Stories of the Sanctuary Club.

By L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace. Told by Paul Cato.

V.—"A HANDFUL OF ASHES."

KORT having been honourably acquitted of any share in the murder of poor Charles Ridley, the course of events at the Club resumed its normal routine. Kort himself was full of energy and devotion to the profession which he had adopted. In spite of my strong prejudice against him I could not but admit that he was more or less both Chetwynd's and my own right hand. Being a younger man he had been educated in a newer school of medical thought, and was more daring in his experiments for the cure of patients than either of us. Nevertheless, the late events had been the reverse of beneficial to the welfare of the Club. More than one member sent in his resignation—new members appeared at long intervals upon the scene, and there were occasions when I felt both grave and depressed with regard to our future.

"When once there is the slightest element of distrust started about a Club like ours its death-note is sounded," remarked Chetwynd to me one morning. "It is, however, a fine property, and if we cared to sell we could easily get a purchaser. By the way, has Kort said anything to you yet with regard to our new member?"

"Our new member?" I said. "It is good news in these gloomy times to hear of a new member. What of him?"

Chetwynd went to his table, pulled open a drawer, and handed me a letter.

"That came this morning," he said; "it happened to be addressed to me, so I opened it."

I took the letter from its envelope and read the following words:—

"Tower House, Inchampton, Surrey.

"Dear Sir,—I am anxious to avail myself of the advantages offered by your Club, and shall be glad if you will kindly send me particulars with prospectus. I make my application to you at the instance of Mr. Kort.

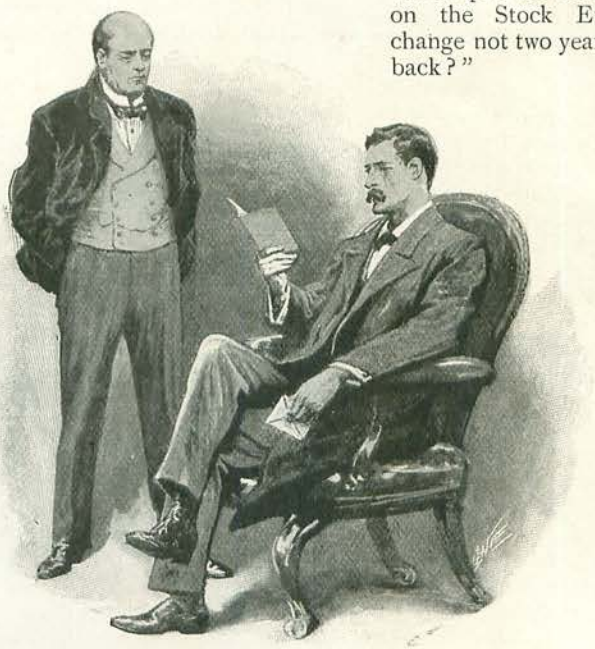
"Yours faithfully, Harold Beauchamp."

"Why didn't Kort mention the matter to me?" I asked.

"I cannot say. He spoke to me about it yesterday; he is anxious that Beauchamp should be admitted as soon as possible. The poor fellow seems to be very ill—a bad form of ataxic paraplegia. Ah! there is Kort just passing the window." Chetwynd hurried to the open window. "Come in, Kort, won't you?" he said, "and satisfy Cato with regard to the advisability of receiving Beauchamp as a member."

Kort dropped the cigarette which he was smoking, and entered through the open French window.

"Beauchamp would make a desirable member," he said at once, "and in admitting him we secure another member as well, no less a person than his uncle, the well-known Mr. Sutherland. You remember, do you not, what a pile he made on the Stock Exchange not two years back?"



"I TOOK THE LETTER FROM ITS ENVELOPE."

Chetwynd crossed towards the door.

"I am going out," he said. "I will leave you two to discuss the matter. Write by to-day's post, Cato, and send the necessary prospectus to Beauchamp." He closed the door behind him.

Kort went across to the mantelpiece, lit a

fresh cigarette, and offered me one, which I declined.

"Has it not struck you lately, Cato, that things have gone somewhat badly?" was his next remark.

"Can you be surprised?" I answered; "the tragedies that have occurred here are not likely to improve the status of the place. You, however, seem to be moderately complaisant over the matter."

"I am and I am not," was his answer. His voice dropped, he stood silent, then he said, rousing himself:—

"I have noticed, Cato, in your manner for some time the patent fact that you dislike me. I think I know your reason. It is this. Ever since I came to the Club I seem to you to be the herald of disaster. I see it myself, and I cannot tell you how distressed I am, for I need not say how truly I have the real interests of the Sanctuary Club at heart. I am glad to have the opportunity of saying this to you now, and at the same time to deplore the occurrence of those two most unfortunate affairs—I allude to the tragic death of poor Banpfylde and the no less terrible suicide of my old friend Charles Ridley. It has really seemed as if fate were against us in these matters, but you must remember that from the very nature of things a place like the Sanctuary Club lays itself open to occurrences scarcely ordinary. The members are abnormal, both mentally and physically."

"I suppose that is so," I replied, "but I am glad you see the coincidence. Until you became our partner, Kort, we were in a flourishing condition. I don't want to blame you, although at times I frankly admit that I have suspected you. Now, what about Beauchamp?"

