ADVENTURES OF MARTIN HEWITT.*

THIRD SERIES.

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IV.—THE CASE OF THE "FLITTERBAT LANCERS."

I.

IN none of the cases of investigation by Martin Hewitt which I have as yet recorded had I any direct and substantial personal interest. In the case I am about to set forth, however, I had some such interest, though legally, I fear, it amounted to no more than the cost of a smashed pane of glass. But the case in some ways was one of the most curious which came under my notice, and completely justified Hewitt's oft-repeated dictum that there was nothing, however romantic or apparently improbable, that had not happened at some time in London.

It was late on a summer evening two or three years back that I drowsed in my armchair over a particularly solid and ponderous volume of essays on social economy. I was doing a good deal of reviewing at the time, and I remember well that this particular volume had a property of such exceeding toughness that I had already made three successive attacks on it, on as many successive evenings, each attack having been defeated in the end by sleep. The weather was hot, my chair was very comfortable, the days were tiring, and the book had somewhere about its strings of polysyllables an essence as of laudanum. Still something had been done on each evening, and now on the fourth I strenuously endeavoured to finish the book. Late as it was my lamp had been lighted but an hour or so, for there had been light enough to read by, near the window, till well past nine o'clock. I was just beginning to feel conscious that the words before me were sliding about and losing their meanings, and that I was about to fall asleep after all, when a sudden crash and a jingle of broken glass behind me woke me with a start,

"A pane of glass in my window was smashed."

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and I threw the book down. A pane of glass in my window was smashed, and I hurried across and threw up the sash to see, if I could, whence the damage had come.

"The man . . . struggled fiercely."

I think I have somewhere said (I believe it was in describing the circumstances of the extraordinary death of Mr. Foggatt) that the building in which my chambers (and Hewitt's office) were situated was accessible—or rather visible, for there was no entrance—from the rear. There was, in fact, a small courtyard, reached by a passage from the street behind, and into this courtyard my sitting-room window looked.

"Hullo there!" I shouted. But there came no reply. Nor could I distinguish anybody in the courtyard. It was at best a shadowy place at night, with no artificial light after the newsagent—who had a permanent booth there—had shut up and gone home. Gone he was now, and to me the yard seemed deserted. Some men had been at work during the day on a drain-pipe near the booth, and I reflected that probably their litter had provided the stone wherewith my window had been smashed. As I looked, however, two men came hurrying from the passage into the court, and going straight into the deep shadow of one corner, presently appeared again in a less obscure part, hauling forth a third man, who must have already been there in hiding. The man—who appeared, so far as I could see, to be smaller than either of his assailants—struggled fiercely, but without avail, and was dragged across toward the passage leading to the street beyond. But the most remarkable feature of the whole thing was the silence of all three men. No cry, exclamation or expostulation escaped any one of them. In perfect silence the two hauled the third across the courtyard, and in perfect silence he swung and struggled to resist and escape. The matter astonished me not a little, and the men were entering the passage before I found voice to shout at them. But they took no notice, and disappeared. Soon after I heard cab wheels in the street beyond, and had no doubt that the two men had carried off their prisoner.

I turned back into my room a little perplexed. It seemed probable that the man who had been borne off had broken my window, but why? I looked about on the floor and presently found the missile. It was, as I had expected, a piece of broken concrete, but it was wrapped up in a worn piece of paper, which had partly opened out again as it lay on my carpet, thus indicating that it had only just been hastily crumpled round the stone. But again, why? It might be considered a trifle more polite to hand a gentlemen a clinker decently wrapped up than to give it him in its raw state, but it came to much the same thing after all if it were passed through a shut window. And why a clinker at all? I disengaged the paper and spread it out. Then I saw it to be an apparently rather hastily written piece of manuscript music, of which a considerably reduced reproduction is given over leaf.

This gave me no help. I turned the paper this way and that, but could make nothing of it. There was not a mark on it

that I could discover, except the music and the scrawled title, "Flitterbat Lancers," at the top. The paper was old, dirty and cracked. What did it all mean? One might

conceive of a person in certain circumstances sending a message—possibly an appeal for help—through a friend's window, wrapped round a stone, but this seemed to be nothing of that sort. It was not a message, but a hastily written piece of music, with no bars or time marked, just as might have been put down by somebody anxious to make an exact note of an air, the time of which he could remember. Moreover, it was years old, not a thing just written in a recent emergency. What lunatic could have chosen this violent way of presenting me with an air from some forgotten "Flitterbat Lancers"? That indeed was an idea. What more likely than that the man taken away *was* a lunatic and the others his keepers? A man under some curious delusion, which led him not only to fling his old music notes through my window, but to keep perfectly quiet while struggling for his freedom. I looked out of the window again, and then it seemed plain to me that the clinker and the paper could not have been intended for me personally, but had been flung at my window as being the only one that showed a light within a reasonable distance of the yard. Most of the windows about mine were those of offices, which had been deserted early in the evening.

Once more I picked up the paper, and, with an idea to hear what the "Flitterbat Lancers" sounded like, I turned to my little pianette and strummed over the notes, making my own time and changing it as seemed likely. But I could make nothing of it, and could by no means extract from the notes anything resembling an air. I considered the thing a little more, and half thought of trying Hewitt's office door, in case he might still be there and could offer a guess at the meaning of my smashed window and the scrap of paper. It was most probable, however, that he had gone home, and I was about resuming my social economy when Hewitt himself came in. He had stayed late to examine a bundle of papers in connection with a case just placed in his hands, and now, having finished, came to find if I were disposed for an evening stroll before turning in—a thing I was in the habit of. I handed him the paper and the piece of concrete, observing, "There's a little job for you, Hewitt, instead of the stroll. What do those things mean?" And I told him the complete history of my smashed window.

Hewitt listened attentively, and examined both the paper and the fragment of paving. "You say these people made absolutely no sound whatever?" he asked.

"None but that of scuffling, and even that they seemed to do quietly."

"Could you see whether or not the two men gagged the other, or placed their hands over his mouth?"

"No, they certainly didn't do that. It was dark, of course, but not so dark as to prevent my seeing generally what they were doing."

"And when you first looked out of the window after the smash, you called out, but got no answer, although the man you suppose to have thrown these things must have been there at the time, and alone?"

"That was so."

