to carry his bag, and the man who knows where the Quinton ruby is, unless I am more than usually mistaken. Don't stare after him, in case he looks round. Presently, when we get into the busier streets, I shall have a little chat with him."

But for some time the man kept to the back streets. In time, however, he emerged into the Buckingham Palace Road, and we saw him stop and look at a hat-shop. But after a general look over the window and a glance in at the door, he went on.

"Good sign," observed Hewitt; "got no money with him—makes it easier for us."

In a little while Wilks approached a small crowd gathered about a woman fiddler. Hewitt touched my arm, and a few quick steps took us past our man and to the opposite side of the crowd. When Wilks emerged he met us coming in the opposite direction.

"What, Sim!" burst out Hewitt, with apparent delight. "I haven't piped your mug* for a stretch†; I thought you'd fell.‡ Where's your cady?"‖

Wilks looked astonished and suspicious. "I don't know you," he said. "You've made a mistake."

Hewitt laughed. "I'm glad you don't know me," he said. "If you don't, I'm pretty sure the reelers§ won't. I think I've faked my mug pretty well, and my clobber,¶ too. Look here: I'll stand you a new cady. Strange blokes don't do that, eh?"

Wilks was still suspicious. "I don't know what you mean," he said.

* Seen your face. † A year. ‡ Been imprisoned. ‖ Hat. § Police. ¶ Clothes.

Then, after a pause, he added, "Who are you, then?"

Hewitt winked and screwed his face genially aside. "Hooky!" he said. "I've had a lucky touch* and I'm Mr. Smith till I've melted the pieces.† You come and damp it."

"I'm off," Wilks replied. "Unless you're pal enough to lend me a quid," he added, laughing.

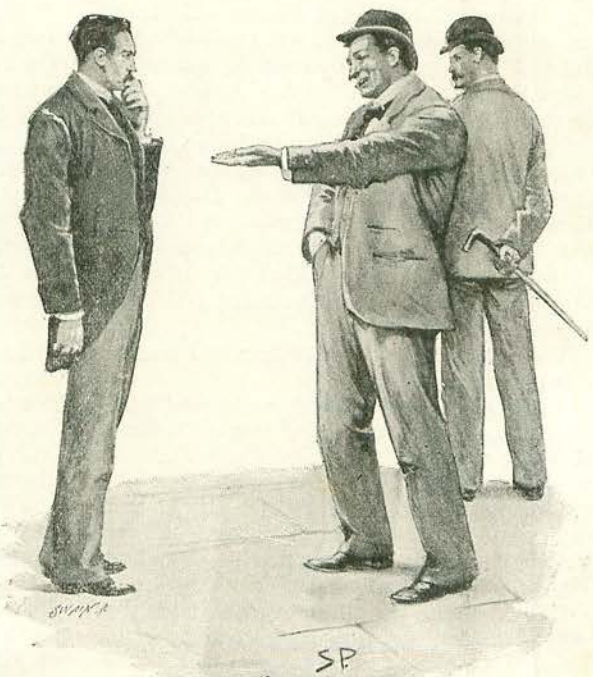
"I am that," responded Hewitt, plunging his hand in his pocket. "I'm flush, my boy, flush, and I've been wetting it pretty well to-day. I feel pretty jolly now, and I shouldn't wonder if I went home cannon.‡ Only a quid? Have two, if you want 'em—or three—there's plenty more, and you'll do the same for me some day. Here y'are."

Hewitt had, of a sudden, assumed the whole appearance, manners, and bearing of a slightly elevated rowdy. Now he pulled his hand from his pocket and extended it, full of silver, with five or six sovereigns interspersed, toward Wilks.

"I'll have three quid," Wilks said, with decision, taking the money; "but I'm blowed if I remember you. Who's your pal?"

Hewitt jerked his head in my direction, winked, and said in a low voice, "He's all

* Robbery. † Spent the money. ‡ Drunk.



"EXTENDED IT, FULL OF SILVER."

right. Having a rest. Can't stand Manchester," and winked again.

Wilks laughed and nodded, and I understood from that that Hewitt had very flatteringly given me credit for being "wanted" by the Manchester police.

We lurched into a public-house, and drank a very little very bad whisky and water. Wilks still regarded us curiously, and I could see him again and again glancing doubtfully in Hewitt's face. But the loan of three pounds had largely reassured him. Presently Hewitt said :—

"How about our old pal down in Gold Street? Do anything with him now? Seen him lately?"