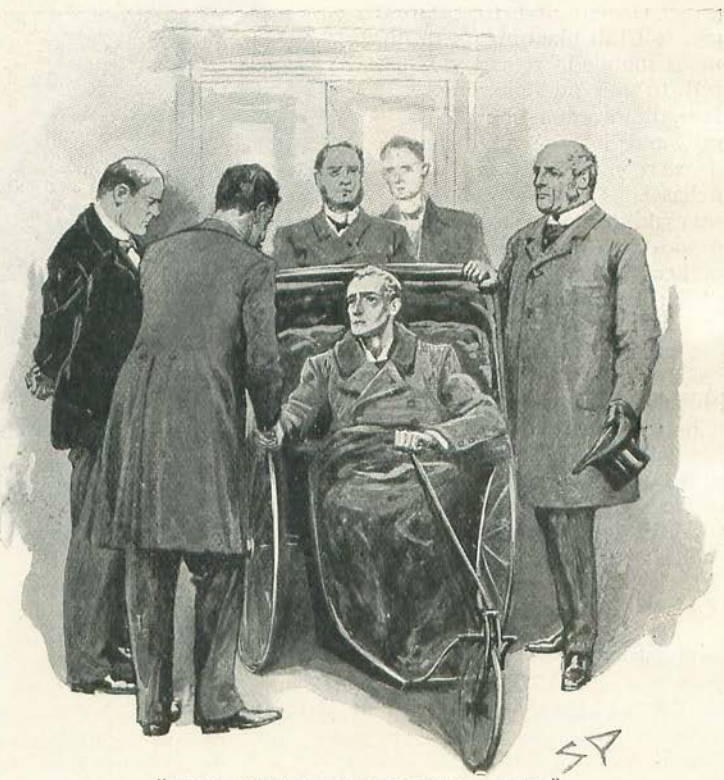
"He is a nice fellow, very ill, needs careful attendance, and there is nothing at all mysterious about him," was Kort's answer.

"Very well, I will write to him to-day."

I wrote to Beauchamp, inclosed the prospectus of the Club, and said we should be glad to admit him as a member.

He arrived in the course of a few days, and being unable to walk was wheeled into the Club in a chair. He was a young-looking man, but must have been over thirty years of age. His face was thin and very pale, his hair receded from his forehead, and was already slightly grey round the temples. Death was plainly written on his face. He was accompanied by a tall, stout, elderly man, who was introduced to us both as Beauchamp's uncle, the well-known Mr. Sutherland, of Stock Exchange fame. Sutherland had a somewhat hard cast of face, light, wide-open grey eyes, and a quick, keen, alert manner. The invalid, on the contrary, was very dreamy, and appeared not to take the slightest interest in his new surroundings. His chair was presently lifted up by his attendants, and he was conveyed to the rooms reserved for him.

On that very same day, and before we



"HE WAS WHEELED INTO THE CLUB IN A CHAIR."

doctors had assembled for our consultation over Beauchamp, I was in my private sitting-room when I heard the handle of the door softly turn and a light footfall sound on the floor. I turned my head in some surprise, for patients were not in the habit of entering my room without first knocking. Then I started to my feet.

"Mrs. Kort!" I exclaimed, "what can I do for you?"

She was slightly out of breath, and her blue eyes looked brighter than usual. There was a vivid spot of colour on each cheek, and I noticed that she had grown painfully thin.

"I am glad you are better," I continued; "welcome down amongst us once more. Why, you are almost a stranger; it is quite six weeks since I have had the pleasure of seeing you about the house."

"If you keep such an accurate memory with regard to my movements," she answered, slowly, "why are you not more careful of my health?"

"I careful of your health?" I exclaimed. "But, my dear madam, I have not the charge of your health; your husband treats you himself."

"My husband! Then that accounts," she said, slowly. She laid her slim hand on the top of a chair which stood near. "I told Horace several times lately that I particularly wished to be placed under your medical treatment, Dr. Cato. He replied that he was quite willing that it should be so, and said that he would himself ask you to visit me. When you did not come I sent my maid Susan for you several times, but I invariably had an answer back to say you would be with me as soon as possible; but you never came, never. Last night I dreamt that you wished to come, but were kept back by force, by strong means, so at danger to myself I have now come to ask you for the real explanation of your non-appearance. Yes, that is why I have come." As she uttered the last few words she paused, and that queer vagueness came into her voice which I had always noticed about her when I met her anywhere except in the Davos suite.

"What was I saying?" she asked me, in a piteous tone.

"Many and strange things," was my reply. "You wanted me to visit you, and I never came. You spoke of danger to yourself; pray go on, I am much interested."

"But I cannot recall any of those words. Where am I? What is wrong?" She looked wildly round her.

"Sit down," I said. I forced her into a seat, took her hand, and felt her pulse. The pulse was fluttering and uneven; I noticed also that the pulses in her temples were throbbing perceptibly.

"It is only what always happens," she said, faintly, "when I—when I——" She stopped and drew herself up with a look of affright. "What can be wrong?" she exclaimed. "What have I come to see you about?"

"In order to consult me about your health," I said, soothingly.

"Yes, yes," she said—she was evidently making a frantic effort to retain her fast-fleeting memory.

"It is going, going," she said, feebly; "this is always the case when I have——oh, I cannot remember anything more."

"Never mind," I said, "you will be all right in your own rooms. I will promise faithfully to visit you there within an hour; you had better go back at once."

"To my own rooms—where are they?"

