

Ambrose Pratt



The Veiled Man

Ambrose Pratt

The Veiled Man



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338094865

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

[CHAPTER V.](#)

[CHAPTER VI.](#)

[CHAPTER VII.](#)

[CHAPTER VIII.](#)

[CHAPTER IX.](#)

[CHAPTER X.](#)

[CHAPTER XI.](#)

[CHAPTER XII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIV.](#)

[CHAPTER XV.](#)

[CHAPTER XVI.](#)

[CHAPTER XVII.](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIX.](#)

[CHAPTER XX.](#)

[CHAPTER XXI.](#)

[CHAPTER XXII.](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV.](#)

[CHAPTER XXV.](#)

[CHAPTER XXVI.](#)

CHAPTER XXVII.
CHAPTER XXXVIII.
CHAPTER XXIX.
CHAPTER XXX.
CHAPTER XXXI.
CHAPTER XXXII.
CHAPTER XXXIII.
CHAPTER XXXIV.
CHAPTER XXXV.
CHAPTER XXXVI.
CHAPTER XXXVII.
THE END

CHAPTER I.

[Table of Contents](#)

He stopped short and turned about. One of the busy stream of workmen amongst whom he had been moving jostled and almost overset him. The laborer rapped out an oath and passed on.

Simon Vickars staggered to the grass border of the asphalt footpath, and there, out of danger of further collision, peered at the crowd with anxious eyes. Six o'clock had struck, but the summer sun still fiercely blazed. "Who called me?" he muttered, and dabbed his perspiring face with a moist handkerchief.

A young woman presently attracted his attention. She carried a valise in one hand, and waved the other excitedly aloft. She was vulgarly dressed, and rather pretty.

"Nell!" he exclaimed.

She hastened up to him, panting for breath.

"There," she gasped, and dropping the valise at his feet she began to fasten under her hat a coil of hair which her exertions had caused to wander.

Simon Vickars picked up the valise, and without a word strode across the lawn at a right angle from the hive-like path. The girl followed him, a sullen expression gradually settling upon her face. The man's want of consideration annoyed her. She had taken a deal of trouble to serve him, and he had not even thanked her.

"Where on earth are you going?" she called out in angry tones.

Simon Vickers halted. He showed her a pallid countenance. "When did it happen?" he demanded.

"This after—about two." The girl forgot her irritation in concern. She had not seen the man so deeply moved before. "I kidded them I was a new servant just come," she continued glibly. "Luckily ma was out. They kept me for a goodish bit puttin' me through a reg'lar catechism about you. But I swore I'd never set eyes on you in me natural, an' as soon as I could—while they were searching your room—I sneaked to mine, shoved on me hat, collared that bag o' yours you asked me to keep for you, and did a git through the window and out the back way. They'd left a trap in the parlor to watch the front o' the house, but never thought o' the back, the fools."

Simon Vickers nodded his approval of her cleverness. "You must have been waiting here for hours," he said.

"Yes, I have, just hours, and it is as hot as blazes, too. And I nearly missed you in the end, in the crowd; you're so little, you see. It was just a chance I spotted you. You'd got a hundred yards ahead as it was. But I knew you by your hat."

Vickers removed the article mentioned, a straw, with a scarlet band, and mopped his forehead. His first panic had subsided, but he still trembled a little.

"You are a good sort, Nelly. I knew I could depend on you," he said.

The girl flushed with pleasure. "That's all right." She waved her hand as though to deprecate further acknowledgment. "What are you going to do?"

"Slip up the cops, if I can, curse 'em. I think I can. I've had some experience."

"How will you?"

"By doing the thing they are least likely to expect me to."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out some gold coins. "Ten quid," he observed, after counting them. "They are all I have in the world, but take what you want, Nelly; take what you want."

He extended his open palm towards the girl. Nelly, however, with an indignant gesture put her hand behind her back.

"What do you take me for?" she cried.

"The brick you are." The man had expected his offer to be refused. He grinned and slipped the coins back into his pocket. "Never mind, old girl, I'll give you a royal time as soon as I come back," he added warmly.

"Are you goin' away, Simon?"