Hewitt stood for near half a minute in thought, and then said, "There's something in this; what, I can't guess at the moment, but something deep, I fancy. Are you sure you won't come out now?"

On this my mind was made up. That dreadful volume had vanquished me altogether three times already, and if I let it go again it would haunt me like a nightmare. There was indeed very little left to read, and I determined to master that and draft my review before I slept. So I told Hewitt that I *was* sure, and that I should stick to my work.

"Very well," he said; "then perhaps you will lend me these articles?" holding up the paper and the stone as he spoke.

"Delighted to lend 'em, I'm sure," I said. "If you get no more melody out of the clinker than I did out of the paper you won't have a musical evening. Good night."

Hewitt went away with the puzzle in his hand, and I turned once more to my social economy, and, thanks to the gentleman who smashed my window, conquered. I am sure I should have dropped fast asleep had it not been for that.

II.

At this time my only regular daily work was on an evening paper, so that I left home at a quarter to eight on the morning following the adventure of my broken window, in order, as usual, to be at the office at eight, consequently it was not until lunch-time that I had an opportunity of seeing Hewitt. I went to my own rooms first, however, and on the landing by my door I found the housekeeper in conversation with a shortish sun-browned man with a goatee beard, whose accent at once convinced me that he hailed from across the Atlantic. He had called, it appeared, three or four times during the morning to see me, getting more impatient each time. As he did not seem even to know my name the housekeeper had not considered it expedient to say when I was expected, nor indeed to give him any information about me, and he was growing irascible under the treatment. When I at last appeared, however, he left her and approached me eagerly.

"See here, sir," he said, "I've been stumpin' these here durn stairs o' yours half through the mornin'. I'm anxious to *a*pologise, I reckon, and fix up some damage."

He had followed me into my sitting-room, and was now standing with his back to the fireplace, a dripping umbrella in one hand, and the forefinger of the other held up shoulder-high and pointing, in the manner of a pistol, to my window, which, by the way, had been mended during the morning, in accordance with my instructions to the housekeeper.

"Sir," he continued, "last night I took the extreme liberty of smashin' your winder."

"Oh," I said, "that was you, was it?"

"It was, sir—me. For that I hev come humbly to apologise. I trust the draught has not discommoded you, sir. I regret the acci*dent*, and I wish to pay for the fixin' up and the general inconvenience." He placed a sovereign on the table. "I 'low you'll call that square now, sir, and fix things friendly and comfortable as between gentle*men*, an' no ill will. Shake."

And he formally extended his hand.

I took it at once. "Certainly," I said, "certainly. As a matter of fact you haven't inconvenienced me at all; indeed, there were some circumstances about the affair that rather interested me. But as to the damage," I continued, "if you're really anxious to pay for it, do you mind my sending the glazier to you to settle? You see it's only a matter of half-a-crown or so at most." And I pushed the sovereign toward him.

"But then," he said, looking a trifle disappointed, "there's general discommodedness, you know, to pay for, and the general *sass* of the liberty to a stranger's winder. I ain't no down-easter—not a Boston dude—but I reckon I know the gentlemanly thing, and I can afford to do it. Yes. Say now, didn't I startle your nerves?"

"Not a bit," I answered laughing. "In fact you did me a service by preventing me going to sleep just when I shouldn't; so we'll say no more of that."

"Well—there was one other little thing," he pursued, looking at me rather sharply as he slowly pocketed the sovereign. "There was a bit o' paper round that pebble that came in here. Didn't happen to notice that, did you?"

"Yes, I did. It was an old piece of manuscript music."

"That was it—just. Might you happen to have it handy now?"

"Well," I said, "as a matter of fact a friend of mine has it now. I tried playing it over once or twice, as a matter of curiosity, but I couldn't make anything of it, and so I handed it to him."

"Ah!" said my visitor, watching me narrowly, "that's a nailer, is that 'Flitterbat Lancers'—a real nailer. It whips 'em all. Nobody can't get ahead of that. Ha, ha!" He laughed suddenly—a laugh that seemed a little artificial. "There's music fellers as 'lows to set right down and play off anything right away that can't make anything of the 'Flitterbat Lancers.' That was two of 'em that was monkeyin' with me last night. They never could make anythin' of it at all, and I was tantalising them with it all along till they got real mad, and reckoned to get it out o' my pocket and learn it off quiet at home, and stop all my chaff. Ha, ha! So I got away for a bit, and bein' a bit lively after a number of tooth-lotions (all three was much that way), just rolled it round a stone and heaved it through your winder before they could come up, your winder bein' the nearest one with a light in it. Ha, ha! I'll be considerable obliged if you'll get it from your friend right now. Is he stayin' hereabout?"

The story was so ridiculously lame that I determined to confront my visitor with Hewitt and observe the result. If he had succeeded in making any sense of the "Flitterbat Lancers" the scene might be amusing. So I answered at once, "Yes;

his office is only on the floor below; he will probably be in at about this time. Come down with me."

We went down, and found Hewitt in his outer office. "This gentleman," I told him with a solemn intonation, "has come to ask for his piece of manuscript music, the 'Flitterbat Lancers.' He is particularly proud of it, because nobody who tries to play it can make any sort of a tune out of it, and it was entirely because two dear friends of his were anxious to drag it out of his pocket and practise it over on the quiet that he flung it through my window-pane last night, wrapped round a piece of concrete."

The stranger glanced sharply at me, and I could see that my manner and tone rather disconcerted him. But Hewitt came forward at once. "Oh yes," he said. "Just so—quite a natural sort of thing. As a matter of fact I quite expected you. Your umbrella's wet—do you mind putting it in the stand? Thank you. Come into my private office."

We entered the inner room, and Hewitt, turning to the stranger, went on: "Yes, that is a very extraordinary piece of music, that 'Flitterbat Lancers.' I have been having a little practice with it myself, though I'm really nothing of a musician. I don't wonder you are anxious to keep it to yourself. Sit down."

The stranger, with a distrustful look at Hewitt, complied. At this moment Hewitt's clerk, Kerrett, entered from the outer office with a slip of paper. Hewitt glanced at it and crumpled it in his hand. "I am engaged just now," was his remark, and Kerrett vanished.

"And now," Hewitt said as he sat down and suddenly turned to the stranger with an intent gaze, "and now, Mr. Hoker, we'll talk of this music."