"In the Davos suite of rooms in the Sanctuary Club. Go, my dear madam, you surely must remember."

"The Davos suite of rooms in the Sanctuary Club?" she said. She looked round her with a vacant expression. "Where is the Sanctuary Club? Where are the Davos rooms? Are we not in Vienna?"

"No, no; we are in England, and you are in the Sanctuary Club."

"We are not in England, we are in Vienna. I tell you I won't stay here, I won't. I hate this dreadful, dreadful place; it was here—it was here——" she grasped me by the arm, terror filling her eyes. There was nothing for it but for me to take her back to her own rooms. I drew her hand through my arm, led her gently upstairs, down the corridor which led to the Davos suite, and then, opening the door of the outer apartment, which was also kept at a high altitude, took her through to her rooms. The moment she entered the vestibule she became quieter, her nervousness vanished, the perplexity left her face, memory was evidently returning; she withdrew her hand from my arm.

"You are better?" I said.

"I am well," she replied, "or at least almost well. Dr. Cato, I have something most important to say to you. I want to consult you. Let us say, for the sake of expediency, that it is on the subject of my health. In one sense, too, that is true, but there is something you must know, something you must know *at once*. Will you stay and hear it now, or will you come later on?"

I thought of the consultation which was

pending with regard to Beauchamp, told her that I could not stay now, but would be back within an hour.

"Very well," she answered, sadly; "I am sorry you have to go, but I will faithfully expect you at the end of that time."

"You may assuredly do so," was my answer. I left the room.

She went as far as the door of her own apartment, and stood looking after me. The sadness and pathos of her attitude would be difficult to describe. I heard someone speak to her in a harsh tone from within—doubtless the disagreeable maid. She entered her rooms at once and shut the door.

A very few moments later we three doctors met in consultation over our new patient, Harold Beauchamp. His strange complaint had made great strides, and was evidently in the last stage. As we made our examination I noticed that Kort seemed unusually deferential, and had cast aside his ordinary somewhat overbearing and self-assertive airs. He yielded at once to Chetwynd's and my diagnosis, and asked what treatment we should recommend.

"Perfect rest, for one thing," said Chetwynd; "and as to drugs, there is only one in my opinion worth trying, and that is uranium nitrate. It has had a great reputation lately in similar cases, and I certainly advocate it from what I have seen of its effects. It ought to be given in good doses, say five grains three times a day, but we must carefully watch the results."

"I know the name in the Pharmacopœia, but have never yet prescribed it," I said.

"It is fairly new," replied Chetwynd. "Do you agree with this treatment, Kort?" he continued.

"Yes," said Kort.

We said a few more words, and a daily routine was marked out for the sick man, which would include as much amusement and fresh air as he had strength for. It was arranged that Mr. Sutherland, who seemed devoted to his nephew, should be his constant companion, and at present no special nurse was required. I then went away and, without saying a word to Chetwynd, went up at once to Mrs. Kort's rooms. I went through the ante-room and knocked at the door of her private sitting-room. The moment I did so it was opened by the maid.

"I have called to see Mrs. Kort," I said; "is she within?"

"My mistress cannot see you, sir—she is lying down."

"But she expects me," I said. "Have the goodness to say that I am waiting."

The woman withdrew, evidently with great unwillingness. She came back in a moment.

"My mistress is very sorry——" she began.

"No, I am not sorry," was the queer and almost reckless echo within the room. "I wish to see Dr. Cato—show him in, Susan, immediately."

The maid's dull, freckled complexion assumed a tinge of pink. She slowly withdrew from her position in front of the door and allowed me to enter.

"You can go, Susan," said her mistress.

I looked at Mrs. Kort in some astonishment. As a rule she walked with a slight stoop, as though her feebleness was so great that she could scarcely support the weight of her slim and willowy figure. She resembled at these times a lily with a broken stem. Now she was absolutely upright, her head well thrown back, her eyes intensely bright. She looked not only beautiful, but also in perfect health. Susan gave her an amazed glance. She then slowly, with manifest unwillingness, left the room. When she got as far as the door she turned and faced Mrs. Kort.

"You will suffer for this, madam," she said.

Mrs. Kort did not even glance in her direction.

"Go," she repeated. The woman went, shutting the door behind her.

"You are afraid of that woman?" I said.

"I am," she answered. "I am afraid of everyone in this house with the exception of yourself and Dr. Chetwynd."

"Believe me, Mrs. Kort," I said, "that if necessary we will protect you. You say you wish to consult me medically. I can scarcely take up your case without letting your husband know, but a patient is undoubtedly at liberty to choose her own physician."

"I told Horace," she answered, "that I particularly wished you to treat me, and he replied that he was quite willing that you should do so."

"Sit down, then, and tell me your symptoms at once."

She seated herself on the edge of a chair, clasping and unclasping her thin hands.

"Mine are not ordinary symptoms, and mine is not an ordinary story," she began. "To understand my symptoms you must know my story, and it is—oh, God! it is a *most terrible one!* I tell it you at the risk of my life, but I would rather do so than allow things to go on as they have been going on lately. You remember Mr. Ridley?"

"'GO,' SHE REPEATED."

"Mr. Charles Ridley?" I said.

"Yes; the man who was supposed to have died by his own hands."

I nodded. I felt my heart beat faster.