"I'll have to for a bit, my girl."

"Where?" Nelly looked inclined to cry.

"Up country somewhere."

"Not out of the country?"

"Strike me—no."

Nelly brightened up. "You'll write to me; won't you?"

"Rather." He held out his hand. "Good-bye, lovey. I'll have to leave you now."

"Without a kiss?" The voice was pitiful.

Simon Vickars kissed her on the mouth. Nelly watched him through her tears until he had disappeared from her view. Long, however, before that moment arrived Simon had forgotten her. He was wondering how he could make good his boast and escape the police.

"They will look for me in the old haunts, search the trains, the intercolonial boats, the public houses, and cheap hotels. That's a dead cert. Well, I guess I can't do better than put up for the present at the swellest place in the city!"

Three cabs were drawn up in line before the Domain gates. Simon chose the second and got in. "Hotel Australia, cabby," he said cheerily. Three minutes later he climbed the hotel steps, paid four shillings at the office, and was handed the key to a room on the fifth story. He signed his name in the book as Samuel Carson, and immediately afterwards entered a waiting lift.

A tall man, with high cheekbones and a villainous squint, who was seated in the vestibule awaiting his turn at the public telephone, watched Simon's every movement, with interested eyes. When Simon had disappeared, he arose and sauntered quietly over to the office.

"Just let me see that book, please," he said to the clerk. "Humph!" he muttered presently. "Samuel Carson, eh! What's the artful up to now, I wonder?"

"I beg your pardon, Detective Hammond," said the clerk.

The tall man gave the clerk a look of concentrated rage. "I just remarked," he replied in tones of savage scorn, "that I'm needing a bell-ringer to dog my heels and advertise the fact that I am a detective. Are you looking for a job, Mr. Jones?"

The clerk turned crimson, but said nothing.

Five hours later Detective Hammond was invited to a conference in the office of his chief.

"I have sent for you, my dear Hammond," said the head of the police, "because you are the only officer I have who never botches his work."

"Something special?" asked the detective.

The chief sighed. "The Artful," he answered. "A warrant was issued this morning—felony too—he has been uttering valueless cheques. You were out—so I gave the business to Chalmers, who was idiot enough to let himself be tricked by a woman—the 'Artful's' mistress, I believe. We have her, but the bird has flown. I want you to take the matter up."

Detective Hammond made a grimace. "A tough job," he remarked. "There is not a smarter criminal in Sydney than Simon Vickers."

"The more credit to you, my dear fellow, if you effect his capture."

"Oh, I'll do that all right. Can I see the woman?"

"Here is an order. She is at the Central."

Hammond put the order in his pocket. "Any reward?" he asked.

"Five pounds."

"Good. I'll claim it in the morning."

"You know something then?"

"I know the Artful, sir; well enough, at any rate, to make a shrewd guess at what he'd likely to do under the circumstances. Have the trains been watched?"

"Yes, and the boats, too."

"What about the pubs?"

"They have all been visited."

"Then my work is easy. I won't even bother about looking up the woman. I'll have the Artful lodged at the Water

Station before breakfast in the morning. Will that do?"

"Do! Have a cigar, Hammond," cried the chief warmly. "No, take a couple. I wish I had a dozen more of your sort in the force."

Hammond suppressed a grin, and absently-minded abstracted four cigars from his chief's box. Ten minutes later he was seated in a comfortable armchair in the private office of the Hotel Australia, smoking and softly chuckling to himself. He would have arrested Simon Vickars there and then, except that such a capture would have appeared a trifle too smart. He wished to make his chief believe that he had exercised his genius for at least half a dozen hours. He had, in fact, a considerable reputation to sustain, and he did not care to monkey with so valuable an asset.

By-and-bye he fell asleep. A waiter, acting on instructions, aroused him soon after daylight. Detective Hammond spent the next hour glancing over a newspaper that was still damp from the press. Six o'clock struck. The detective rolled up the paper and put it in his pocket. The journal was the property of the hotel, but his acquisitive facility was handsomely developed. He strolled out of the office and began to climb the stairs. His shoes were shod with felt, so he made no noise, and he did not trouble to inform the nodding porter of his intentions. He arrived at the fifth storey somewhat out of breath, but he was rested and ready for anything when he reached the door of Simon Vickar's room. There he paused for a moment in order to oil his master-key, and also to loosen his handcuffs and revolver.