The stranger started and frowned. "You've the advantage of me, sir," he said; "you seem to know my name, but I don't know yours."

Hewitt smiled pleasantly. "My name," he said, "is Hewitt—Martin Hewitt, and it is my business to know a great many things. For instance, I know that you are Mr. Reuben B. Hoker, of Robertsville, Ohio."

The visitor pushed his chair back, and stared. "Well—that gits me," he said. "You're a pretty smart chap anyway. I've heard your name before, of course. And—and so you've been a-studyin' of the 'Flitterbat Lancers,' have you?" This with a keen glance in Hewitt's face. "Well, well, s'pose you have. What's your opinion?"

"Why," answered Hewitt, still keeping his steadfast gaze on Hoker's eyes, "I think it's pretty late in the century to be fishing about for the Wedlake jewels, that's all."

These words astonished me almost as much as they did Mr. Hoker. The great Wedlake jewel robbery is, as many will remember, a traditional story of the sixties. I remembered no more of it at the time than probably most men do who have at some time or another read up the *causes célèbres* of the century. Sir Francis Wedlake's country house had been robbed, and the whole of Lady Wedlake's magnificent collec-

"Mr. Hoker."

tion of jewels stolen. A man named Shiels, a strolling musician, had been arrested and had been sentenced to a long term of penal servitude. Another man named Legg—one of the comparatively wealthy scoundrels who finance promising thefts or swindles and pocket the greater part of the proceeds—had also been punished, but only a very few of the trinkets, and those quite unimportant items, had been recovered. The great bulk of the booty was never brought to light. So much I remembered, and Hewitt's sudden mention of the Wedlake

jewels in connection with my broken window, Mr. Reuben B. Hoker and the "Flitterbat Lancers" astonished me not a little.

As for Hoker, he did his best to hide his perturbation, but with little success. "Wedlake jewels, eh?" he said; "and—and what's that to do with it, anyway?"

"To do with it?" responded Hewitt, with an air of carelessness. "Well, well, I had my idea, nothing more. If the Wedlake jewels have nothing to do with it we'll say no more about it, that's all. Here's your paper, Mr. Hoker—only a little crumpled. Here also is the piece of cement. If the Wedlake jewels have nothing to do with the affair you may possibly want that too—I can't tell." He rose and placed the articles in Mr. Hoker's hand, with the manner of terminating the interview.

Hoker rose, with a bewildered look on his face, and turned toward the door. Then he stopped, looked at the floor, scratched his cheek, and finally, after a thoughtful look, first at me and then at Hewitt, sat down again emphatically in the chair he had just quitted and put his hat on the ground. "Come," he said, "we'll play a square game. That paper *has* something to do with the Wedlake jewels, and, win or lose, I'll tell you all I know about it. You're a smart man—you've found out more than I know already—and whatever I tell you, I guess it won't do me no harm; it ain't done me no good yet, anyway."

"Say what you please, of course," Hewitt answered, "but think first. You might tell me something you'd be sorry for afterward. Mind, I don't invite your confidence."

"Confidence be durned! Say, will you listen to what I say, and tell me if you think I've been swindled or not? There ain't a creature in this country whose advice I can ask. My 250 dollars is gone now, and I guess I won't go skirmishing after it any more if you think it's no good. Will you do so much?"

"As I said before," Hewitt replied, "tell me what you please, and if I can help you I will. But remember, I don't ask for your secrets."

"That's all right, I guess, Mr. Hewitt. Well, now, it was all like this." And Mr. Reuben B. Hoker plunged into a detailed account of his adventures since his arrival in London.

Relieved of repetitions, and put as directly as possible, it was as follows:—Mr. Hoker was a waggon-builder, had made a good business from very humble beginnings, and intended to go on and make it still a better. Meantime he had come over to Europe for a short holiday—a thing he had promised himself for years. He was wandering about the London streets on the second night after his arrival in the city, when he managed to get into conversation with two men at a bar. They were not very prepossessing men altogether, though flashily dressed. Very soon they suggested a game of cards. But Reuben B. Hoker was not to be had in that way, and after a while they parted. The two were amusing fellows enough in their way, and when Hoker saw them again the next night in the same bar he made no difficulty of talking with them freely. After a time, and after a succession of drinks, they told him that they had a speculation on hand—a speculation that meant thousands if it succeeded—and to carry out which they were only waiting for a paltry sum of £50. There was a house, they said, in which they were certain was hidden a great number of jewels of immense value, which had been deposited there by a man who was now dead. Exactly in what part of the house the jewels were to be found they did not know. There was a paper, they said, which was supposed to have contained some information, but as yet they hadn't quite been able to make it out. But that would really matter very little if once they could get possession of the house. Then they would simply set to work and search from the topmost chimney to the lowermost brick if necessary. Anyhow the jewels must be found sooner or later. The only present difficulty was that the house was occupied, and that the landlord wanted a large deposit of rent down before he would consent to turn out his present tenants and give them possession at a higher rental. This deposit and other expenses, they said, would come to at least £50, and they hadn't the money. However if any friend of theirs who meant business would put the necessary sum at their disposal, and keep his mouth shut, they would make him an equal partner in the proceeds with themselves; and as the value of the whole haul would probably be something not very far off £20,000, the speculation would bring a tremendous return to the man who was smart enough to see the advantage of putting down his £50.

Hoker, very distrustful, sceptically demanded more detailed particulars of the scheme. But these the men (Luker and Birks were their names, he found, in course of talking) inflexibly refused to communicate.

"Is it likely," said Luker, "that we should give the 'ole thing away to anybody who

might easily go with his £50 and clear out the bloomin' show? Not much. We've told you what the game is, and if you'd like to take a flutter with your £50, all right, you'll do as well as anybody, and we'll treat you square. If you don't—well, don't, that's all. We'll get the oof from somewhere — there's blokes as 'ud jump at the chance, I can tell you—only they're inconvenient blokes to deal with, as I'll explain if you come in with us. Anyway we ain't goin' to give the show away before you've done somethin' to prove you're on the job, straight. Put your money in and you shall know as much as we do."

Then there were more drinks, and more discussion. Hoker was still reluctant, though tempted by the prospect, and growing more venturesome with each drink.