"I can throw light on that matter," she began; "I can also tell you something about myself. You wonder—I am sure you wonder—why I am well in these rooms, and why I am ill, miserable, almost imbecile, out of them. You wonder, do you not?"

"I have wondered very much," I replied.

"Well, I am prepared to give you the reason. I can stand this misery no longer. I would rather my wretched life came to an end. I will tell you and Dr. Chetwynd all. Can you both come up here to-night, and can you——"

The words had scarcely passed her lips before the door of the room was thrown briskly open, and Kort entered. I shall never forget the curious effect of his presence on his wretched wife. She had been bending towards me talking earnestly, but now she seemed to stiffen, as though lead were poured through her veins, the words froze on her lips, she gave a nervous laugh, and said: "Do you want me, Horace?"

"I want Cato," was his reply. He spoke cheerfully, but I noticed that his dark eyes flashed a lightning glance from one of us to the other.

"I wish to consult with you immediately, Cato. I am sorry, Isobel, to interrupt your *tête-à-tête*, but it is impossible to help matters."

"Your wife wishes to place herself under my care for a time," I said, rising as I spoke. "She tells me that she has alluded to the subject to you, and that you have made no objection. In nervous cases like hers a change of treatment often has the most beneficial result."

"You have no objection, Horace; you said so," was Mrs. Kort's remark.

"I should like to see her in consulation with Chetwynd," were my next words, "and to go very carefully into her symptoms."

"I make no objection," said Kort, with a shrug of his shoulders, "but at the first consultation it will be necessary for me to be present; you can then prescribe exactly what treatment you like, Cato; but come now at once. There is a marked change for the worse in poor Seafield, and I do not think he will last out the day."

Kort alluded to one of our consumptive patients who had long been in a dying con dition.

I rose slowly.

"With regard to Mrs. Kort, shall we arrange for a consultation this evening?" I said.

She was standing now at one of the windows. I saw her glance out into the lovely grounds, but I doubt if she saw anything; her face was the colour of death.

"Shall we consult over your wife this evening?" I repeated.

"As you please," he answered.

"Oh, thank you, Horace," she exclaimed, a ring of joy in her voice; "and you will come, Dr. Cato, you will be sure to come?"

She darted past Kort and seized both my hands.

"You will not fail me?" she said.

"Assuredly no," I answered.

"Whatever you hear?" she continued.

"Whatever I hear," I said. I left the room, Kort following me immediately.

"'YOU WILL NOT FAIL ME?' SHE SAID."

That evening, therefore, Kort, Chetwynd, and I saw her together in her bedroom. But I was circumvented after all. She was sitting up in bed looking listless and uninterested in everything. When we came in she scarcely noticed us, replied vaguely to all my questions, and watched her husband's face as though she would read the answers he wished her to give in his countenance. In the end we came away, Chetwynd fully convinced that the wretched girl was a confirmed lunatic and full of pity for Kort, whom he considered a most indulgent and self-sacrificing husband.

"My hope is," said Kort, after our consultation had come to an end, "that a long residence in the Davos suite, joined to absolute quiet and freedom from excitement, may gradually combat the worst symptoms from which my poor wife suffers. But, Cato," he added, "you must be cruel to be kind, and should she break out of her restraint and come to visit you, you must treat her wild words as you would those of any other person who is not responsible for her actions."

I held my tongue. Appearances were all in favour of Kort's statement, but I could not forget Ridley's words, and I wondered what had taken place at Vienna five terrible years ago.

Meanwhile, our new patient, Beauchamp, was going on fairly well. He was uncomplaining, cheerful, never alluding to his sufferings, satisfied with any small attentions which were paid to him, and, in short, as amiable a patient as we had ever admitted to the shelter of the Sanctuary Club. He came downstairs most evenings, and soon made himself a favourite with the other members. He was an accomplished musician, and often sat for hours at the piano playing a dreamy sort of music, and which he somewhat shyly informed us he had composed himself.

The custom of the firm was that after a careful consultation each patient was put under the special care of one doctor alone. Beauchamp, by his own and his uncle's desire, was attended entirely by Kort. This seemed natural enough, as Kort had been the one to introduce him to the Club, and Sutherland told me on one occasion that he knew Kort personally for several years. Sutherland himself after the first day or two turned out an agreeable member of our little community. He could tell good stories, could raise the laugh even at his own expense, and had a certain dry humour which, although somewhat caustic, also made him a rather brilliant member of society. He was devoted to his nephew, and although at first I had not been favourably impressed by him, when I saw him with poor Beauchamp, attending to his smallest whim, solicitous, more than solicitous, for his comfort, I took myself to task for my undue suspicions.

"What is the matter with me?" I thought. "Can all this be the effect that queer man Kort has over me? I wish, I do wish, I could induce Chetwynd to see the fellow through my glasses."

Some weeks after Beauchamp's admission I happened to go into the library one evening. I found the invalid there alone. He was listlessly turning the pages of an illustrated paper. As I entered he looked at me with tired eyes.

"How are you to-day?" I asked.

He forced himself to give a cheerful smile.

"I am afraid I am no better," he answered. "I do not seem to benefit from the treatment. Is there any chance for me, Dr. Cato?"

"I hope so," I answered, somewhat vaguely. Then I continued: "You must remember the old proverb, 'While there is life there is hope.'"

He shrugged his shoulders as if he disliked my stereotyped answer.