Wilks looked up at the ceiling and shook his head.

"That's a good job. It 'ud be awkward if you were about there to-day, I can tell you."

"Why?"

"Never mind, so long as you're not there. I know something, if I *have* been away. I'm glad I haven't had any truck with Gold Street lately, that's all."

"D'you mean the reelers are on it?"

Hewitt looked cautiously over his shoulder, leaned toward Wilks, and said, "Look here, this is the straight tip. I know this—I got it from the very nark* that's given the show away. By six o'clock No. 8, Gold Street, will be turned inside out, like an old glove, and everyone in the place will be——" He finished the sentence by crossing his wrists like a handcuffed man. "What's more," he went on, "they know all about what's gone on there lately, and everybody that's been in or out for the last two moons† will be wanted particular—and will be found, I'm told." Hewitt concluded with a confidential frown, a nod, and a wink, and took another mouthful of whisky. Then he added, as an afterthought: "So I'm glad you haven't been there lately."

Wilks looked in Hewitt's face and asked: "Is that straight?"

"*Is* it?" replied Hewitt, with emphasis. "You go and have a look, if you ain't afraid of being smugged yourself. Only *I* shan't go near No. 8 just yet—I know that."

Wilks fidgeted, finished his drink, and expressed his intention of going. "Very well, if you *won't* have another——" replied Hewitt. But he had gone.

"Good," said Hewitt, moving towards the door, "he has suddenly developed a hurry. I shall keep him in sight, but you had better take a cab and go straight to Euston. Take tickets to the nearest station to Radcot—Kedderby, I think it is—and look up the train arrangements. Don't show yourself too much, and keep an eye on the entrance. Unless I am mistaken, Wilks will be there pretty soon, and I shall be on his heels. If I *am* wrong, then you won't see the end of the fun, that's all."

Hewitt hurried after Wilks, and I took the cab and did as he wished. There was an hour and a few minutes, I found, to wait for the next train, and that time I occupied as best I might, keeping a sharp look-out across the quadrangle. Barely five minutes before the train was to leave, and just as I was beginning to think about the time of the next, a cab dashed up and Hewitt alighted. He hurried in, found me, and drew me aside into a recess, just as another cab arrived.

"Here he is," Hewitt said. "I followed him as far as Euston Road and then got my cabby to spurt up and pass him. He has had his moustache shaved off, and I feared you mightn't recognise him, and so let him see you."

From our retreat we could see Wilks hurry into the booking-office. We watched him through to the platform and followed. He wasted no time, but made the best of his way to a third-class carriage at the extreme fore-end of the train.

"We have three minutes," Hewitt said, "and everything depends on his not seeing us get into this train. Take this cap. Fortunately, we're both in tweed suits."

He had bought a couple of tweed cricket caps, and these we assumed, sending our "bowler" hats to the cloak-room. Hewitt also put on a pair of blue spectacles, and then walked boldly up the platform and entered a first-class carriage. I followed close on his heels, in such a manner that a person looking from the fore-end of the train would be able to see but very little of me.

"So far, so good," said Hewitt, when we were seated and the train began to move off. "I must keep a look-out at each station, in case our friend goes off unexpectedly."

"I waited some time," I said; "where did you both get to?"

"First he went and bought that hat he is wearing. Then he walked some distance, dodging the main thoroughfares and keeping to the back streets in a way that made following difficult, till he came to a little tailor's shop. There he entered and came out in a quarter of an hour with his coat mended. This was in a street in Westminster.

* Police spy. † Months.

Presently he worked his way up to Tothill Street, and there he plunged into a barber's shop. I took a cautious peep at the window, saw two or three other customers also waiting, and took the opportunity to rush over to a 'notion' shop and buy these blue spectacles, and to a hatter's for these caps — of which I regret to observe that yours is too big. He was rather a long while in the barber's, and finally came out as you saw him, with no moustache. This was a good indication. It made it plainer than ever that he had believed my warning as to the police descent on the house in Gold Street and its frequenters; which was right and proper, for what I told him was quite true. The rest you know. He cabbed to the station, and so did I."

