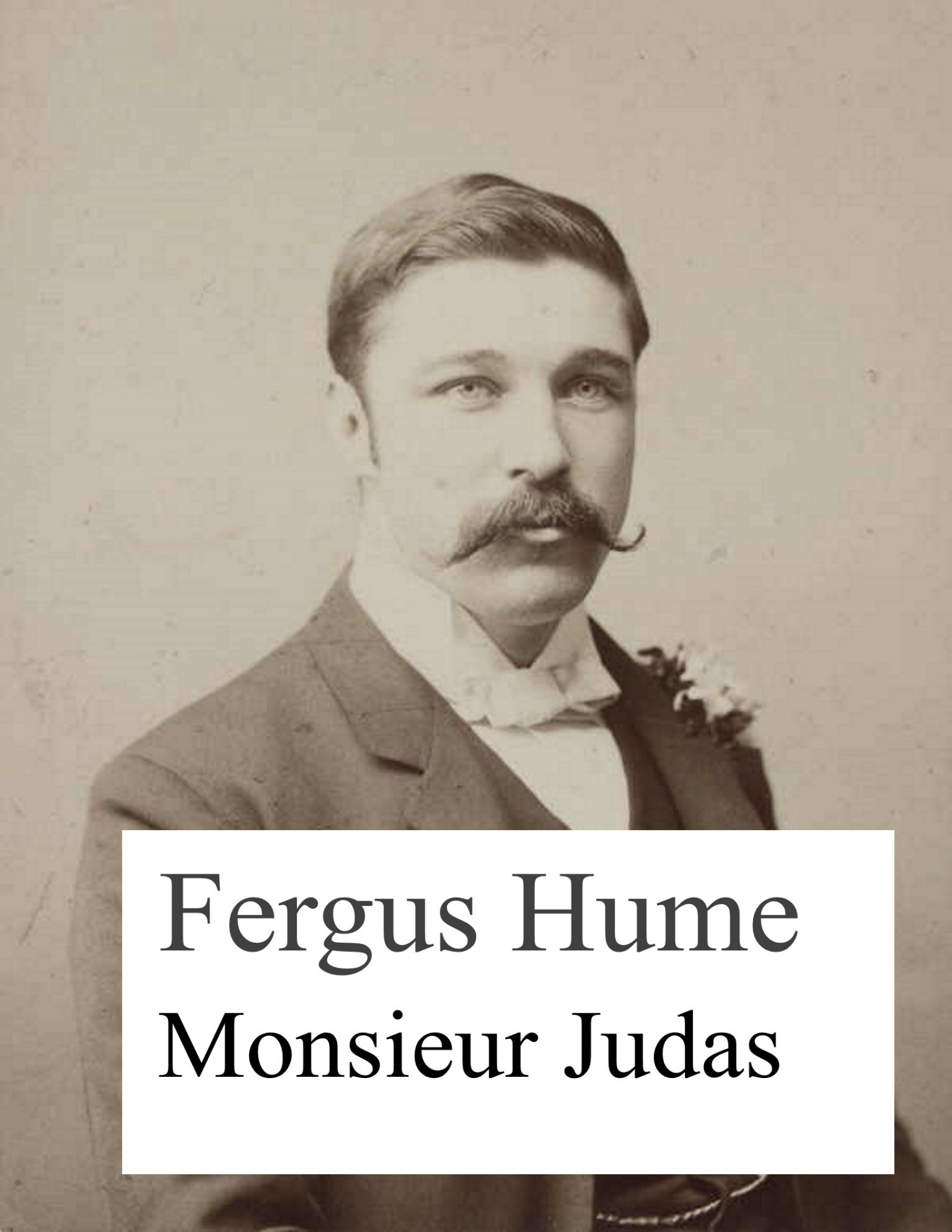

Fergus Hume

Monsieur Judas

Monsieur Judas

Monsieur Judas

A Paradox

The Jarlchester Mystery

Not an important place by any means, this sleepy little town lying at the foot of a low range of undulating hills, beside a slow-flowing river. A square-towered church of Norman architecture, very ancient and very grim; one principal narrow street, somewhat crooked in its course; other streets, narrower and more crooked, leading off on the one side to the sheltering hills, and on the other down to the muddy stream. Market-place octagonal in shape, with a dilapidated stone cross of the Plantagenet period in the centre; squat stone bridge, with massive piers, across the sullen gray waters; on the farther shore a few red-roofed farmhouses; beyond, fertile pastoral lands and the dim outline of distant hills.