"That medicine, for instance, does me no good," he said again; "I don't seem actually to lose much ground, but then, on the other hand, I don't gain any." He sighed heavily and lay back in the deep chair in which he was seated. I went and stood by the fire. Now and then I glanced at him. He had all the marked symptoms of his distressing complaint—it was making rapid progress, although there was no reason to apprehend immediate danger. As I watched him the sick man once again raised his soft, brown eyes to my face.

"I wish to ask you a frank question," he said. "I am quite aware that I am not your patient, but I believe you will tell me the truth. How long have I to live?"

"That I cannot possibly say," was my answer. "I will be as frank as you desire. Tiresome and worrying as you find your life, your malady is not in itself fatal. You may have many years yet before you. I have even known cases like yours go on to old age."

"That would be a very melancholy state of things," he said, slowly. He paused again. "Now I will tell you," he continued, "why I asked that question. Two mornings ago I happened to overhear a conversation between Mr. Kort and my uncle. I did not catch everything they said, but I knew that they were discussing me and my symptoms, and I caught the words—'laryngeal spasm.' What did they mean by that expression? What is laryngeal spasm?"

"Nothing to alarm you," I said. "Do not worry yourself about things of that sort. Try and get some hobby to amuse yourself with."

I hurried off to find Chetwynd. These things were getting on my nerves—I scarcely knew what to do or what to think. When I entered

"WHAT DID THEY MEAN BY THAT EXPRESSION?"

my friend's consulting-room I found to my disappointment that he was out, and would not be in until the evening. About eight o'clock that same evening I met him. He told me immediately that Beauchamp was dead. As had been expected, a sudden spasm of the glottis had ended the scene.

While he was talking Kort entered.

"Yes," he said, "it is all over with our poor young friend. I am sorry for Sutherland, he is much distressed. By the way, he wishes to have the body removed to his own house in Surrey, preparatory to the funeral at Woking."

"Why at Woking?" I asked.

"Because Beauchamp left directions in his will that he was to be cremated. I will undertake the matter, and of course sign the death certificate, as I was with him at the last."

MR WALTER O'BRIEN.

Neither Chetwynd nor I had anything to say with regard to this, and Kort immediately left the room. The next morning the body of poor Beauchamp was removed from the Sanctuary Club, and I tried to banish his memory from my mind. This was not difficult, for at that time I had a great deal of work which occupied me. Several members were at last coming to the Club, and I had every hope that we were on the eve of another period of prosperity.

Kort was absent for a few days after poor Beauchamp's death, and it occurred to me that now would be the time to visit Mrs. Kort and get her to tell me what that secret was which lay heavy on her heart.

I cannot understand now why I did not avail myself of this opportunity, but excess of work certainly called off my attention into other channels, and in spite of myself I now and then inclined to Chetwynd's belief that the poor girl was really insane.

Beauchamp died in November, and it was, I remember well, on the 13th of the following December, about eleven o'clock in the morning, that the next scene in this queer drama took place. Chetwynd and I were together in my room when a servant entered with a card, saying that a gentleman was waiting to see me at once. I took up the card and read the following name:—

"MR. WALTER O'BRIEN,
"Home and Colonial Assurance Company,
"Royal Exchange Buildings, E.C."

"Show Mr. O'Brien in," I said to the servant. Then I turned to Chetwynd. "We may as well see him," I said, "but I conclude he is merely one of the usual touting insurance agents."

The next instant a middle-aged man, well dressed, entered the room. He stood for a moment looking from one of us to the other.

"I am Dr. Cato," I said. "You expressed a wish to see me; will you take a chair?"

He bowed and dropped into the nearest seat.

"I have called, Dr. Cato," he began, "as you see by my card, on behalf of the Home and Colonial Assurance Company, of which I happen to be the manager. I am anxious to have a conversation with you on a matter of the greatest importance, and I must ask you to oblige me with a private interview."

"I have no secrets from my partner, Dr. Chetwynd," I replied; "you can speak quite freely in his presence."

Mr. O'Brien looked uneasy, but presently, with a slight bow to Chetwynd, he began:—

"My inquiries are in connection with the late Mr. Harold Beauchamp, who died here last month, and upon whose life our company have issued a policy of fifty thousand pounds. An application has been made by Mr. Beauchamp's uncle, Mr. Sutherland, of Ray Park, Surrey, through his solicitors, for the money. Mr. Beauchamp left, we understand, a will in which Mr. Sutherland is his sole heir. Now, certain rumours with relation to Mr. Sutherland's past, with which, gentlemen, I need hardly trouble you, have made us delay

in paying the insurance, and we are bound to make every investigation. I understand that Mr. Beauchamp died in this house. Are you two doctors certain that he died of natural causes?"

"Mr. Harold Beauchamp died of laryngeal spasm following ataxic paraplegia," I answered, quickly. "But as our other partner, Mr. Kort, was attending him, I will ask him to come here at once."

I rose and rang the bell, and told the servant to ask Mr. Kort to come to see me without delay. In a very few moments he entered the room. I introduced him to Mr. O'Brien, and told him the object of O'Brien's visit. He looked quietly at the manager of the insurance company, and did not speak for a moment.

"You suspect Mr. Harold Beauchamp of not having died of natural causes?" he said then, slowly.

"Hardly that," answered Mr. O'Brien, "so much as we desire to be absolutely certain that his death was due to natural causes before paying such a large sum of money to his uncle."