"And now, perhaps," I said, "after giving me the character of a thief wanted by the Manchester police, forcibly depriving me of my hat in exchange for this all-too-large cap, and rushing me off out of London without any definite idea of when I'm coming back, perhaps you'll tell me what we're after?"

Hewitt laughed. "You wanted to join in, you know," he said, "and you must take your luck as it comes. As a matter of fact, there is scarcely anything in my profession so uninteresting and so difficult as this watching and following business. Often it lasts for weeks. When we alight we shall have to follow Wilks again, under the most difficult possible conditions—in the country. There it is often quite impossible to follow a man unobserved. It is only because it is the only way that I am undertaking it now. As to what we're after—you know that as well as I; the Quinton ruby. Wilks has hidden it, and without his help it would be impossible to find it. We are following him so that he will find it for us."

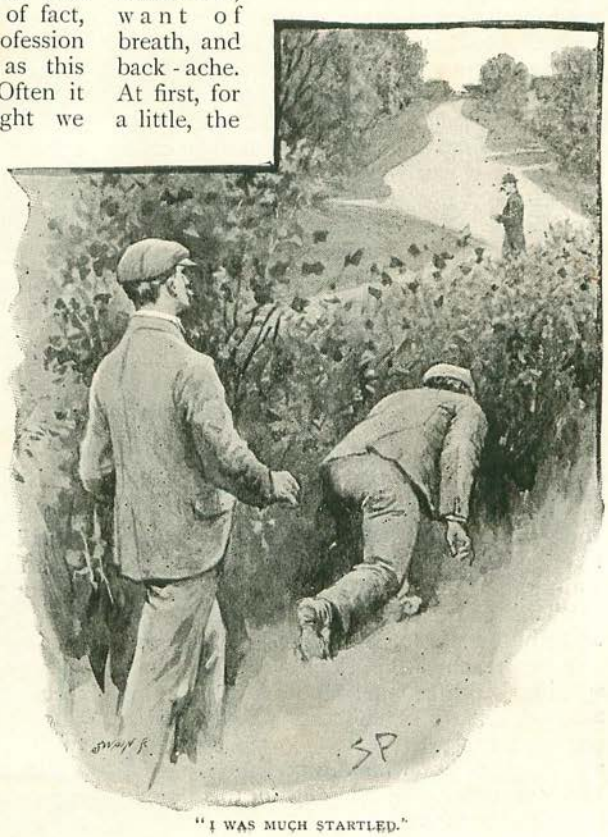
"He must have hidden it, I suppose, to avoid sharing with Hollams?"

"Of course, and availed himself of the fact of Leamy having carried the bag to direct Hollams's suspicion to him. Hollams found out, by his repeated searches of Leamy and his lodgings, that this was wrong, and this morning evidently tried to persuade the ruby out of Wilks's possession with a revolver. We saw the upshot of that."

Kedderby Station was about forty miles out. At each intermediate stopping station Hewitt watched earnestly, but Wilks remained in the train. "What I fear," Hewitt observed, "is that at Kedderby he may take a fly. To stalk a man on foot in the country is difficult enough; but you *can't* follow one vehicle in another without being spotted. But if he's so smart as I think, he won't do it. A man travelling in a fly is noticed and remembered in these places."

He did *not* take a fly. At Kedderby we saw him jump out quickly and hasten from the station. The train stood for a few minutes, and he was out of the station before we alighted. Through the railings behind the platform we could see him walking briskly away to the right. From the ticket collector we ascertained that Radcot lay in that direction, three miles off.

To my dying day I shall never forget that three miles. They seemed three hundred. In the still country, almost every footfall seemed audible for any distance, and in the long stretches of road one could see half a mile behind or before. Hewitt was cool and patient, but I got into a fever of worry, excitement, want of breath, and back-ache. At first, for a little, the



"I WAS MUCH STARTLED."