The lock, answering his expectations, moved soundlessly. The detective pushed open the door and entered the room. Simon Vickars was asleep. The detective shut and locked the door without arousing the sleeper. He then approached the bed, pistol in hand, treading like a cat. In the half light of the chamber the Artful's face looked strangely small and childlike. It seemed a shame to disturb such peaceful slumbering. Hammond paused and eyed his quarry keenly. He thought it possible he might be shamming sleep. But no, the narrow chest rose and fell too regularly, and the long black eyelashes rested upon the cheek without a quiver. Hammond felt rather pitiful. It was such a small man, such a small face, and not ill-looking. A secretive, shut in face, perhaps, yet less wicked than cunning. "What business has such a hairless little rat to be a criminal," reflected the detective.

"Come, wake up," he commanded gruffly.

The long black lashes lifted and a pair of soft brown eyes gazed up at the detective.

"Simon Vickars," called Hammond. "The game is up. I arrest you in the Queen's name."

The little man raised himself upon his pillow. "Hammond!" he gasped.

"At your service."

Simon rubbed his eyes. "I was dreaming," he muttered.

"Were you?"

"What am I wanted for?"

"Forgery and uttering. I warn you that whatever you say will be used against you. Get up and dress yourself, look alive."

Simon Vickars looked hard at the detective. "I was dreaming," he said, and of a sudden his lips began to tremble and his eyes filled with tears. "I was dreaming of my poor old mother." He covered his face with his hands and burst into a storm of weeping. Hammond gave a disgusted smile and put his revolver in his pocket. "Stow that," he growled. "Try and be a man."

"I—I—can't. I'm a guilty wretch I—I—know," sobbed Simon. "But I'm that miserable!"

"Get up."

Simon with one hand plucked off the bedclothes, and then very slowly put his feet to the floor. His body was shaking like a shrub in a gale; he still kept his face hidden.

"Hand me my trousers," he entreated piteously. He had slept in his shirt.

The trousers were hanging at the foot of the bed. Detective Hammond moved to procure them, and like an arrow Simon Vicars leaped at his throat. The detective was a powerful man, but he was taken entirely unawares, and before he could collect his energies his neck was imprisoned in a steel grip. The "Artful" moreover had attacked him from the side, and, with a desperate wriggle ere the struggle had well begun, managed to get astride his victim's back, and to wind a pair of sinewy legs around the detective's middle.

Hammond tore at the hands which bound his throat; he failed to remove them; he felt for his revolver, it was barred in his pocket with a knee, against which he pushed and hammered in vain. He tried to shout for help, but not a sound escaped him. He was choking. He made a tremendous effort and staggered on a blind impulse towards

the door, clutching madly at the air with frantically extended hands. He fell ere he reached it, face downwards on the carpet, utterly insensible.

Simon Vickars arose, and stealing to open the door, peered out. The corridor was deserted.

Returning, he bound the detective's hands and legs with strips torn from a sheet, and carefully gagged his victim, who was now breathing heavily, with a toothbrush wrapped in a towel. With a strength amazing in so small a man, he then lifted the unconscious body, and, having bestowed it upon the bed, bound it to the posts by hands and feet. Ten minutes later Simon was dressed and ready for the street. He wore a check suit, a crush hat, a small black moustache, and an imperial. He searched the detective's pockets, and removed therefrom the morning newspaper which Hammond had abstracted from the office, a revolver, the detective's badge of office, a cigar, and a handful of silver change.

Simon thereupon pulled the curtains of the bed about his yet unconscious victim, and departing from the room, valise in hand, locked the door behind him. In the passage he lighted a cigar.

A man carrying an armful of boots was the only person he encountered until he had reached the ground floor. There, however, he was stopped by the hall porter.

"You are up early, sir," said the man suspiciously.

But Simon knew how to treat fellows of that sort.

"What the devil has that to do with you?" he snapped.
"Call me a cab."