Picturesque in a quiet fashion certainly, but not striking in any way; a haven of rest for worn-out people weary of worldly troubles, but dull—intensely dull—for visionary youth longing for fame. The world beyond did not know Jarlchester, and Jarlchester did not know the world beyond, so accounts were thus equally balanced between them.

Being near Winchester, the ancient capital of Saxon England, it was asserted by archaeologists that Jarlchester, sleepy and dull as it was in the nineteenth century, had once been an important place. Jarl means Earl, and Chester signifies a camp; so those wiseacres asserted that the name Jarlchester meant the Camp of the Earl; from which supposition arose a fable that Jarl Godwin had once made the little town his head-quarters when in revolt against pious Edward who built St. Peter's of Westminster. As Godwin, however, according to history, never revolted against the King, and generally resided in London, the authenticity of the story must be

regarded as doubtful. Nevertheless, Jarlchester folks firmly believed in it, and sturdily held to their belief against all evidence to the contrary, however clearly set forth.

They were a sleepy lot as a rule, those early-to-bed and early-to-rise country folk; for nothing had occurred for years to disturb their sluggish minds, so they had gradually sunk into a state of somnolent indifference, with few ideas beyond the weather and the crops.

Then Jarlchester, unimportant since Anglo-Saxon times, suddenly became famous throughout England on account of "The Mystery," and the mystery was "A Murder."

On this moist November morning, when the whole earth shivered under a bleak gray sky, a crowd, excited in a dull, bovine way, was assembled in front of the "Hungry Man Inn," for in the commercial-room thereof, now invested with a ghastly interest, an inquest was being held on the body of a late guest of the inn, and the bucolic crowd was curious to know the verdict.

A long, low-ceilinged apartment this commercial-room, with a narrow deal table covered with a glaring red cloth down the centre; four tall windows looking out on to the crowd, who, with faces flattened against the glass, peered into the room. A jury of lawful men and true, much impressed with a sense of their importance, seated at the narrow table; at the top thereof, the coroner, Mr. Carr, bluff, rosy-faced, and eminently respectable. Near him a slender young man, keen-eyed and watchful, taking notes (reported by the crowd outside to be a London detective); witnesses seated here, there, and everywhere among eager spectators; but the body! oh, where was the body, which was the culminating point of interest in the whole gruesome affair? The crowd outside was visibly disappointed to learn that the body was lying upstairs in a darkened room, and the jury, half eager,

half fearful, having inspected it according to precedent, were now assembled to hear all procurable evidence as to the mode in which the living man of two days ago became the body upstairs.

First Witness.—Boots. Short, grimy, bashful; pulls forelock stolidly, shuffles with his feet, is doubtful as to aspirates, and speaks hoarsely, either from cold—it is raining—or from nervousness either of the jury or of the body; perhaps both.

"Name? Jim Bulkins, sir. Bin boots at "Ungry Man' fur two year'n more come larst Easter. Two days back, gen'man—him upstair—come 'ere t' stay. Come wi' couach fro' Winchester. Ony a bag—leather bag—very light. Carried 't upstair fur gen'man, who 'ad thir'-seven. Gen'man come 'bout five. 'Ad dinner, then wrote letter. Posted letter hisself. Show'd 'im post orfice. Guv me sixpence; guv me t'other fur carr'in' up bag. Seemed cheerful. Went t' bed 'bout nine. Nex' mornin' I went upstair with butts. Gen'man arsked fur butts t' be givin pusonally t' 'im 'cause 'e were perticler 'bout polish. Knocked at door; n' anser. Knocked agin; n' anser. Thought gen'man 'sleep, so pushed door to put butts inside; door were open."

Coroner.—"What do you mean by the door being open?"

Witness.—"Weren't locked, sir; closed t' a bit—what you might call ajar, sir. Entered room, put down butts; gen'man were lyin' quiet in bed. Thought 'e were sleepin' an' come downstair. This were 'bout nine. At ten went up agin. Knocked; n' anser. Knocked agin; n' anser. Went into room agin; gen'man still sleepin'. Went to wake 'im an' found 'e were ded. Sung out at onct, an' Mr. Chickles 'e come up."

Juryman (sharp-nosed and inquisitive).—"How was he lying when you saw him first?"