"Don't you see," said Birks, "that if we was a-tryin' to 'ave you we should out with a tale as long as yer arm, all complete, with the address of the 'ouse and all. Then I s'pose you'd lug out the pieces on the nail, without askin' a bloomin' question. More fool you, that's all. As it is, the thing's so perfectly genuine that we'd rather lose the chance and wait for some other bloke to find the money than run a chance of givin' the thing away. It ain't you wot'll be doin' a favour, mind. If it's anybody it's us. Not that we want to talk of favours at all, if you come to that. It's a matter o' business, simple and plain, that's all it is. If you're willin' to come in with the money that we can't do without—very well. If you ain't, very well too, only we ain't goin' to give the thing away to an outsider. It's a question of either us trustin' you with a chance of collarin' £20,000, or you trustin' us with a paltry £50. We don't lay out no 'igh moral sentiments, we only say the weight o' money is all on one side. Take it or leave it, that's all. 'Ave another Scotch."

The talk went on and the drinks went on, and it all ended at "chucking-out time" in Reuben B. Hoker handing over five ten-pound notes, with smiling, though slightly incoherent, assurances of his eternal friendship for Luker and Birks.

In the morning he awoke to the realisation of a bad head, a bad tongue, and a bad opinion of his proceedings of the previous night. In his sober senses it seemed plain that he had been swindled. He had heard of the confidence trick, to which many Americans had unaccountably fallen victims (for to him the trick had always seemed very thin), and he had sworn that something better than the confidence trick would be required to get over *him*. But now there seemed no doubt that this was no more than the confidence trick over again, in a new and more impudent form. All day he cursed his fuddled foolishness, and at night he made for the bar that had been the scene of the transaction, with little hope of seeing either Luker or Birks, who had agreed to be there to meet him. There they were, however, and rather to his surprise, they made no demand for more money. They asked him if he understood music, and showed him the worn old piece of paper containing the manuscript "Flitterbat Lancers." The exact spot, they said, where the jewels were hidden was supposed to be indicated somehow and somewhere on that piece of paper. Hoker did not understand music, and could find nothing on the paper that looked in the least like a direction to a hiding-place for jewels or anything else.

Luker and Birks then went into full particulars of their project. First, as to its history. The jewels were the famous Wedlake jewels, which had been taken from Sir Francis Wedlake's house in 1866 and never heard of again. A certain Jerry Shiels had been arrested in connection with the robbery, had been given a long sentence of penal servitude, and had died in gaol. This Jerry Shiels was an extraordinarily clever criminal, and travelled about the country as a street musician. Although an expert burglar, he very rarely perpetrated robberies himself, but acted as a sort of travelling fence, receiving stolen property and transmitting it to London or out of the country. He also acted as the agent of a man named Legg, who had money, and who financed any likely-looking project of a criminal nature that Shiels might arrange or recommend. Luker and Birks explained that there were many men of this class, and that it was to them that they had referred on the previous evening, when they said that there were "blokes that would jump at the chance" of financing the present venture.

Jerry Shiels travelled with a "pardner"—a man who played the harp and acted as his assistant and messenger in affairs wherein Jerry was reluctant to appear personally. When Shiels was arrested he had in his possession a quantity of printed and manuscript music, and after his first remand his "pardner," Jemmy Snape, applied for the music to be given up to him in order, as he explained, that he might earn his living. No objection was raised to this, and Shiels was quite willing that Snape should have it, and so it was handed over. Now among

this music was a small slip, headed "Flitterbat Lancers," which Shiels had shown to Snape before the arrest. In case of Shiels being taken Snape was to take this particular slip to Legg as fast as he could. The slip indeed carried about it, in some unexplained way which Legg understood, an indication of the place in which Shiels had concealed the bulk of the Wedlake jewels, and the whole proceeding was an ingenious trick invented by Shiels (and used before, it was supposed) to communicate with Legg while under arrest.

Snape got the music, but, as chance would have it, on that very day Legg himself was arrested, and soon after was sentenced also to a term of years. Snape hung about in London for a little while and then emigrated. Before leaving, however, he gave the slip of music to Luker's father, a rag-shop keeper, who was a friend of his, and to whom he owed money. He explained its history, and hoped that Luker senior would be able to recoup himself for the debt, and a good deal over. Then he went. Luker senior had made all sorts of fruitless efforts to get at the information concealed in the paper. He had held it to the fire to bring up concealed writing, had washed it, had held it to the light till his eyes ached, had gone over it with a magnifying glass—all in vain. He had got musicians to strum out the notes on all sorts of instruments, backwards, forwards, alternately, and in every other way he could think of. If at any time he fancied a resemblance in the resulting sound to some familiar song-tune, he got that song and studied all its words with loving care, upside-down, right-side up—every way. He took the words "Flitterbat Lancers" and transposed the letters in all directions, and did everything else he could think of. In the end he gave it up and died. Now lately, Luker junior had been impelled with a desire to see into the matter. He had repeated all the parental experiments, and more, with chemicals, and with the same lack of success. He had taken his "pal" Birks into his confidence, and together they had tried other experiments still—usually very clumsy ones indeed—till at last they began to believe that the message had probably been written in some sort of invisible ink which the subsequent washings and experiments had erased altogether. But he had done one other thing: he had found the house which Shiels rented at the time of his arrest, and in which a good quantity of stolen property — not connected with the Wedlake case — was discovered. Here, he argued, if anywhere, Jerry Shiels had hidden the jewels. There was no other place where he could be found to have lived, or over which he had sufficient control to warrant his hiding valuables therein. Perhaps, once the house could be properly examined, something about it might give a clue as to what the message of the "Flitterbat Lancers" meant. At any rate, message or none, anybody in possession of the house, with a certain amount of patience, secrecy, and thoroughness, could in time make himself master of every possible hiding-place, and could completely excavate the back yard. The trouble was that the house was occupied, and that money was wanted to get possession. It was with the view of providing this that they had decided to broach the subject to Hoker.

Hoker of course was anxious to know where the house in question stood, but this Luker and Birks would on no account inform him. You've done your part," they said, "and now you leave us to do ours. There's a bit of a job about gettin' the tenants out. They won't go, and it'll take a bit of time before the landlord can make them. So you just hold your jaw and wait. When we're safe in the 'ouse, and there's no chance of anybody else pokin' into the business, then you can come and help find the stuff if you like. But you ain't goin' to 'ave a chance of puttin' in first for yourself this journey, you bet."

