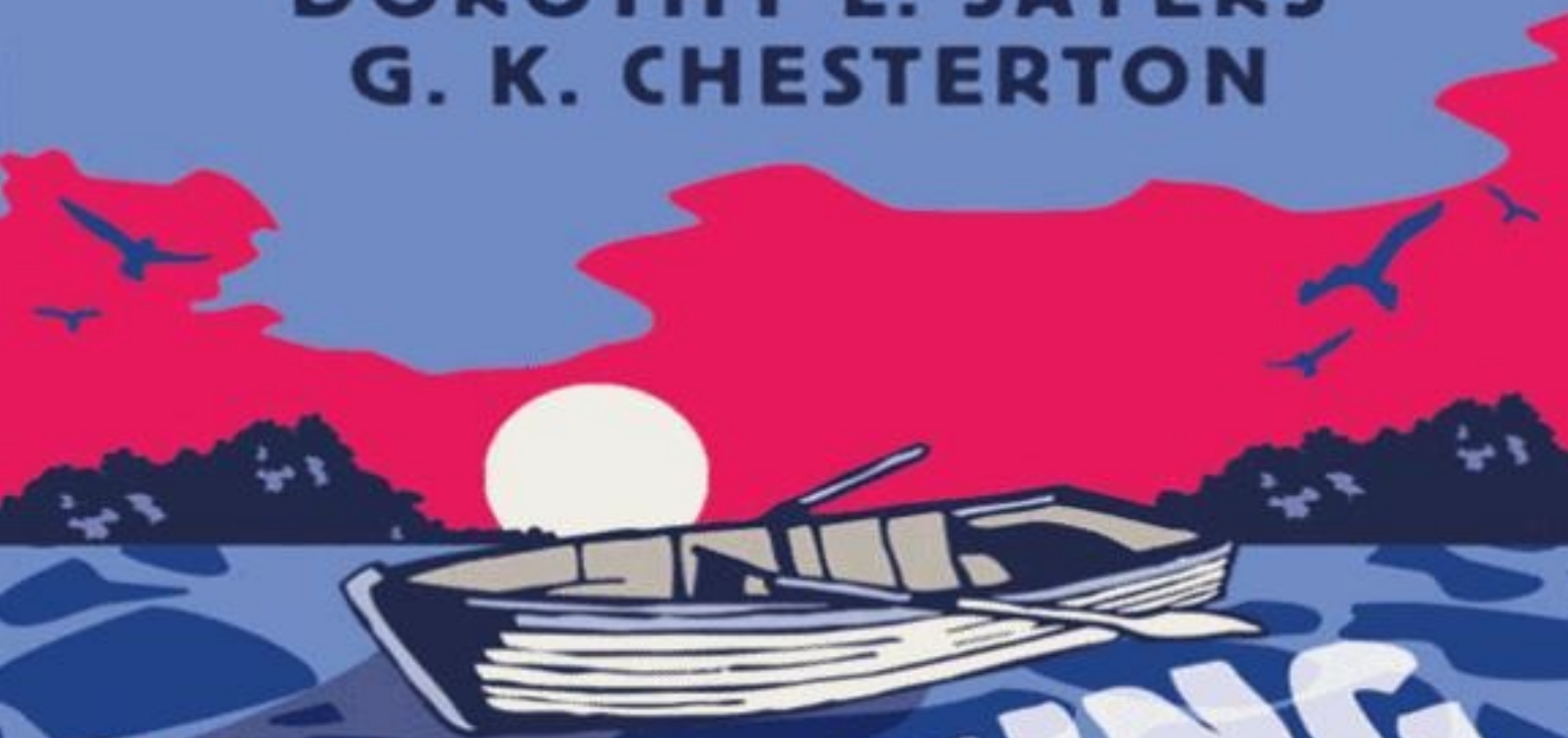


BY MEMBERS OF
THE DETECTION CLUB
INCLUDING

AGATHA CHRISTIE

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

G. K. CHESTERTON



THE

**FLOATING
ADMIRAL**

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THE
FLOATING
ADMIRAL

The Floating Admiral

By Certain Members of the Detection Club

G. K. Chesterton
Canon Victor L. Whitechurch
G. D. H. and M. Cole
Henry Wade
Agatha Christie
John Rhode
Milward Kennedy
Dorothy L. Sayers
Ronald A. Knox
Freeman Wills Crofts
Edgar Jepson
Clemence Dane
Anthony Berkley