Witness.—"Bedclose up t' chin, sir. 'Ands and h'arms inside bedclose; lyin' on back—bedclose smooth like. Know'd 'e were ded by whiteness of 'is face—like chalk, sir—h'awful!"

Coroner.—"Are you sure deceased asked you to give him his boots personally next morning?"

Witness.—"Yes, sir—said 'e were vury perticler."

Coroner.—"Did he seem to you like a man intending to make away with himself?"

Witness.—"No, sir. Quite lively like. Sed as 'ow 'e were goin' to look roun' this 'ole nex' day, sir."

Coroner (pompously).—"And what did the deceased mean by the expression 'this hole,' my man?"

Witness (grinning).—"Jarlchester, sir."

Great indignation on the part of the patriotic jury at hearing their native town thus described, and as Boots is still grinning, thinking such remark to be an excellent joke, he is told sharply to stand down, which he does with obvious relief.

The next witness called was Sampson Chickles, the landlord of the "Hungry Man." A fat, portly individual is Mr. Chickles, with a round red face, and a ponderous consciousness that he is the hero of the hour—or rather the minute. "Swear Sampson Chickles!" Which is done by a fussy clerk with a rapid gabble and a dingy Bible—open at Revelations—and Mr. Chickles, being sworn to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, gives his evidence in a fat voice coming somewhere from the recesses of his rotund stomach.

"My name, gentlemen, is Sampson Chickles, and I've lived in Jarlchester, man and boy, sixty years. But I keep my health wonderful, gentlemen, saving a touch of the—"

Coroner.—"Will the witness kindly confine himself to the matter in hand?"

Witness (somewhat ruffled).—"Meaning the dead one, I presume, Mr. Carr. Certainly, Mr. Carr; I was coming to that. He—meaning the dead one—came here two days ago by the coach from Winchester. There is, gentlemen, no name on his bag—there is no name on his linen—no letters, no cards in his pockets—not even initials, gentlemen, to prevent his clothes being stolen at the wash. He never mentioned his name, Mr. Carr. I was going to ask him next morning, but he was dead, and therefore, gentlemen, not in a position to speak. As far as I am concerned, Mr. Carr, the dead one has never been christened. The mystery—meaning the dead one—has no name that I ever heard of, and was spoken of by me and my daughter (who may know more than her father) as the gentleman in No. 37. I only spoke to the dead one twice, Mr. Carr and gentlemen; once when I arranged about terms—thirty shillings a week, gentlemen, not including wine—and again when I asked him if he had enjoyed his dinner—soup, fish, fowl, and pudding. Gentlemen, he had enjoyed his dinner."

A Juryman (hungry-looking, evidently thinking of the dinner).—"Was he cheerful, Mr. Chickles?"

Witness.—"Jocund, sir, if I may use the term. Merry as a lark."

Facetious juryman suggests wine.

Witness (with mournful dignity).—"No, sir! Pardon me, Mr. Specks, he had no wine while he was in this house. His explanation was a simple one,

gentlemen—wine did not agree with his pills—tonic pills, Mr. Carr—one to be taken before bedtime every night."

Coroner (with the air of having found something).—"Pills, eh? Did he look ill?"

Witness.—"Not exactly ill, Mr. Carr; not exactly well, gentlemen. Betwixt and between. Weak, sir. His legs shook, his hands trembled, and when a door banged he jumped, gentlemen—jumped!"

A Juryman.—"Then I presume he was taking tonic pills for his constitution?"

Witness.—"Well, yes, Mr. Polder, yes, sir. There is the box of pills—tonic pills, as he—meaning the dead one—told me. Found in his room, gentlemen—on the chest of drawers—after his death."

Inspection of pills by jury. Great curiosity evinced when pills (eight in number) appeared to be like any other pills. The London detective, however, secured the pill-box after inspection, and sat with it in his hand thinking deeply.

Mr. Chickles, having given all his evidence, retired, with the full consciousness that he had given it in a masterly fashion; and his daughter, Miss Molly Chickles, plump, pretty, and a trifle coquettish, was duly sworn. At first she was rather bashful, but having found her tongue—a task of little difficulty for this rustic daughter of Eve—told all she knew with many sidelong glances and confused blushes—feminine arts not quite thrown away on the jury, although they were to a man married and done for.