Hoker went home that night sober, but in much perplexity. The thing might be genuine after all; indeed there were many little things that made him think it was. But then if it were, what guarantee had he that he would get his share, supposing the search turned out successful? None at all. But then it struck him for the first time that these jewels, though they may have lain untouched so long, were stolen property after all. The moral aspect of the affair began to trouble him a little, but the legal aspect troubled him more. That consideration, however, he decided to leave over, for the present at any rate. He had no more than the word of Luker and Birks that the jewels (if they existed) *were* those of Lady Wedlake, and Luker and Birks themselves only professed to know from hearsay. At any rate his £50 was gone where he felt pretty sure he would have a difficulty in getting it back from, and he determined to wait events. But at least he made up his mind to have some little guarantee for his money. In accordance with this resolve he suggested, when he met the two men the next day, that he should take charge of the

slip of music and make an independent study of it. This proposal, however, met with an instant veto. The whole thing was now in their hands, Luker and Birks laid it down, and they didn't intend letting any of it out. If Hoker wanted to study the "Flitterbat Lancers" he could do it in their presence, and if he were dissatisfied he could go to the next shop. Altogether it became clear to the unhappy Hoker that now he had parted with his money he was altogether at the mercy of these fellows, if he wished to get any share of the plunder, or even to see his money back again. And if he made any complaint, or if the matter became at all known, the affair would be "blown upon," as they expressed it, and his money would be gone. Mostly, though, he resented their bullying talk, and he determined to get even in the matter of the music. He resolved to make up a piece of paper, folded as like the slip as possible, and substitute one for the other at their next meeting. Then he would put the "Flitterbat Lancers" in some safe place and face his fellow-conspirators with a hand of cards equal to their own. He carried out his plan the next evening with perfect success, thanks to a trick of "passing" cards which he had learned in his youth, and thanks also to the contemptuous indifference with which Luker and Birks had begun to regard him. He got the slip in his pocket and left the bar. He had not gone far, however, before Luker discovered the trick, and soon he became conscious of being followed. He looked for a cab, but he was in a dark street, and no cab was near. Luker and Birks turned the corner and began to run. He saw they must catch him, and felt no doubt that if they did he would lose the slip of paper, the £50, and everything. They were big active fellows, and could probably do as they liked with him—especially since he could not call for help without risking an exposure of their joint enterprise. Everything depended now on his putting the "Flitterbat Lancers" out of their reach, but where he could himself recover it. Then it would form a sort of security for his share of the venture. He ran till he saw a narrow passage-way on his right, and into this he darted. It led into a yard where stones were lying about, and in a large building before him he saw the window of a lighted room a couple of floors up. It was a desperate expedient, but there was no time for consideration. He wrapped a stone in the paper and flung it with all his force through the lighted window. Even as he did it he heard the feet of Luker and Birks as they hurried down the street. The rest of the adventure in the court I myself saw.

Luker and Birks kept Hoker in their lodgings all that night. They searched him unsuccessfully for the paper, they bullied, they swore, they cajoled, they entreated, they begged him to play the game square with his pals. Hoker merely replied that he had put the "Flitterbat Lancers" where they couldn't easily find it, and that he intended playing the game square so long as they did the same. In the end they released him, apparently with more respect for his cuteness than they had before entertained, advising him at any rate, to get the paper into his possession as soon as he could. With this view he repaired again to the scene of his window-smashing exploit, and having ascertained the exact position of the window in the building, began his morning's attack on my outer door.

"And now," said Mr. Hoker, in conclusion of his narrative, "perhaps you'll give me a bit of Christian advice. You're up to as many moves as most people over here. Am I playin' a fool-game running after these toughs, or ain't I? I wouldn't have told you what I have, of course, if it wasn't clear that you'd got hold of the hang of the scheme somehow. Say, now, is it all a swindle?"

Hewitt shrugged his shoulders. "It all depends," he said, "on your friends Luker and Birks, as you may easily see for yourself. They may want to swindle you of your money and of the proceeds of the speculation, as you call it, or they may not. I'm afraid they'd like to, at any rate. But perhaps you've got some little security in this piece of paper. One thing is plain: they certainly believe in the deposit of jewels themselves, else they wouldn't have taken so much trouble to get the paper back, on the chance of seeing some way of using it after they had got into the house they speak of."

"Then I guess I'll go on with the thing, if that's it."

"That depends of course on whether you care to take trouble to get possession of what, after all, is somebody else's lawful property."

Hoker looked a little uneasy. "Well," he said, "there's that, of course. I didn't know nothin' about that at first, and when I did I'd parted with my money and felt entitled to get something back for it. Any way the stuff ain't found yet. When it is, why then, you know, I might make a deal with the owner. But, say, how did you find

out my name, and about this here affair being jined up with the Wedlake jewels?"

Hewitt smiled. "As to the name and address, you just think it over a little when you've gone away, and if you don't see how I did it, you're not so cute as I think you are. In regard to the jewels—well, I just read the message of the 'Flitterbat Lancers,' that's all."

"You read it? Whew! That beats! And what does it say, and where? How did you fix it?" Hoker turned the paper over eagerly in his hands as he spoke.

"See, now," said Hewitt, "I won't tell you all that, but I'll tell you something, and it may help you to test the real knowledge of Luker and Birks. Part of the message is in these words, which you had better write down: '*Over the coals the fifth dancer slides says Jerry Shiels the horney.*'"

"What?" Hoker exclaimed, "Fifth dancer slides over the coals? That's a mighty odd dance-figure, anyway, lancers or not. What's it all about?"

"About the Wedlake jewels, as I said. Now you can go and make a bargain with Luker and Birks. The only other part of the message is an address, and that they already know, if they have been telling the truth about the house they intend taking. You can offer to tell them what I have told you of the message, after they have told you where the house is, and proved to you that they are taking the steps they talk of. If they won't agree to that I think you had best treat them as common rogues (which they are), and charge them with obtaining your money under false pretences. But in any case don't be disappointed if you see very little of the Wedlake jewels."

Nothing more would Hewitt say than that, despite Hoker's many questions; and when at last Hoker had gone, almost as troubled and perplexed as ever, my friend turned to me and said, "Now, Brett, if you haven't lunched, and would like to see the end of this business, hurry up!"

"The end of it?" I said. "Is it to end so soon? How?"