The hall porter was confounded. He apologised and obeyed. Simon drove straight to the Metropole Hotel, an establishment only second in importance to the Hotel Australia. He paid ten shillings, and was conducted to a handsomely furnished apartment on the ground floor. His name was now George Lamb.

Sitting down he began to read the advertisements in the newspaper which had been stolen twice. Presently, in a column of "Wanted," the following caught his eye:—

"Wanted for the s.s. *Moravian*, sailing to-day at noon, three cabin stewards. Apply personally with references before 8 a.m. at the offices of Dalgety and Company Ltd."

Simon Vickars put down the paper and sprang to his feet. His eyes roved the room and discovered a desk, pens and ink. From his valise he produced a bundle of blank letter heads, stamped with the address of several fashionable London hotels. Simon Vickars had always made it a practice of carrying away some letter paper from each hotel he visited. By dint of writing hard and fast, the clock had only struck a quarter past seven when he issued forth from the Metropole armed with testimonials which announced to the unwary that one, Simon Le Cuvrier had been variously employed at the Hotel Cecil, the Carlton, St. Ermin's, the Hotel Victoria, and the Savoy, at all of which places he had given quite astonishing satisfaction.

Dalgety and Company's manager at once perceived that he had discovered a treasure.

Behold Simon, therefore, an hour and a half later, clad in a steward's uniform of the s.s. *Moravian* (the trousers were

many sizes too large for him), busily engaged in polishing glass and silverware on the steamer's lower deck, explaining his position meanwhile to a pair of brother menials similarly employed, in a tongue admirably adapted to his most recent alias, "Mais oui, messieurs. Zis gonntree ees not feet for un chien—ze dog—to lif in. I hat him. I come her a—vat you say—a gentilhomme, gentleman. But I my money spend—sacre! who care? Zey take him—my money. Ah, oui! To me, zey say, 'Va t'en!' I am gentlemon—vraiment, mais, vat to do? you see me now—ze steward. Bah! Mais donc, que voulez vous? Et is necessaire zat I go home."

CHAPTER II.

[Table of Contents](#)

The second steward interrupted the flow of Simon's romantic assertions as the little man was on the point of declaring himself of royal origin. Under the spur of a sympathetic audience Simon's imagination always strode about in seven league boots. The second steward held in his hand an open book. He eyed Simon for a few seconds and then referred to his book.

"Simon Le Couvrier," he said.

"Monseigneur," replied Simon, bowing to the floor. "Ja'i l'honneur de vous saluer."

"I don't understand French, and I am going to call you plain Simon—your second name is too much of a corker for me," said the second steward. "Come along, and I'll show you the cabins you'll have to look after."

Simon grinned and shrugged magnificent contempt behind his superior's back. He made haste, however, to follow him, and once out of sight of those whom he had been feeding with lies, he became cringingly obsequious. The second steward expanded under such treatment, and having completed his rounds, he invited Simon to his cabin and treated him to a glass of absinthe.

As they emerged they were accosted by a giant, a young and extremely handsome man, whose strong chin, steely blue eyes and aquiline nose made Simon think of a Viking. "I'm looking for the second steward," he announced.

"I am the second steward, sir."

"I,"—the young man gave a charming smile which revealed a set of teeth, small and of dazzling whiteness. "I am the Earl of Cawthorne. My cousin, who is an invalid, you know, is just coming on board. I wish to be sure that his cabin is in order, and I would also like to see his cabin steward."

The second steward was a snob. He almost bent in two. "I have had your lordship's cousin's cabin prepared for your lordship's cousin's reception under my personal supervision," he said fawningly. "Your lordship will, I am sure, be pleased with it. This man"—he indicated Simon—"will be your lordship's cousin's cabin steward, and I have already given him instructions to do everything for your lordship's cousin that he possibly can."

The second steward lied regarding the special instructions, but Simon was not a man to contradict his master. He stepped forward.

"Per—r—meet me to assure monseigneur zat I vill wait always upon monseigneur's cousin avec du grand plaisir," he said, and bowed low, his hand upon his heart.