Said Molly, in answer to the Coroner:

"My name is Mary Chickles. Father calls me Molly. I am the daughter of Sampson Chickles, and barmaid here. I knew the deceased, but he did not tell me his name. He arrived here two days ago—on Tuesday, at five, by the coach. He came into the bar, and asked me if he could put up here for a week. I told him he could, and called father, who arranged about the terms. He then went up to his bedroom and came down to dinner at six. After dinner he went into the parlour, and I think wrote a letter. After doing so he asked me where the post office was. I sent him with Boots, and heard afterwards that he posted his letter. On his return he sat down in the bar for a few minutes. There was no one there at the time. He seemed to me to be very weak, and told me his nerves were shattered. I asked him if he had consulted a doctor. He replied that he had done so, and was taking tonic pills every night before he went to bed. I said that I hoped he took them regular, as it was no use unless he did so. He assured me that he always took one pill every night without fail. He mentioned that he was going to stay for a time in Jarlchester, and hoped the quiet would do him good."

Coroner.—"Did he say he was down here for his health?"

Witness.—"Not exactly, sir; but he talked a good deal about his nerves, and such like. He said he was going to stay a week or so, and expected a friend to join him shortly."

Coroner.—"Oh! a friend, eh! Man or woman?"

Witness.—"He did not say, sir."

A Juryman.—"When did he expect this friend?"

Witness.—"He said in a few days, but did not mention any special time. After a short conversation he went to bed at nine o'clock, and next morning father told me he was dead."

Coroner.—"Did he appear gloomy or low-spirited?"

Witness.—"Oh, dear no, sir. A very pleasant-spoken gentleman. He said his nerves were bad, but I was quite astonished at his cheerfulness."

Coroner.—"Did he say anything about the next day?"

Witness.—"Yes, sir. He asked if there was anything to be seen in Jarlchester, and when I told him about the church, he said he would look it up next day."

A Juryman.—"Do you think he had any intention of destroying himself?"

Witness.—"Not so far as I saw, sir."

Coroner.—"He did not mention anything about the letter?"

Witness.—"Not a word, sir."

A Juryman (facetiously).—"Did you think him good-looking, Miss Molly?"

Witness (tossing her head).—"Well, not what I call handsome, sir; but there's no knowing what other girls think."

With this parting shot, Miss Chickles retired to her usual place in the bar, and gossiped to outsiders about the present aspect of the case, while Sergeant Spills, the head of the Jarlchester police force, came forward to give his evidence. A crisp, dry-looking man, the Sergeant, with a crisp, dry manner, and a sharp ring in the tones of his voice; economical in his words, decisive in his speech.

"Charles Spills, sir, sergeant of the police in Jarlchester. Jim Bulkins reported death of deceased. Came here, saw body lying in bed. Clothes drawn up to chin. In my opinion, deceased died in his sleep. Examined bag

of deceased. Contained linen (not marked), suit of clothes (not marked), toilet utensils of the usual kind. Drawing block and some lead pencils (much used)."

Coroner (prompted by London detective).—"Were there any drawings?"

Witness.—"No, sir."

Coroner.—"No sketches or faces on the block?"

Witness.—"No, sir! Clothes worn by deceased—dark blue serge suit, double-breasted."

Coroner.—"Any name on the clothes?"

Witness.—"No, sir! Tag used to hang up coat, on which tailor's name generally placed, torn off. Searched pockets; found penknife, loose silver (twelve shillings and sixpence), and box of pills laid before the jury. Silver watch on dressing-table—silver chain attached—silver sovereign purse containing six sovereigns. Nothing else."

Coroner.—"Nothing likely to lead to the name of deceased?"

Witness.—"Absolutely nothing, sir. Searched, but found no name. Inquired—discovered no name. Case puzzled me, so wired to London for detective—Mr. Fanks—now sitting on your left."

Sergeant Spills having thus discharged his duty, saluted in a wooden fashion, and substituting Joe Staggers, coachman, for himself, took up a rigid attitude beside him, like a toy figure in a Noah's ark.

Evidence of Joe Staggers. Horsey gentleman, large, red, and fat; smothered voice, suggestive of drink; a god on the box-seat behind four horses, but a

mere mortal given to drink when on the ground.

"Joseph Staggers, sur. 'Ees, sur! Druv the coaach fro Winchester t' Jarlchest'r these ten year an' more. Two days ago—it were Toosd'y, cos t' bay 'oss cast a shoe—I were waitin' at station, an' gen'man—the corpus—come up t' me, an' ses 'e, 'Jarlchest'r?' inquiring like. "Ees, sur,' ses I, an' up 'e gits an' off we goes. 'E sat aside me an' talked of plaace. 'Ees, sur. Ses 'e: 'This are foine arter Lunnon."