"I presume you saw my certificate of death?" continued Kort; "and if you did you know the cause of death that I assigned."

"We saw the certificate, of course, Mr. Kort, and I need hardly say that we do not for a moment doubt the genuineness of the paper; but what we want to know is this: would it have been possible to administer any poison which would simulate such a cause of death?"

"Certainly not," answered Kort. "I was with Beauchamp when he died—it was a perfectly natural process. May I ask why you suspect foul play?"

"For two reasons—the first relates to Mr. Sutherland's private affairs; the second to the fact of the rapid cremation of the body."

"The cremation was in accordance with the dead man's will, which, of course, you are at liberty to read," was Kort's reply.

"I am aware of that," said Mr. O'Brien, now speaking a little testily; "nevertheless, the cremation makes any analysis impossible—therefore I have come here to-day to make these inquiries."

"You have your answer from Mr. Kort," I said.

"You are prepared to swear to the impossibility of foul play?" he continued, turning to Kort.

"I am."

"Very well. I thank you, gentlemen. That is all." He rose, and with an expression of evident dissatisfaction and perplexity, took up his hat and left the room.

"This is a queer business," said Kort, turning to me. "Did you, Cato, happen to know that Beauchamp's life was so heavily insured?"

"I had no idea of such a thing," was my reply; "but, of course, the suggestion of poisoning is absurd."

"Oh, quite," he replied, and after a few more words he left us.

"Another queer affair," I said to Chetwynd, in a desponding tone. "What is the doom which hangs over us? The Club cannot long go on with such tragedies and suspicions filling the very air."

Chetwynd made no reply for a moment.

"Too queer," he said at last; "these cannot be mere coincidences. Cato, I do not know what you will think of me, but I am at last inclined to share your fears."

"About Mrs. Kort? About poor Charles Ridley? About——"

"About everything."

I had never seen my friend look more grave than he did at this moment.

"I must think the matter out," he said. "I will come and see you again when I have formed a more definite conclusion. At present all is hazy, and yet, and yet—things are queer, too queer, too queer." He left the room. As he did so I noticed that strange look in his eyes which they always wore when he was absorbed in a deep problem.

It was not until the afternoon of that same day that I saw him again. He entered my consulting-room and turned the key in the lock.

"Why do you do that?" I asked.

"Because I have something to say, and we must not be disturbed. Listen. Whether right or wrong, I have discarded the idea of Mrs. Kort's insanity. There are several matters which much disturb me. Kort will ruin this Club, and us also, if we are not careful, but we must be wary and sure of our facts. Now, I have something else to tell you."

"What?" I inquired.

"It has to do with poor Beauchamp. It may be quite a wild idea, but here it is. I went to the dispensary just now in order to look at the bottle containing the uranium nitrate, the drug which, you remember, Beauchamp was taking. I cannot, of course, say

how much of the medicine was used for him, because Kort made it up from the crystals in the bottle, but it struck me that as the bottle was nearly full when Beauchamp came, it looks uncommonly low now."

"Good heavens!" I cried, "do you mean that you suspect that the poor fellow may have been given too big a dose of it by Sutherland?"

"It is possible that Sutherland got hold of the bottle, for I think Kort trusted him absolutely. From O'Brien's remark there is something odd with regard to Sutherland's past life, and he alone, so far as we can tell, is benefited by the death of his nephew. One thing at least is certain—if such a dose were given to Beauchamp it would certainly kill him."

"Since you do not know the amount that was originally in the bottle, I do not see what use there is in saying anything about it," I replied, gloomily.

Chetwynd paced up and down the room quickly.

"You can prove nothing," I continued; "the body has been cremated, and, therefore, all trace of poisoning gone."

"Has it?" he muttered. His steps quickened. Suddenly he stopped and turned to me.

"Do you know that uranium nitrate is a non-volatizable metal?" he said, fixing his eyes on my face, and pronouncing each word slowly.

I stared back at him in astonishment, not seeing at first what his meaning was. Then I sprang to my feet.

"What!" I cried, "you mean that it would be still in the ashes?"

"Yes, I mean that. If my suspicion that Beauchamp's death was caused by an excessive dose of uranium nitrate is correct, a careful quantitative analysis of the ashes might reveal some interesting evidence."

"By Jove! Chetwynd, that is an idea. Yes, it would certainly be the case. What do you mean to do?"

"I shall sift this matter thoroughly. I have been slow in my suspicions, but now that they are aroused I promise you I will not let the grass grow under my feet. I mean to go immediately to town to see O'Brien. Come, let us go together."

Five minutes later we were rapidly driving towards the City.

"You know," said Chetwynd, as we drove along, "that recent experiments have abundantly proved that a metal can be isolated from ashes when not volatilized by cremation, and certainly uranium would not be. Silver, copper, and many other metals would act in the same way, but the great point in this case will be the fact that uranium is such a rare metal that no counsel for the defence could possibly uphold a plea of its accidentally having found access to the ashes."

"I see," I replied, with enthusiasm; "yes, if any very large quantity is found in the ashes our case will be proved."

"Our case?" he said, glancing at me.

"Yes," I replied, "for my private impression is that Kort has a hand in this matter. I cannot help suspecting the man. I believe there is an evil influence over our house, and the sooner the man who exercises this terrible power is exposed the better."

"But Kort does not benefit in the least," said Chetwynd, in a gloomy tone.