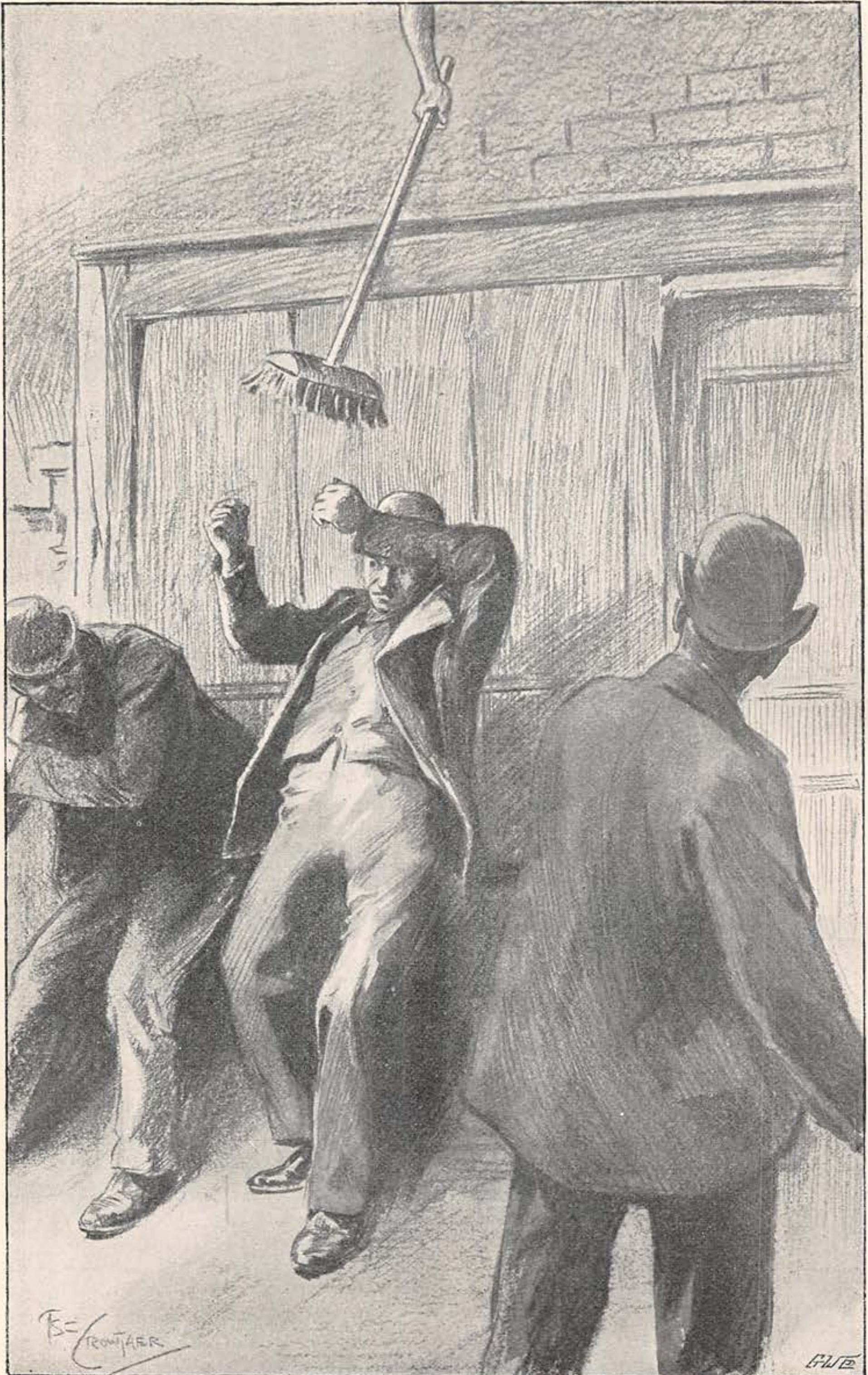
"Simply by a police raid on Jerry Shiels's old house with a search warrant. I communicated with the police this morning before I came here."

"Poor Hoker!" I said.

"Oh, I had told the police before I saw Hoker, or heard of him, of course. I just conveyed the message on the music slip, that was enough. But I'll tell you all about it when there's more time; I must be off now. With the information I have given him, Hoker and his friends may make an extra push and get into the house soon, but I couldn't resist the temptation to give the unfortunate Hoker some sort of a sporting chance—though it's a poor one, I fear. Get your lunch as quickly as you can, and go at once to Colt Row, Bankside — Southwark way, you know. Probably we shall be there before you. If not, wait."

Hewitt had assumed his hat and gloves as he spoke, and now hurried away. I took such lunch as I could in twenty minutes and hurried in a cab towards Blackfriars Bridge. The cabman knew nothing of Colt Row, but had a notion of where to find Bankside. Once in the region I left him, and then Colt Row was not difficult to find. It was one of those places that decay with an access of respectability, like Drury Lane and Clare Market. Once, when Jacob's Island was still an island, a little further down the river, Colt Row had evidently been an unsafe place for a person with valuables about him, and then it probably prospered, in its own way. Now it was quite respectable, but very dilapidated and dirty, and looked as unprosperous as a street well can. It was too near the river to be a frequented thoroughfare, and too far from it to be valuable for wharfage purposes. It was a stagnant backwater in the London tide, close though it stood to the full rush of the stream. Perhaps it was sixty yards long—perhaps a little more. It was certainly very few yards wide, and the houses at each side had a patient and forlorn look of waiting for a metropolitan improvement to come along and carry them away to their rest. Many seemed untenanted, and most threatened soon to be untenable. I could see no signs as yet of Hewitt, nor of the police, so I walked up and down the narrow pavement for a little while. As I did so I became conscious of a face at a window of the least ruinous house in the row, a face that I fancied expressed particular interest in my movements. The house was an old gabled structure, faced with plaster. What had apparently once been a shop-window, or at any rate a wide one, on the ground floor, was now shuttered up, and the face that watched me—an old woman's—looked from a window next above. I had noted these particulars with some curiosity, when, arriving again at the street corner, I observed Hewitt approaching, in company with a police inspector, and followed by two unmistakable "plain-clothes" men.

"Well," Hewitt said, "you're first here



"The woman began to belabour the invaders about the shoulders and head from above."

after all. Have you seen any more of our friend Hoker?"

"No, nothing."

"Very well—probably he'll be here before long, though."