Coroner.—"Oh, did he say he had come from London?"

Witness (doggedly).—"'E ses what I sed afore, sur. Talked foine, sur; but didn't knaw a 'oss fro' a cow."

Mr. Staggers' evidence unanimously pronounced by jury to be worse than useless, an opinion not shared by Mr. Fanks (of London, detective), who scratched down something in a secretive little book with a vicious little pencil.

Coroner.—"Call Dr. Drewey."

A most important witness, Dr. Drewey, he having made a post-mortem examination of the body, and the jury, hitherto somewhat languid, now wake up, Mr. Fanks turns over a new page in his secretive little book, and Dr. Drewey, bland, gentlemanlike, in a suit of sober black, and gravely smiling (professional smile), gives his opinion of things with great unction.

"I have examined the body of the deceased. It is that of a man of about eight-and-twenty years of age. Very badly nourished, and with comparatively little food in the stomach. The stomach itself was healthy, but I found the vessels of the head unusually turgid throughout. There was

also great fluidity of the blood, and serous effusion in the ventricles. The pupils of the eyes were much contracted. Judging from these appearances, and from the turgescence of the vessels of the brain, I have no hesitation in declaring that the deceased died from an overdose of morphia or of opium."

Coroner.—"Then you think the deceased took an overdose of poison?"

Witness (with bland reproof).—"I say he died from an overdose, but I am not prepared to say that he took it himself."

A Juryman.—"Then some one administered the dose?"

Witness.—"I can't say anything about that."

A Juryman.—"When do you think the deceased died?"

Witness.—"That is a very difficult question to answer. In most cases of poisoning by opium, death takes place within from six to twelve hours. I examined the body of the deceased between one and two o'clock the next day, and from all appearances he had been dead ten hours. According to the evidence of Miss Chickles, he went to bed at nine o'clock, so if he took the dose of opium then—as was most likely—he must have died about four o'clock in the morning."

Coroner.—"During his sleep?"

Witness.—"Presumably so, opium being a narcotic."

Coroner (prompted by London detective).—"Did his stomach look like that of an habitual opium-eater?"

Witness.—"No, not at all."

Coroner.—"According to you, the deceased must have taken the poison at nine o'clock when he went to bed, and on looking at the evidence of Miss Chickles, I see that the deceased stated that he took his tonic pill regularly before he went to bed. Now did it strike you that he might have taken two pills by mistake, which would account for his death?"

Witness (hesitating).—"I acknowledge that such an explanation certainly did occur to me, and I analysed three pills selected at random from the box. When I did so, I found it was impossible such pills could have caused his death."

Coroner (obviously bewildered).—"Why so?"

Witness.—"Because these tonic pills contain arsenic. There is not a grain of morphia to be found in them. If the deceased had died from an overdose of these pills, I would have found traces of arsenic in his stomach; but as he died from the effects of morphia or opium—I am not prepared to say which—these tonic pills have nothing to do with his death."

This decisive statement considerably puzzled the jury. The deceased died of an overdose of morphia, the pills contained nothing but arsenic; so it being clearly proved that the pills had nothing to do with the death, the deceased must have obtained morphia or opium in some other fashion. Sergeant Spills was recalled on the chance that the deceased might have purchased poison from the Jarlchester chemist. In his evidence, however, Sergeant Spills stated that he had, by direction of Dr. Drewey, inquired into the matter, and had been assured by the chemist that the deceased had never been near the shop. The room had been thoroughly searched, and no drugs nor medicine of any kind had been discovered except the box of tonic pills now before the jury. There was absolutely nothing to show how the deceased had come by his death, that is, he had died of an

overdose of morphia, but how the morphia had come into his possession was undiscoverable, so the jury were quite bewildered.

All obtainable evidence having been taken, the Coroner gave his opinion thereon in a neat speech, but a speech which showed how undecided he was in his own mind as to the real facts of this peculiar case.