"Nevertheless, the two men were in league," was my answer.

We arrived at the office of the insurance company, and were at once shown into the manager's private room. His amazement when Chetwynd disclosed his idea was beyond description.

"Really," he cried, "it is scarcely credible. One would have thought that cremation, at any rate, would have destroyed for ever all evidence of poisoning if a suspicion of such were to exist."

"In the case of uranium nitrate such would not be the case," replied Chetwynd.

O'Brien turned suddenly to me.

"Do you, Dr. Cato, corroborate Dr. Chetwynd's statement?" he asked.

"Certainly I do," I answered. "My friend is one of the first analytical chemists in London."

"Very well," he replied, snatching up his hat, "I shall act on this immediately. Can I rely on you to make this analysis if I obtain possession of the ashes?" he added to Chetwynd.

"Certainly, but it will be a police affair, of course, and the Government analyst, Russell, would have to do it; but as he happens to be a great friend of mine, I daresay he will allow me to help him if you mention the special details."

He hurried off, and we returned to the Club, deciding that it would be wisest not to mention anything about the matter to Kort.

The insurance company and the Home Office evidently wasted no time, for at six o'clock on the following evening a letter was brought to Chetwynd by special messenger.

"Here you are, you see," he said, handing it across to me. I read as follows :—

"Somerset House, W.C.

"DEAR CHETWYND, — The Home and Colonial Assurance Company have acted on your advice—an ingenious idea certainly, and worthy of you. They have just received the necessary authority from the Home Office, and Beauchamp's ashes will be here at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. If there is anything in this, a more formal analysis will doubtless be necessary, but in the first instance I should greatly value your assistance and advice. Can you be with me sharp at the hour I have mentioned?

"Yours very truly,

"MAURICE RUSSELL."

"You will go, of course?" I said, handing it back to him.

"Certainly," he replied, "and you had better come too, Cato. Russell knows your name, and will have no objection to your being present."

At ten o'clock the following morning Chetwynd and I left the Club together. The mission before us absorbed every thought. Surely there never was a more unique one—the analysis of the ashes of a cremated man, on the result of which the most astounding issues might hang.

We reached Somerset House punctually at eleven o'clock, where Russell received us. Chetwynd introduced me, and asked if I might be present at the analysis.

"Certainly, Dr. Cato," he replied. "I know of you by reputation, and am glad to make your acquaintance. Come over to the laboratory now, and we will discuss the matter thoroughly." As he spoke, Russell crossed the room, opened the door, and led us down a passage into a splendidly-fitted laboratory on the same floor. As he closed the door of this room he spoke.

"Before we begin," he said, "in an analysis of such great importance we should clearly decide on our line of action. The substance we have to deal with is limited in amount, so we cannot afford to make mistakes. My idea is this. Whatever salt of uranium was administered, we shall now from the ashes doubtless find it in the form of oxide U_3O_8. I propose to filter this out as a soluble nitrate, reduce it down to the dioxide, and then assume the oxygen required which would bring it up to the trioxide with permanganate of potassium."

"Exactly," replied Chetwynd, "that is the process I should myself suggest."

"Very well. Shall we each analyze a portion and then compare results? But I must first find out if the ashes have arrived. They were to be brought up by a man from Woking: the messenger ought to be here now."

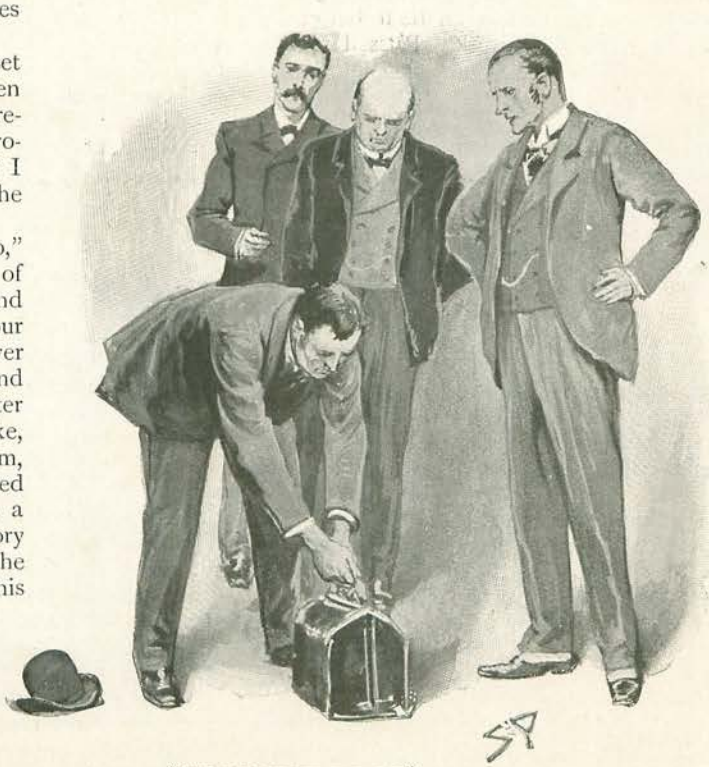
Russell had just pressed the bell to inquire about the ashes, when there was a knock at the door, and a man entered carrying a black bag.

"Are you the messenger from Woking?" asked Russell.

"Yes sir," answered the man.

"Have you got the ashes?"