The party turned into Colt Row, and the inspector, walking up to the door of the house with the shuttered bottom window, knocked sharply. There was no response, so he knocked again; but equally in vain.

"All out," said the inspector.

"No," I said, "I saw a woman watching me from the window above not three minutes ago."

"Ho, ho!" the inspector replied. "That's so, eh? One of you—you Johnson—step round to the back, will you? You know the courts behind."

One of the plain-clothes men started off, and after waiting another minute or two the inspector began a thundering cannonade of knocks that brought every available head out of the window of every inhabited room in the Row.

The woman's face appeared stealthily at the upper window again, but the inspector saw, and he shouted to her to open the door and save him the necessity of damaging it. At this the woman opened the window, and began abusing the inspector with a shrillness and fluency that added a street-corner audience to that already congregated at the windows.

"Go away you blaggards," the lady said—among other things—"you ought to be 'orsew'ipped, every one of ye! A-comin' 'ere a-tryin' to turn decent people out o' 'ouse and 'ome! Wait till my 'usband comes 'ome—'e'll show yer, ye mutton-cadgin' scoundrels! Payin' our rent reg'lar, and good tenants as is always been—as you may ask Mrs. Green next door this blessed minute—and I'm a respectable married woman, that's what I am, ye dirty great cow-ards!"—this last word with a low tragic emphasis.

Hewitt remembered what Hoker had said about the present tenants refusing to quit the house on the landlord's notice. "She thinks we've come from the landlord to turn her out," he said to the inspector.

"We're not here from the landlord, you old fool!" the inspector said, in as low a voice as could be trusted to reach the woman's ears. "We don't want to turn you out. We're the police, with a search-warrant to look for something left here before you came; and you'd better let us in, I can tell you, or you'll get into trouble."

"'Ark at 'im!" the woman screamed, pointing at the inspector, "'Ark at 'im!" Thinks I was born yesterday, that feller! Go 'ome, ye dirty pie-stealer, go 'ome! 'Oo sneaked the cook's watch, eh? Go 'ome!"

The audience showed signs of becoming a small crowd, and the inspector's patience gave out. "Here Bradley," he said, addressing the remaining plain-clothes man, "give a hand with these shutters," and the two—both powerful men—seized the iron bar which held the shutters, and began to pull. But the garrison was undaunted, and seizing a broom the woman began to belabour the invaders about the shoulders and head from above. But just at this moment the woman, emitting a terrific shriek, was suddenly lifted from behind and vanished. Then the head of the plain-clothes man who had gone round the houses appeared, with the calm announcement, "There's a winder open behind, sir. But I'll open the front door if you like."

Then there was a heavy thump and *his* head was withdrawn; the broom was probably responsible. The inspector shouted impatiently for the front door to be opened, and in a minute or two the bolts were shot and it swung back. The placid Johnson stood in the passage, and as we passed in he said: "I've locked *'er* in the back room upstairs." As a matter of fact we might have guessed it. Volleys of screeches, punctuated by bangs from contact of broom and door, left no doubt.

"It's the bottom staircase of course," the inspector said, and we tramped down into the basement. A little way from the stair-foot Hewitt opened a cupboard door which enclosed a receptacle for coals. "They still keep the coals here, you see," he said, striking a match and passing it to and fro near the sloping roof of the cupboard. It was of plaster, and covered the under-side of the stairs.

"And now for the fifth dancer," he said, throwing the match away and making for the staircase again. "One, two, three, four, five," and he tapped the fifth stair from the bottom. "Here it is."

The stairs were uncarpeted, and Hewitt and the inspector began a careful examination of the one he had indicated. They tapped it in different places, and Hewitt passed his hand over the surfaces of both tread and riser. Presently, with his hand at the outer edge of the riser, Hewitt spoke. "Here it is, I think," he said; "it is the riser that slides."

He took out his pocket-knife and scraped away the grease and paint from the edge of

the old stair. Then a joint was plainly visible. For a long time the plank, grimed and set with age, refused to shift, but at last, by dint of patience and firm fingers, it moved, and in a few seconds was drawn clean out from the end, like the lid of a domino-box lying on its side.

Within, nothing was visible but grime, fluff, and small rubbish. The inspector passed his hand along the bottom angle. "Here's a hook or something at any rate," he said. It was the gold hook of an old-fashioned earring, broken off short.

Hewitt slapped his thigh. "Somebody's been here before us," he said, "and a good time back too, judging from the dust. That hook's a plain indication that jewellery was here once, and probably broken up for convenience of carriage and stowage. There's plainly nothing more, except—except this piece of paper." Hewitt's eyes had detected, black with loose grime as it was, a small piece of paper lying at the bottom of the recess. He drew it out and shook off the dust. "Why, what's this?" he exclaimed. "More music! Why, look here!"

We went to the window and there saw in Hewitt's hand a piece of written musical notation, thus:—

Hewitt pulled out from his pocket a few pieces of paper. "Here is a copy I made this morning of the 'Flitterbat Lancers,' and a note or two of my own as well," he said. He took a pencil and, constantly referring to his own papers, marked a letter under each note on the last-found slip of music. When he had done this the letters read:—

"*You are a clever cove whoever you are but there was a cleverer says Jim Snape the horney's mate.*"

"You see?" Hewitt said, handing the inspector the paper. "Snape, the unconsidered messenger, finding Legg in prison, set to work and got the jewels for himself. He either had more gumption than the other people through whose hands the 'Flitterbat Lancers' has passed, or else he had got some clue to the cipher during his association with Shiels. The thing was a cryptogram, of course, of a very simple sort, though uncommon in design. Snape was a humorous soul, too, to leave this message here in the same cipher, on the chance of somebody else reading the 'Flitterbat Lancers.'"

"But," I asked, "why did he give that slip of music to Luker's father?"

"Well, he owed him money, and got out of it that way. Also he avoided the appearance of 'flushness' that paying the debt might have given him, and got quietly out of the country with his spoil. Also he may have paid off a grudge on old Luker—anyhow the thing plagued him enough."

The shrieks upstairs had grown hoarser, but the broom continued vigorously. "Let that woman out," said the inspector, "and we'll go and report. Not much good looking for Snape now, I fancy. But there's some satisfaction in clearing up that old quarter-century mystery."