"I think, gentlemen, that you will agree with me in acknowledging this affair to be a remarkably mysterious one. The deceased comes down here from London (as proved by the evidence of Joseph Staggers) for a few days' rest (evidence of Miss Chickles). He gives no name, and has neither name nor initials marked on his linen, his bag, or his clothes. Not even a letter or a card to throw light on his identity. Entirely unknown, he enters the doors of this inn; entirely unknown, he dies the next morning, carrying the secret of his name and his position into the next world. From all accounts (testified by the evidence of several witnesses), he was quite cheerful, and evidently—I cannot be sure—but evidently had no idea of committing suicide. Looking at the question broadly, gentlemen, the idea of suicide would no doubt have to be abandoned; but looking at the case from my point of view, the whole affair is peculiarly suggestive of self-destruction. This gentleman, now deceased, comes down here, he is careful to give no address, which showed that he wished his friends to remain ignorant of his death. He is very cheerful, and talks about exploring the neighbourhood next day—a mere blind, gentlemen of the jury, as I firmly believe. After writing a letter—doubtless one of farewell to some friend—he retires quietly to bed, and is found dead next morning. The post-mortem examination, undertaken by Dr. Drewey, shows that he died from the effects of an overdose of morphia or opium. Now, gentlemen, he must have taken the morphia or opium himself. No one else could have administered it, as he was not known in Jarlchester, having been here only a few hours when his death occurred, so no one had any reason to give him

poison. Regarding the pills now before us, they have been analysed by Dr. Drewey, and are found to contain only arsenic, so we may dismiss the pills altogether. He died of morphia and must have taken it himself, as, had it been administered violently by another person, the sounds of a struggle would have been heard. No sounds were heard, however, so this proves to my mind that he killed himself wilfully. No traces of any drugs (saving the pills alluded to) were found in his room; as proved by Sergeant Spills, he bought no drugs from our local chemist, so only one presumption remains. The deceased must have brought here from London a sufficient quantity of morphia to kill him—took it all, and died leaving no trace of the drug behind. Unknown, unnamed, unfriended, the deceased came to this town, and no one but himself could have administered the poison of which he died. You, gentlemen, as well as myself, have heard the evidence of the intelligent witnesses, and will, therefore, give your verdict in accordance with their evidence; but from what has been stated, and from the whole peculiar circumstances of the case, I firmly believe—in my own mind, gentlemen—that the deceased died by his own hand."

Thus far the sapient Coroner, who delivered this address with a solemn air, much to the satisfaction of the jury, who were dull-minded men, quite prepared to be guided by a master-spirit such as they regarded the Coroner.

During the speech, indeed, a scornful smile might have been seen on the thin lips of Mr. Fanks; but no one noticed it, so intent were they on the words of wisdom which fell from the lips of Mr. Coroner Carr.

Under the inspiration, therefore, of the Coroner, the twelve lawful men and true brought in a verdict quite in accordance with their own and the Coroner's ideas on the subject:

"That the deceased (name unknown) died on the morning of the 13th of November, through an overdose of morphia taken by himself during a temporary fit of insanity."

Having thus relieved their minds to their own satisfaction, this assemblage of worthies—asinine for the most part—went their several ways quite convinced that they had solved the Jarlchester Mystery.

"The fools," said Mr. Fanks, scornfully, slipping the pill-box, which had been left on the table, into his pocket. "They think they've got to the bottom of this affair. Why, they don't know what they're talking about."

"You don't think it's suicide?" asked Sergeant Spills, crisply, rather nettled at the poor opinion Mr. Fanks entertained of the Jarlchester brains.

"No, I don't," retorted the detective, coolly; "but I think it's a murder, and an uncommonly clever murder, too."

"But your reasons?" demanded Spills, with wooden severity.

"Ah, my reasons," replied Mr. Fanks, reflectively. "Well, yes! I've got my reasons, but they wouldn't be intelligible to you."

Extracts From a Detective's Note-Book

"A curious case, this Jarlchester Mystery—I must confess myself puzzled . . . From Drewey's evidence deceased died of morphia . . . Pills only contain arsenic . . . can't be any connection between the death and those pills . . . Can't find out where deceased purchased morphia . . . Perhaps Coroner right, and he brought it from London . . . Examined clothes of deceased . . .

well made . . . fashionable . . . shabby . . . Qy., seedy swell? . . . such a one might commit suicide . . . Doubtful as to nerve . . .

". . . Don't understand that open door . . . ajar . . . nervous man wouldn't sleep with door ajar . . . absurd . . . Qy., could any one have entered room during night? . . . Impossible, as deceased a stranger here . . .

"*Mem.*—To find out if any one slept in adjacent rooms.