road zig-zagged, and then the chase was comparatively easy. We waited behind one bend till Wilks had passed the next, and then hurried in his trail, treading in the dustiest parts of the road or on the side grass, when there was any, to deaden the sound of our steps. At the last of these short bends we looked ahead and saw a long white stretch of road with the dark form of Wilks a couple of hundred yards in front. It would never do to let him get to the end of this great stretch before following, as he might turn off at some branch road out of sight and be lost. So we jumped the hedge and scuttled along as we best might on the other side, with backs bent, and our feet often many inches deep in wet clay. We had to make continual stoppages to listen and peep out, and on one occasion, happening, incautiously, to stand erect, looking after him, I was much startled to see Wilks with his face toward me, gazing down the road. I ducked like lightning, and, fortunately, he seemed not to have observed me, but went on as before. He had probably heard some slight noise, but looked straight along the road for its explanation, instead of over the hedge. At hilly parts of the road there was extreme difficulty; indeed, on approaching a rise it was usually necessary to lie down under the hedge till Wilks had passed the top, since from the higher ground he could have seen us easily. This improved neither my clothes, my comfort, nor my temper. Luckily we never encountered the difficulty of a long and high wall, but once we were nearly betrayed by a man who shouted to order us off his field.

At last we saw, just ahead, the square tower of an old church, set about with thick trees. Opposite this Wilks paused, looked irresolutely up and down the road, and then went on. We crossed the road, availed ourselves of the opposite hedge, and followed. The village was to be seen some three or four hundred yards farther along the road, and toward it Wilks sauntered slowly. Before he actually reached the houses, he stopped and turned back.

"The churchyard!" exclaimed Hewitt, under his breath. "Lie close and let him pass."

Wilks reached the churchyard gate, and again looked irresolutely about him. At that moment a party of children, who had been playing among the graves, came chattering and laughing toward and out of the gate, and Wilks walked hastily away again, this time in the opposite direction.

"That's the place, clearly," Hewitt said. "We must slip across quietly, as soon as he's far enough down the road. . . . Now!"

We hurried stealthily across, through the gate, and into the churchyard, where Hewitt threw his blue spectacles away. It was now nearly eight in the evening, and the sun was setting. Once again Wilks approached the gate, and did not enter, because a labourer passed at the time. Then he came back and slipped through.

The grass about the graves was long, and under the trees it was already twilight. Hewitt and I, two or three yards apart, to avoid falling over one another in case of sudden movement, watched from behind gravestones. The form of Wilks stood out large and black against the fading light in the west, as he stealthily approached through the long grass. A light cart came clattering along the road, and Wilks dropped at once and crouched on his knees till it had passed. Then, staring warily about him, he made straight for the stone behind which Hewitt waited.

I saw Hewitt's dark form swing noiselessly round to the other side of the stone. Wilks passed on and dropped on his knee beside a large, weather-worn slab that rested on a brick understructure a foot or so high. The long grass largely hid the bricks, and among it Wilks plunged his hand, feeling along the brick surface. Presently he drew out a loose brick, and laid it on the slab. He felt again in the place and brought forth a small dark object. I saw Hewitt rise erect in the gathering dusk, and with extended arm step noiselessly toward the stooping man. Wilks made a motion to place the dark object in his pocket, but checked himself, and opened what appeared to be a lid, as though to make sure of the safety of the contents. The last light, straggling under the trees, fell on a brilliantly sparkling object within, and like a flash Hewitt's hand shot over Wilks's shoulder and snatched the jewel.

The man actually screamed—one of those curious sharp little screams that one may hear from a woman very suddenly alarmed. But he sprang at Hewitt like a cat, only to meet a straight drive of the fist that stretched him on his back across the slab. I sprang from behind my stone, and helped Hewitt to secure his wrists with a pocket-handkerchief. Then we marched him, struggling and swearing, to the village.

When, in the lights of the village, he recognised us, he had a perfect fit of rage, but afterwards he calmed down, and admitted

that it was a "very clean cop." There was some difficulty in finding the village constable, and Sir Valentine Quinton was dining out and did not arrive for at least an hour. In the interval Wilks grew communicative.

"How much d'ye think I'll get?" he asked.

"Can't guess,"

"HE FELT AGAIN IN THE PLACE."

Hewitt replied. "And as we shall probably have to give evidence, you'll be giving yourself away if you talk too much."

"Oh, I don't care—that'll make no difference. It's a fair cop, and I'm in for it. You got at me nicely, lending me three quid. I never knew a reeler do that before. That blinded me. But was it kid about Gold Street?"

"No, it wasn't. Mr. Hollams is safely shut up by this time, I expect, and you are avenged for your little trouble with him this afternoon."

"What did you know about that? . . . . Well, you've got it up nicely for me, I must say. S'pose you've been following me all the time?"