We left the place pursued by the execrations of the broom wielder, who bolted the door behind us, and from the window defied us to come back, and vowed she would have us all searched before a magistrate for what we had probably stolen. In the very next street we hove in sight of Reuben B. Hoker in the company of two swell-mob-looking fellows, who sheered off down a side turning at sight of our group. Hoker, too, looked rather shy at sight of the inspector. As we passed, Hewitt stopped for a moment and said, "I'm afraid you've lost those jewels, Mr. Hoker; come to my office to-morrow and I'll tell you all about it."

III.

"The meaning of the thing was so very plain," Hewitt said to me afterwards, "that the duffers who had the 'Flitterbat Lancers' in hand for so long never saw it at all. If Shiels had made an ordinary clumsy cryptogram, all letters and figures, they would have seen what it was at once, and at least would have tried to read it. But because it was put in the form of music they tried everything else but the right way. It was a clever dodge of Shiels', without a doubt. Very few people, police officers or not, turning over a heap of old music, would notice or feel suspicious of that little slip

among the rest. But once one sees it is a cryptogram (and the absence of bar-lines and of notes beyond the stave would suggest that) the reading is as easy as possible. For my part I tried it as a cryptogram at once. You know the plan—it has been described a hundred times. See here—look at this copy of the 'Flitterbat Lancers.' Its only difficulty, and that is a small one, is that the words are not divided. Since there are on the stave positions for less than a dozen notes, and there are twenty-six letters to be indicated, it follows that crochets, quavers and semiquavers on the same line or space must mean different letters. The first step is obvious. We count the notes to ascertain which sign occurs most frequently, and we find that the crochet in the top space is the sign required—it occurs no less than eleven times. Now the letter most frequently occurring in an ordinary sentence of English is *e*. Let us then suppose that this represents *e*. At once a coincidence strikes us. In ordinary musical notation in the treble clef the note occupying the top space would be E. Let us remember that presently. Now the most common word in the English language is *the*. We know the sign for *e*, the last letter of this word, so let us see if in more than one place that sign is preceded by two others, identical in each case. If so, the probability is that the other two signs will represent *t* and *h*, and the whole word will be *the*. Now it happens that in no less than four places the sign *e* is preceded by the same two other signs—once in the first line, twice in the second, and once in the fourth. No word of three letters ending in *e* would be in the least likely to occur four times in a short sentence except *the*. Then we will call it *the*, and note the signs preceding the *e*. They are a quaver under the bottom line for the *t* and a crotchet on the first space for the *h*. We travel along the stave, and wherever these signs occur we mark them with *t* or *h*, as the case may be. But

"'The fifth dancer slides.'"

now we remember that *e*, the crotchet in the top space, is in its right place as a musical note, while the crotchet in the bottom space means *h*, which is no musical note at all. Considering this for a minute, we remember that among the notes which are expressed in ordinary music on the treble

stave, without the use of leger lines, *d e* and *f* are repeated at the lower and at the upper part of the stave. Therefore anybody making a cryptogram of musical notes would probably use one set of these duplicate positions to indicate other letters, and as *h* is in the lower part of the stave, that is where the variation comes in. Let us experiment by assuming that all the crotchets above *f* in ordinary musical notation have their usual values, and let us set the letters over their respective notes. Now things begin to shape. Look toward the end of the second line: there is the word *the* and the letters *f f t h*, with another note between the two *f* s. Now that word can only possibly be *fifth*, so that now we have the sign for *i*. It is the crotchet on the bottom line. Let us go through and mark the *i* s. And now observe. The first sign of the lot is *i*, and there is one other sign before the word *the*. The only words possible here beginning with *i*, and of two letters, are *it*, *if*, *is* and *in*. Now we have the signs for *t* and *f*, and we know that it isn't *it* or *if*. *Is* would be unlikely here, because there is a tendency, as you see, to regularity in these signs, and *t*, the next letter alphabetically to *s*, is at the bottom of the stave. Let us try *n*. At once we get the word *dance* at the beginning of line three. And now we have got enough to see the system of the thing. Make a stave and put G A B C and the higher D E F in their proper musical places. Then fill in the blank places with the next letters of the alphabet downward, *h i j*, and we find that *h* and *i* fall in the places we have already discovered for them as crotchets. Now take quavers and go on with *k l m n o*, and so on as before, beginning on the A space. When you have filled the quavers do the same with semiquavers — there are only six alphabetical letters left for this—*u v w x y z*. Now you will find that this exactly agrees with all we have ascertained already, and if you will use the other letters to fill up over the signs still unmarked you will get the whole message—

"*In the Colt Row ken over the coals the fifth dancer slides says Jerry Shiels the horney.*

"'Dancer,' as perhaps you didn't know, is thieves' slang for a stair, and '**horney**' is the strolling musician's name for a cornet player. Of course the thing took a little time to work out, chiefly because the sentence was short, and gave one few opportunities. But anybody with the key, using the cipher as a means of communication, would read it as easily as print. Snape used the same cipher in his jocular little note to the next searcher in the Colt Row staircase.

"As soon as I had read it, of course I guessed the purport of the 'Flitterbat Lancers.' Jerry Shiels's name is well known to anybody with half my knowledge of the criminal records of the century, and his connection with the missing Wedlake jewels, and his death in prison, came to my mind at once. (The police afterwards, by the way, soon identified his old house in Colt Row from their records.) Certainly here was something hidden, and as the Wedlake jewels seemed most likely, I made the shot in talking to Hoker."

"But you terribly astonished him by telling him his name and address. How was that?"

Hewitt laughed aloud. "That," he said; "why, that was the thinnest trick of all. Why, the man had it engraved at large all over the silver band of his umbrella handle. When he left his umbrella outside, Kerrett (I had indicated the umbrella to him by a sign) just copied the lettering on one of the ordinary visitors' forms and brought it in. You will remember I treated it as an ordinary visitor's announcement. Kerrett has played that trick before, I fear." And he laughed again.

On the afternoon of the next day Reuben B. Hoker called on Hewitt and had half an hour's talk with him in his private room. After that he came up to me with half-a-crown in his hand. "Sir," he said, "everything has turned out a durned sell. I don't want to talk about it any more. I'm goin' out o' this durn country. Night before last I broke your winder. You put the damage at half-a-crown. Here is the money. Good-day to you, sir."

And Reuben B. Hoker went out into the tumultuous world.