". . . Examine pill-box . . . sudden idea about same . . . Fancy I'll be able to find name of deceased ... if so look for motive of murder . . . questionable, very! if idea will lead to anything . . . still I'll try . . . This case piques my curiosity . . . Is it murder or suicide? . . . I must discover which . . ."

A Curious Coincidence

That night, after a comfortable dinner—and the "Hungry Man's" dinners were something to be remembered—Mr. Fanks sat in front of the fire staring into a chaos of burning coals, and thinking deeply. It was in the commercial-room, of course, but there were no commercial travellers present. Mr. Fanks with a world of thought in his shrewd face was the only occupant of the room, and sat within the cheery circle of light proceeding from the red glare of the fire and the yellow flame of the lamp, while at his back the place was in semi-darkness. Cold, too—a nipping, chilly, frosty feeling, as if winter was giving the world a foretaste of his Christmas quality, and outside on the four tall windows beat the steady rain, while occasionally a gust of wind made their frames rattle.

Here, however, in this oasis of light in a desert of gloom, everything was pleasant and agreeable, except perchance Mr. Fanks, who sat with his cup of coffee standing on the table at his elbow untasted, while he frowned thoughtfully at the chaotic fire as though he had a personal spite against it.

A clever face, a very clever face, clean shaven, with sharply cut features, dark hair, touched with gray at the temples, and cut short in the military fashion, keen eyes of a bluish tint, with a shrewd twinkle in their depths, and a thin-lipped, resolute mouth—perhaps a trifle too resolute for so young a man (he was not more than thirty); but then, Mr. Fanks, although young in years, was old in experience, and every line on his features was a record of something learned at the cost of something lost, and on that account never forgotten. A smart, alert figure, too, had Mr. Fanks, well-clothed in a rough gray tweed suit, slender, sinewy hands with a ring—

signet ring—on the little finger of the left one, and well-formed feet, neatly shod in boots of tanned leather.

A gentleman! Yes, decidedly the London detective was a gentleman—that could be seen by his whole appearance; and as to his dress, well, he wore his clothes like a man who went to a good tailor and valued him accordingly.

Quoth Mr. Fanks, after some minutes of deep thought, during which he removed his keen eyes from gazing fire-wards, and looked doubtfully at a pill-box which he held in his left hand:

"This is the only clue I can possibly obtain. The chemist who made up these pills has kindly put his name and address—in print—on the box. If, then, I go to this chemist, I will be able to find out the name of the dead man—after that the circumstances of his life, and then—well, after all, I may be wrong, and these country bumpkins right. It may be a case of suicide—I suppose, under the circumstances, they could hardly bring in any other verdict, and yet it is so strange. Why should he have poisoned himself with morphia, when he could have done so with an overdose of these pills? Easier death, I dare say. Morphia is a narcotic, and arsenic an irritant. Humph! it's a strange case altogether—very strange. I don't know exactly what to make of it."

He relapsed into silence, slipped the pill-box into his pocket, and taking the cup from the table began to sip his coffee slowly. Coffee—black coffee, hot and strong, as Mr. Fanks was now taking it—clears the brain, and renders it intensely sharp and wakeful; so after a few minutes the detective put down the cup, and thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets, stretched out his long legs, and began to think aloud once more, as was his fashion when alone.

"It's a fine profession that of a detective, but one gets tired of commonplace murders; this, however, isn't a commonplace murder. Query. Is it a murder at all? Jury say 'No.' I say 'Yes'—eh! I wonder who is right! Egotism on my part, probably, but I believe in my own idea. Why should a man come down to this out-of-the-way place to die? Why should he take the trouble to explain that he intends to stop here for a week if he intended to commit suicide? No! I can't and won't believe it's suicide. As to that theory of Carr's, that he brought just enough morphia to poison himself. Rubbish! Suicides don't take so much trouble as a rule. My belief," continued Mr. Fanks, reflectively, "my belief is that he took something innocently and it killed him. Now what would he take innocently? These pills, of course! Yet, if they killed him, it would be arsenic, not morphia. Hang it, what the deuce does it all mean?"

There being no answer to this question, he caught his chin between his finger and thumb, staring hard at the fire meanwhile, as if thereby to solve his doubts. A hard case, this Jarlchester Mystery; a difficult case; and yet it fascinated Mr. Fanks by its very difficulty. He was fond of difficulties, this young man. In his childish days, Chinese puzzles—most perplexing of mysteries—had been his delight. As a schoolboy, he adored algebraical problems and newspaper cryptograms, so now in his early manhood he found his true vocation in solving those inexplicable enigmas which the criminal classes, and very often the non-criminal classes—principally the latter—present to the world for solution.