The blonde giant took a sovereign from his waistcoat pocket and dropped it into Simon's palm.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Plait—il, monseigneur. Je me nomme—Simon Le Couvrier."

"I don't understand French," replied the Earl. "I gather, though, that your name is Simon, eh?"

"As monseigneur pleases."

"Ah," said the Earl, "here is my cousin. Perhaps you will lead the way to his cabin."

But at that moment the second steward, received a peremptory message from his chief, and he was obliged to hurry away. He muttered "No. 40" in Simon's ear and fled.

Simon perceived a stretcher advancing towards him, carried by two men attired in ambulance uniform. The stretcher was entirely covered with a circular canvas screen. Simon was ignorant of the whereabouts of No. 40, but he reflected that it had been engaged for the cousin of an earl, so he led the way to the boat deck.

He found the cabin without difficulty. It was the largest on the steamer, faced across a narrow passage by two others that occupied in the aggregate a similar space of deck room. The stretcher bearers entered and deposited their burden on the couch. The Earl followed them; Simon remained at the threshold looking in. The Earl turned down the bedclothes of the cabin's single cot, while the bearers removed the canvas canopy from the stretcher. Simon perceived the recumbent figure of a man whose height erect could not have been less than six feet. His figure, however (he was clad in pyjamas of fine silk), was painfully lean and shrunken. Upon his head he wore a velvet cap, from the peak of which fell a smooth impenetrable veil that perfectly concealed his face. The bearers tenderly raised the invalid and conveyed him to the cot. The Earl covered his cousin's moveless body with the bedclothes, and gave the ambulance men a sovereign a piece. They immediately withdrew.

"Come in, Simon," said the Earl.

Simon entered.

"Please close the door."

Simon obeyed.

The Earl bent over his cousin. "John, old chap," he said gently, "this is your cabin steward. His name is Simon."

Simon bowed. The veiled head slowly turned, and Simon became conscious that the invalid could see him. The Earl looked silently from one to the other. At the end of a minute Simon began to feel uncomfortable under the scrutiny of unseen eyes; at the end of two he felt miserable; at the end of three beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead; his imagination was stirred, uncannily stirred; the wildest fancies darted into his mind; the silence grew unsupportable.

"Monseigneur," he stammered, turning with a helpless gesture to the Earl.

A voice of penetrating sweetness issued of a sudden from the cot.

"Simon has a bad conscience, I'm afraid, Jack; but that should not prevent him from making a good servant. Where is your cabin, Jack?"

"Immediately opposite," replied the Earl. "I have not seen it yet."

"Then do so now, and look after our luggage as well."

"Will you be all right, old chap."

"Certainly."

The Earl left the cabin, and Simon hastily prepared to follow. He hated the idea of being left alone with that veiled figure on the cot, but he was not permitted to escape so easily.

"Simon," said the sweet voice. It possessed a curiously compelling faculty that voice, sweet as it was.

Simon faced about.

"Monseigneur," he stammered.

"Come here."

Simon trembled and obeyed.

"Your moustache and imperial, Simon, are false," said the voice.

Simon uttered an irrepressible cry, and sprang in sudden panic for the door, his one thought to escape.

"Stop, fool!" The voice pierced to the very bottom of Simon's heart. He stopped; his face was ashen white. "Shut the door; lock it if you like. I am not a policeman—idiot!"

Simon locked the door, and, standing in the shadow, fumbled with shaking fingers in his hip pocket for Detective Hammond's revolver. He did not know what to expect, but he would not be arrested if he could help it. That would mean for him at least five years' penal servitude, one of which must be spent in solitary confinement. Rather death.

"Better allow your revolver to remain where it is," advised the voice.

"Good God," Simon blurted out, "what eyes you must have."

"So you are not a Frenchman," mocked the voice. "I guessed it."

"What in the devil's name are you?" demanded Simon, of a sudden stirred to rage.

The Earl's cousin sat up in his bed. He took from the pocket of his pyjama coat a cigar case, and opened it, selected a weed with care. Simon noticed that his hands were curiously deformed, the fingers were twisted, the palms and backs were seamed with flaming scars.

"A match, please."