"Yes, sir." The man opened the bag and



"THE MAN OPENED THE BAG."

produced a metal cinerary urn. On the outside was engraved the name, "Harold Walter Beauchamp."

"This is the certificate, sir, from the manager," he said, handing a paper as he spoke to Russell.

"Very well; that will do."

The man retired, and Chetwynd and Russell began their investigations, while I watched them both with breathless interest.

Chetwynd was the first to remove the lid of the urn. He took a small quantity of the ashes on a spatula and made a solution of the nitrate.

"Now for the ferrocyanide of potassium," he said to me; "we should get in any case a brown precipitate." He added the reagent to the test-tube, and instantly a dense precipitate fell.

He uttered a cry.

"Absolutely loaded with it," he said, in a whisper.

I continued to watch him as with deft hands he drew the mystery that surrounded Beauchamp's death from the incinerated remains of his own body. It was a strange and wonderful piece of detection!

Meanwhile Russell in a distant part of the laboratory was making another careful analysis. At the end of an hour both men had completed their work. Russell rapidly ran over his calculations and in silence handed the paper across to Chetwynd, who compared it with his own figures.

"Six hundred and eighty-three grains!" cried Chetwynd; "a lethal dose with a vengeance."

As he spoke he handed the paper to me. I stared at it without speaking. Though I had been practically convinced that foul play had been used, now that the ugly and terrible demonstration of it stared me in the face, without the possibility of error, I seemed scarcely able to realize it.

"We must take these papers immediately to O'Brien," said Chetwynd. "He is the person to take the next step in this terrible affair."

Thanking Russell for his assistance, we both left the room. A few moments later we were in the office of the insurance company. We told O'Brien what had taken place. He listened with intense eagerness. We then showed him the figures. His amazement was almost beyond words.

"A warrant must be taken out immediately for the arrest of Sutherland," he said; "that is my affair. As to Kort, whether he is guilty or not, he must be subpœnaed to appear at the trial. I do not think we can do more at present."

The insurance manager was in a state of excitement impossible to describe.

"Will you wait in town for me, gentlemen?" he said; "it may be two or three hours before I can get the necessary formalities completed, but this very day that scoundrel shall be locked up."

We promised to return again to the office in a short time, and he left us.

To arrange the formalities and obtain the required assistance of the law was after all but the work of a few hours, and early that same afternoon we, a silent party, travelled down to Sutherland's place, Ray Park, in Surrey. I scarcely dared contemplate the wretched man's hideous fate should nothing transpire to clear him of the awful charge on which he was to be arrested. Hiring a fly at Inchampton we drove to Ray Park, some two miles from the station. It was a small but pretty red brick house, and scarcely fulfilled the impression its somewhat pretentious title gave it.

O'Brien rang and knocked loudly. Almost instantly the door was opened, and to our utter amazement and consternation the tall figure of Kort stood before us.

"In the name of all that is wonderful, what has brought you here?" he cried, looking from one of us to the other, and as far as we could tell not in the least suspecting the hideous truth.

"We want to see Sutherland," I answered. I had scarcely said the words before the officer of the law who accompanied us stepped forward.

"I must see Mr. Sutherland without a moment's delay," he said. "I hold here a warrant for his arrest on suspicion of causing the death of the late Harold Beauchamp by the administration of poison."

"What, has the news got out already?" said Kort, his face turning from red to white and from white to red again. The police officer forced his way into the house. Kort stood for a moment as if he would keep him out, then stepped back to let him pass.

"You can all come in," he said. "I did not know the terrible news had got abroad. I am stunned by this. The wretched Sutherland sent for me this morning. You are too late, officer. Come, I have something to show you."

As he spoke Kort walked down the hall, and threw open a door.

"He is beyond your power—look!"

We all found ourselves in one of the

reception-rooms. Seated in a chair, with his head bowed upon the table and one arm hanging loosely, sat Sutherland. I uttered a cry as I raised him. The man was dead.

"Yes, he is dead," said Kort. "He sent for me early this morning in order to confess his crime, and knowing how I might possibly be implicated, wrote a long confession saying that when he had done so he should give himself up. He has, as you see, but to the judgment of no earthly tribunal. I had left him for a few moments, and found him thus a short time before you arrived. Smell this glass—it contained hydrocyanic acid, painless and swift."

"THE MAN WAS DEAD."

While Kort was speaking the inspector glanced through a sheet of paper which lay beside the dead man on the table.

"Yes, it is a full confession," he said. He read aloud as follows :—

"I, Edgar Walter Sutherland, hereby of my own free will, without reservation or equivocation, confess the terrible crime I have committed — the murder of my nephew, Harold Beauchamp. Without collusion or complicity I designed and carried it out alone. I obtained the uranium nitrate from the dispensary of the Sanctuary Club and administered two large doses myself. I had got into severe monetary trouble, and the insurance money on my nephew's life was the only means by which I could put myself straight.

"I write this confession now in order to clear from blame or suspicion Mr. Kort, on whom, owing to the circumstances of the case, such might possibly fall. I cannot bear the load of guilt any longer. My mind is going. God help me.

"EDGAR WALTER SUTHERLAND."

A silence followed the words of the police-officer. He looked at O'Brien.

"Well, sir," he said, "we cannot arrest a dead man."

"And as your company will not have to pay the insurance money in any case now, I presume the law will have nothing further to do in the matter," said Chetwynd.