"Well, yes—I haven't been far off. I guessed you'd want to clear out of town if Hollams was taken, and I knew this"—Hewitt tapped his breast pocket—"was what you'd take care to get hold of first. You hid it, of course, because you knew that Hollams would probably have you searched for it if he got suspicious?"

"Yes, he did, too. Two blokes went over my pockets one night, and somebody got into my room. But I expected that. Hollams is such a greedy pig. Once he's got you under his thumb he don't give you half your makings, and if you kick, he'll have you smugged. So that I wasn't going to give him *that* if I could help it. I s'pose it ain't any good asking how you got put on to our mob?"

"No," said Hewitt, "it isn't."

We didn't get back till the next day, staying for the night, despite an inconvenient want of requisites, at the Hall. There were, in fact, no late trains. We told Sir Valentine the story of the Irishman, much to his amusement.

"Leamy's tale sounded unlikely, of course," Hewitt said, "but it was noticeable that every one of his misfortunes pointed in the same direction—that certain persons were tremendously anxious to get at something they supposed he had. When he spoke of his adventure with the bag, I at once remembered Wilks's arrest and subsequent release. It was a curious coincidence, to say the least, that this should happen at the very station to which the proceeds of this robbery must come, if they came to London at all, and on the day following the robbery itself. Keddderby is one of the few stations on this line where no trains would stop after the time of the robbery, so that the thief would

have to wait till the next day to get back. Leamy's recognition of Wilks's portrait made me feel pretty certain. Plainly, he had carried stolen property; the poor innocent fellow's conversation with Hollams showed that, as in fact did the sum, five pounds, paid to him by way of 'regulars' or customary toll from the plunder for services of carriage. Hollams obviously took Leamy for a criminal friend of Wilks's, because of his use of the thieves' expressions 'sparks' and 'regulars,' and suggested, in terms which Leamy misunderstood, that he should sell any plunder he might obtain to himself, Hollams. Altogether it would have been very curious if the plunder were *not* that from Radcot Hall, especially as no other robbery had been reported at the time.

"Now, among the jewels taken only one was of a very pre-eminent value—the famous ruby. It was scarcely likely that Hollams would go to so much trouble and risk, attempting to drug, injuring, waylaying, and burgling the rooms of the unfortunate Leamy, for a jewel of small value—for any jewel, in fact, but the ruby. So that I felt a pretty strong presumption, at all events, that it was the ruby Hollams was after. Leamy had not had it, I was convinced, from his tale and his manner, and from what I judged of the man himself. The only other person was Wilks, and certainly he had a temptation to keep this to himself, and avoid, if possible, sharing with his London director, or principal; while the carriage of the bag by the Irishman gave him a capital opportunity to put suspicion on him, with the results seen. The most daring of Hollams's attacks on Leamy was doubtless the attempted maiming or killing at the railway station, so as to be able, in the character of a medical man, to search his pockets. He was probably desperate at the time, having, I have no doubt, been following Leamy about all day at the Crystal Palace without finding an opportunity to get at his pockets.

"The struggle and flight of Wilks from Hollams's confirmed my previous impressions. Hollams, finally satisfied that very morning that Leamy certainly had not the jewel, either on his person or at his lodging, and knowing, from having so closely watched him, that he had been nowhere where it could be disposed of, concluded that Wilks was cheating him, and attempted to extort the ruby from him by the aid of another ruffian and a pistol. The rest of my way was plain. Wilks, I knew, would seize the opportunity of Hollams's being safely locked up to get at and dispose of the ruby. I supplied him with funds and left him to lead us to his hiding-place. He did it, and I think that's all."

"He must have walked straight away from my house to the churchyard," Sir Valentine remarked, "to hide that pendant. That was fairly cool."

"Only a cool hand could carry out such a robbery single-handed," Hewitt answered. "I expect his tools were in the bag that Leamy carried, as well as the jewels. They must have been a small and neat set."

They were. We ascertained on our return to town the next day that the bag, with all its contents intact, including the tools, had been taken by the police at their surprise visit to No. 8, Gold Street, as well as much other stolen property. Hollams and Wilks each got very wholesome doses of penal servitude, to the intense delight of Mick Leamy. Leamy himself, by-the-bye, is still to be seen, clad in a noble uniform, guarding the door of a well-known London restaurant. He has not had any more five-pound notes for carrying bags, but knows London too well now to expect it.