Simon remembered that he was a servant. "Now he will have to raise his veil," he thought. But the Earl's cousin after accepting Simon's match-box, put one hand to his veil. Simon saw something move. Almost involuntary he drew closer, and made the astonishing discovery that the veil was constructed of stiff leather, and that it was furnished with a brown glass vizard and a sliding mouthpiece.

The Earl's cousin inserted one end of the cigar into the open mouthpiece and applied a lighted match to the other. Before he puffed out the smoke, he always withdrew the cigar.

Simon watched him, breathing shortly. He was too astounded even to speculate about the motive for using so curious a helmet. The figure inspected the glowing cigar tip, and extinguished the match.

"You look surprised," he observed.

Simon gasped.

"I have a kind heart and an ugly face, Simon. There you have my secret in a nutshell."

Simon thought of smallpox, eczema and leprosy. He shuddered and fell back.

"My face," proceeded the invalid, "is deformed, not diseased. But it is so positively ugly that I wear this veil, even when sleeping. But my heart is so much comparatively kinder than my face is ugly that, unless necessity compels, I never inflict my society upon the world. Out of sight out of mind; you know the proverb, Simon. Now, as I am superlatively sensitive (mark the degrees, Simon, and remember them. I am positively ugly, comparatively kind,

superlatively sensitive.) Now, since—to repeat myself—I am superlatively sensitive, I prefer that my existence should be forgotten by the world; I wish, in fact, to live unknown and unremarked. People, you see, are of three classes, Simon; kind people, thoughtless people, and cruel people. The kind would would ostentatiously ignore my misfortune, the thoughtless would try to console me, the cruel would pity me. The whole d——d lot would torture me. You grasp me, Simon?"

Simon nodded; he was incapable of speech.

"It is scarcely half past ten yet," resumed the other. "I had myself carried aboard two hours before sailing time in order to escape remark. I am not really much of an invalid, Simon, though I do suffer from heart disease; but I shall not leave this cabin until we reach England. In the meanwhile you will be my sole attendant. My cousin will so arrange that you will have no other work to do."

"Ah!"

"Your principal duty will be to defend this cabin from the curiosity of others—servants and passengers alike. Of course my cousin the Earl will always be welcome here, but if you ever permit another person to intrude upon my hermitage, I shall give you five pounds instead of fifty at the end of the voyage!"

"Ah!"

"You will, of course, bring me my bath, meals, and so on, and serve me in other ways; but you will have lots of leisure on your hands, so you need not look so discontented."

"I—I—am not discontented, sir. I—I was thinking——"

"What?"

"That something might happen to prevent me leaving Sydney."

The veiled figure started. "No, no—what! go through all this again!" he cried in tones of deep emotion; "I could not. Impossible, Simon, you must not be caught."

Simon's eyes gleamed. "If the police were to search the ship, they would be sure to find my valise!" he muttered.

"Where is it?"

"For safety's sake I gave it to another steward to mind for me."

"He was very like you in appearance, Simon, eh?"

Simon paled. "You must be the devil himself," he cried.

"Go and bring your valise here immediately. Lock the door behind you!"

When Simon returned the veiled man was lying down again, but he still smoked.

"Put your bag under the clothes at the foot of my bed," he commanded quietly.

Simon obeyed.

"My name is John Deen."

"Yes, sir."

"Why do the police want you, Simon?"

"Forgery, sir."

"So! a respectable crime. Well, well."

"A man must live," muttered Simon.

"Certainly, Talleyrand to the contrary, notwithstanding."

"Talleyrand was a shallow wit, Mr. Deen."

"A profound cynic, Simon."

"But an insincere philosopher; he committed worse crimes than theft."

A knock sounded on the door, it opened, and the Earl of Cawthorne entered.

"Baggage is all right, Jack," he announced. "But I shan't be able to get your books here for a while yet. The cabin trunks are all in my diggings. Simon can help me with them later on."

"Thank you, John."

"The police have just unearthed a stowaway from the steerage," went on the Earl.

"Ah," murmured Simon.

"A little rat of a man he looks, but for all that a desperate criminal. It seems that he half murdered a detective at some hotel here early this morning."

"What is his name, John?"