Mr. Fanks was suddenly aroused from his problematical musings by the sudden opening of the door, and on turning his head with a start, saw it was being closed by a tall young man, who immediately afterwards advanced slowly towards the fire.

"As this is the warmest room in the house," said the new-comer, carelessly, "I've ventured to intrude my company upon you for an hour or so."

"Very pleased, indeed," murmured Mr. Fanks, pushing his chair to one side, so as to allow the stranger to have a fair share of the fire. "It's dull work sitting alone."

This movement on the part of Mr. Fanks and the sitting down of the stranger brought both their faces within the mellow radiance of the lamp, whereupon a sudden look of recognition flashed into the eyes of each.

"Roger Axton!" cried the detective, springing to his feet.

"Fanks!" said the other, also rising and cordially clasping the hand held out to him. "My dear old schoolfellow!"

"And your dear old schoolfellow's nickname also," remarked Fanks, as they shook hands heartily. "What a curious coincidence, to be sure! It is only the mountains that never meet."

"Ten years ago," said Axton, resuming his seat with a sigh. "Ten years ago, Octavius!"

"And it seems like yesterday," observed Octavius, smiling. "Strange that I should meet little Axton at Jarlchester, of all places in the world. What brought you here, old boy?"

"My own legs," said Roger, complacently. "I'm in the poet trade, and have been trying to draw inspiration from nature during a walking tour."

"A poet, eh! Yes, I remember your rhapsodies about Shelley and Keats at school. So you've followed in their footsteps, Roger. 'The child's the father of the man.' That's the Bible, isn't it?"

"I've got a hazy idea that Wordsworth said something like it," responded Axton, drily. "Yes, I'm a poet. And you?"

"I'm the prose to your poetry. You study nature, I study man."

"Taken Pope's advice, no doubt. A novelist?"

"No; not a paying line nowadays. Overcrowded."

"A schoolmaster?"

"Worse still. We can't all be Arnolds."

"Let us say a phrenologist?"

"Pooh! do I look like a charlatan?"

"No, indeed, Fanks! Eh, Fanks," repeated Axton, struck with a sudden idea, and pushing his chair away from that of his companion. "Why, you're a detective down here about that—that suicide."

"What wonderful penetration!" said Octavius, laughing. "How did you hit upon that idea, my friend?"

Roger Axton's hand went up to his fair moustache, which hardly concealed the quivering of his lips, and he laughed in an uneasy manner.

"Circumstantial evidence," he said at last, hurriedly. "The barmaid told me that a London detective called Fangs was down here on account of the—the suicide, and allowing for her misuse of the name, and your unexpected presence here, it struck me—"

"That I must be the man," finished Fanks, shooting a keen glance at the somewhat careworn face of his school friend. "Well, you are perfectly right.

I am Octavius Fanks, of Scotland Yard, detective, formerly Octavius Rixton, of nowhere in particular, idler. You don't seem to relish the idea of my being a bloodhound of the law."

"I—I—er—well, I certainly don't see why a detective shouldn't be as respectable as any other man. Still—"

"There's a kind of Dr. Fell dislike towards him," responded Octavius, composedly. "Yes, that's true enough, though intensely ridiculous. People always seem to be afraid of a detective. I don't know why, unless, maybe, it's their guilty conscience."

"Their conscience?" faltered Axton, with an obvious effort.

"I said 'their guilty conscience'" corrected Fanks, with emphasis. "I'll tell you all about it, Roger. But first take your face out of the shadow, and let me have a look at you. I want to see how the boy of seventeen looks as the man of seven-and-twenty."

Reluctantly—very reluctantly, Roger Axton did as he was requested, and when the yellow light shone full on his face, the detective stared steadily at him, with the keen look of one accustomed to read every line, every wrinkle, every light, every shadow on the features of his fellow-men, and skilled to understand the meanings thereof.

It was a handsome young face of the fresh-coloured Saxon type, but just now looked strangely haggard and careworn. Dark circles under the bright blue eyes, the complexion faded from healthy hues to a dull unnatural white; and the yellow hair tossed in careless disorder from off the high forehead, whereon deep lines between the arched eyebrows betrayed vexation or secret trouble—perhaps both. A face that should have worn a merry smile, but did not; lips that should have shown the white teeth in a