"Simon Vicars. Well, ta-ta, Jack. I'll look you up again as soon as we start."

"Don't hurry back, John!"

When the door closed, Simon dropped limply on the couch; his knees had declined to support him.

"We are in luck's way, Vicars," said Mr. Deen.

But Simon buried his face in his hands and fell to crying like a child.

The veiled figure uttered one short laugh, and then was silent.

CHAPTER III.

[Table of Contents](#)

The more Simon thought the matter over, the more puzzled he became. The cousin of an earl had helped him to evade justice—why? It was impossible to take Mr. Deen at the foot of the letter and attribute his peculiar kindness to a hypersensitive repugnance to confide his misfortune to a second strange servant. Simon was too old and experienced a world's Genizen to swallow so flimsy an excuse? He rejected it with contempt, in fact. But he looked for an answer to his question in vain. The veil, too, troubled him greatly. He was willing to believe his master's face unutterably hideous, but he shrunk from accepting mere ugliness as an explanation of such absolute retirement as Mr. Deen indulged in. It was beyond all reason. Men are gregarious animals. Moreover, Mr. Deen professed no hatred of this kind. Simon's instincts were mostly parasitical. Since early manhood, he had preyed furtively and constantly upon his fellow-beings, without rage, but also without pity and without remorse. He was a born spy, an accomplished blackmailer, and a gambler to the soles of his feet. He possessed an unlimited faith in the wickedness of human nature. Immediately he felt safe, and within a week he felt safe, his instincts prompted him to seek a victim whose blood he could devour. He discovered two—the Earl of Cawthorne and his cousin, the veiled man, John Deen.

It may be objected, why the Earl? But if Simon had been asked why the veiled man, he could not have answered. As well ask a blind leech travelling in a certain direction

through a forest whither he proceeds. Like such a leech, Simon smelt blood, and to pursue the simile, like the leech Simon followed his nose. That is to say, he watched and he waited. Whenever he could he watched through the keyhole of Mr. Deen's door; but he never saw his master without his veil. Mr. Deen appeared to be a book worm. Except during meal hours, and when exercising with the dumb-bells, as he did for half an hour both morning and evening, he was always reading. His literary tastes were Catholic. His library embraced Tolstoi, Paul de Cock, Balzac, and Herbert Spencer.

As time passed Simon wondered at him more and more. He seemed so contented with his solitude, so happily reconciled to his oblivion, that it was hard to conceive that he had ever been acquainted with another fate. Moreover; his temper was extraordinarily placid. Sometimes he admitted feeling unwell, and the more frequently as the steamer approached the tropics, but he did not complain; he merely mentioned his illness as an excuse for lack of appetite, it seemed that he was incapable of being irritated or put out. Simon tried to annoy him without success. One day as a final experiment, he spilt a cup of hot tea upon Mr. Deen's knees.

"It is quite a relief, Simon," said the veiled man, "to find that you can be clumsy at times." Simon was, in fact, an almost perfect servant. But on that occasion he left the cabin in white fury at his failure. In despair he began to watch the Earl. Lord Cawthorne repaid his efforts, however, scarcely less poorly than Mr. Deen. The young man's life was as simple and as open as the sunlight. He was easily

the most popular person aboard the boat. Whenever he appeared men and women clustered round him, and, as if on a preconcerted signal, there arose the sounds of gay talk and merry laughter. Apparently he had no vices. He did not drink, he never gambled, it was very seldom that he smoked. Twice a day he visited his cousin, but his visits were short, and his conversation related only to details of the daily run, or jesting remarks about the other passengers. Simon was sure of that, because he had reduced eavesdropping to an exact science.

It was all very puzzling, very exasperating; for although Simon could discover nothing wherewith to foster his suspicions, he smelt a mystery more acutely with the passing of each day. Before the steamer reached Capetown he felt convinced that he was dealing with a pair of the deepest and most consummate scoundrels in existence, and his desire to fathom the secret had developed into an absorbing passion.

The crisis came, near Teneriffe, on one evening of those balmy days for which the Canaries are famous the wide world over.

The veiled man, throughout the day, had evinced a strangely restless mood. Instead of reading he had paced the floor of his shadowy cabin for hour on hour, and since the fall of dark he had stood before his open porthole, peering out from a narrow slit in his parted curtains, at the thoughtless folk who walked the deck. Simon had come and gone, watching and wondering. The Earl had bidden his cousin good-night, with but a curt response. At 11 o'clock, however, Mr. Deen drew back and closed the shutter of his

port. He set his electric fan going, rang the bell, and sat down upon a canvas chair.

Simon entered, discreet servility personified. "Bed, sir?" he asked, after bolting the door.

The veiled man in his own peculiar fashion was lighting a cigar.

"Presently," he replied. "Sit down. I wish to speak to you."

Simon having complied, Mr. Deen leaned back in his chair and fixed the cabin steward with his vizzor. Simon had endured many such stares, but had never grown quite accustomed to them nor lost in their infliction an uncanny sense of being measured by unearthly eyes.

"You suit me very well, Simon," said the veiled man.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Deen."

"And I am glad that you are glad; and if you are sincerely glad, your gladness and my gladness may continue."

"I—I beg your pardon, sir." Simon looked puzzled.

"The faculty of adapting yourself to circumstances is your forte, Simon. My genius lies in the opposite direction. I propose that we join forces."

"Sir—I——"

"I don't need to be informed that you have failed to understand me, Simon. Permit me to be more explicit. I am offering you £10 a month, and a yearly holiday of fourteen days to enter my service. S—s—h, man, don't be in a hurry to accept. I should require you to devote your time to me, and I cannot deny that you will lead a gay life as my servant. When we get to England I intend to shut myself up in a wing of my cousin's castle. Your duties there will be the same as here, with this difference—here I have imposed no

bridle on your tongue; there I shall insist upon directing the course of your imagination. In other words, you may lie about me as much as you please, but I must be your fiction editor."

Simon had told so many highly-colored stories to his brother stewards about the veiled man that, although he believed in his heart that Mr. Deen was only guessing brilliantly, he could not repress a guilty start nor prevent his cheeks from coloring.

"I—I assure you, sir——" he began.

"Quite so," interrupted the other. "You are incapable of falsehood, eh? But one of these days, Simon, you will recognise at all events the futility of lying to me."

"Mr. Deen—I——"

"One moment, Simon. Hear me to the end. You have a peculiar talent which I have been delighted to remark—and—and (the veiled man laughed) baffle, Simon. You are a born sp—— No, no; we must not be uncharitable; let us say a born detective, Simon."

Simon's mouth gaped open, but he did not speak. He was utterly confounded.

"I have no idea," resumed the veiled man, "of permitting so choice and rare a gift to run to seed. You shall spy to your heart's content, Simon, but understand me fully—for me, not against me."

Simon had nothing to say.

The veiled man sighed. "A Sydney heart specialist has given me two years to live," he said slowly. "If, during those two years, you serve me faithfully, Simon, you will be the richer by one thousand pounds."

Simon found his tongue. "Oh, sir," he cried, "I shall serve you to the death."

"Say unto death, Simon." The voice cut the air like a sweeping blade. "Let me but suspect you of seeking to forestall your legacy, and I shall destroy you."

Simon was very properly indignant. "If you think me so base——" he angrily commenced.

"I do not, Simon. But since I have warned you—take care!"

"It is true that I am a forger, Mr. Deen. All the same you have no right——"

A cold laugh checked his flow of words, but at the same time it made Simon really enraged; so angry, indeed, that he lost his self-control.

"Anyway, what are you?" he grated out. "Birds of a feather, flock together."

"Thank you, Simon," replied the veiled man, very softly. "You have done me a real kindness. For weeks past I have been vainly endeavoring to read your mind concerning me."

"You're so mighty clever. All of us can't have earls for cousins, though, and wear masks."

"Poor Simon, how mad you look!"

Simon gnashed his teeth, and altogether reckless now, cast behind him the last shred of caution. Bending forward, and sneering like a caged wolf, he hissed—

"Fair play's a jewel, Mister Deen. You have my secret. What is yours?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow, Simon."

"Why not now? Is it murder?"

"No, the reverse."