 HarperCollins e-books

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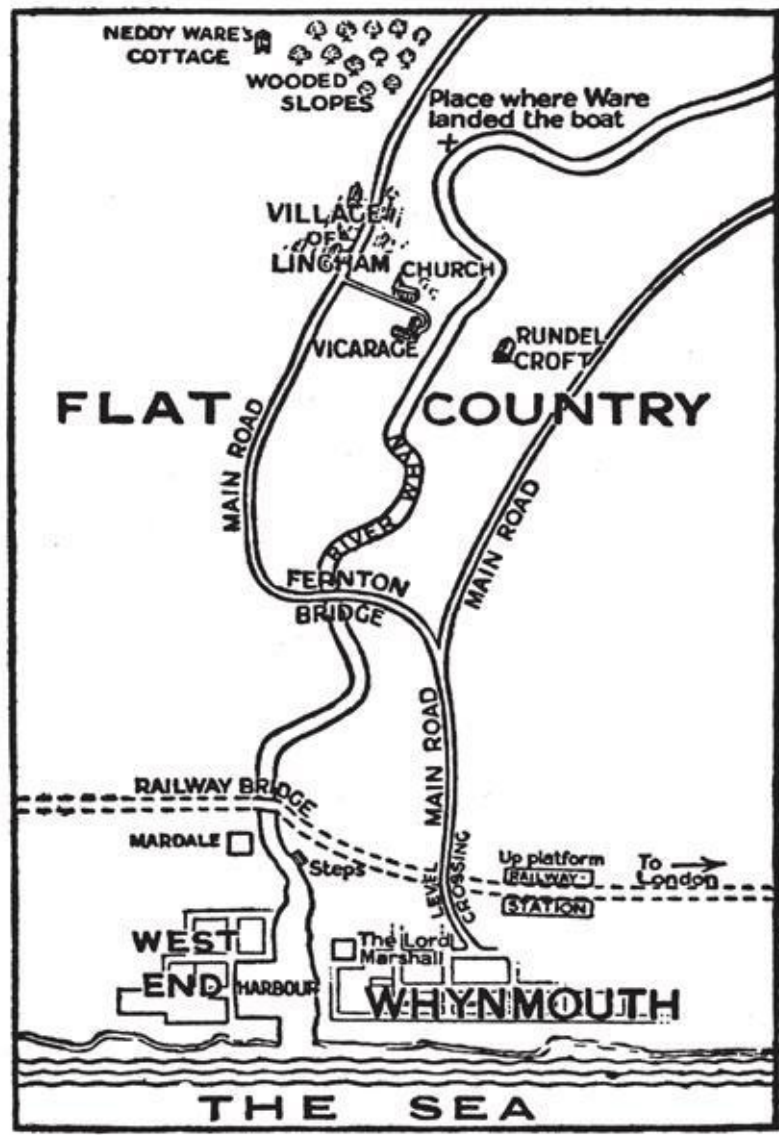
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By Simon Brett

PRESIDENT OF THE DETECTION CLUB 2001–

IT is appropriate that the origins of the Detection Club are shrouded in mystery. No official archives for the organisation have ever been kept and so its history has to be pieced together from the memoirs, correspondence, hints and recollections of its members. One reason for this incomplete record may be that the Club originally prided itself on being a kind of secret society, with rituals known only to its initiates. In the days of the internet, however, such a level of security is impossible. Indeed, an extract from the Detection Club's most secret rite, the Initiation of New Members, is readily accessible on Wikipedia.

So the Club's history is, at the best, conjectural. One authority declares that it was founded in 1930 with 26 members, but this assertion is somewhat weakened by the fact that a letter was published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1930 and signed by "members of the Detection Club". And the serials *The Scoop* and *Behind the Screen* appeared in *The Listener* respectively in 1930 and 1931. They were written by multiple authors, including Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, E. C. Bentley and Anthony Berkeley, under the name of the Detection Club, as was this work, *The Floating Admiral*, whose copyright notice on the first edition reads: "The Detection Club 1931".

So a more likely prehistory of the Club was that round about 1928 Anthony Berkeley Cox (who only used his first two names on his books) and other detective writers started to meet for informal dinners which then became more established into the rituals of a Club. According to some sources, G. K. Chesterton was appointed the first President—though sometimes referred to as "Leader"—in 1930. Mind you, other authorities say that he didn't take over the Presidential mantle until 1932. Even the Detection Club itself is inconsistent about the date. On its headed notepaper it is stated that Chesterton's reign began in 1932, whereas in the List of Members it says 1930. So you can really take your pick.

What is certain, however, is that, on 11 March 1932 the "Constitution and Rules of the Detection Club" were adopted. The opening section of this document reads: "The Detection Club is instituted for the association of writers of detective-novels and for promoting and continuing a mutual interest and fellowship between them." Members had to fulfil "the following condition: That he or she has written at least two detective-novels of admitted merit or (in exceptional cases) one such novel; it being understood that the term 'detective-novel' does not include adventure-stories or 'thrillers' or stories in which the detection is not the main interest, and that it is a demerit in a detective-novel if the author does not 'play fair by the reader'."

In this 1932 Constitution, the Ordinary Meetings of the Club should be "not fewer than four in the year", so things haven't changed that much. In 2010—and for many years before that—the Detection Club met three times.

What has changed is the criterion of admissibility for potential candidates. With the great spread of crime fiction's range, the qualification has been extended way beyond the traditional whodunit (which is just as well, because very few people nowadays write traditional whodunits). The current membership certainly includes writers of "adventure-stories or 'thrillers' or stories in which the detection is not the main interest", as well as practitioners of the historical, legal, forensic, psychopathological and other developing subgenres. Crime fiction is a much broader church now than it was in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Detection Club reflects that.

Some would argue that contemporary mysteries are much more varied and frequently better written than the offerings of that so-called “Golden Age”. They are certainly more psychologically credible than many of the works produced at that time. They are also more serious, sometimes even to the point of taking themselves too seriously. In crime fiction, *noir* is the new black.

Most of these differences could be seen as improvements, but the one thing that has been lost with the passage of time is the sense of *fun* that used to be associated with crime fiction. In her introduction to *The Floating Admiral*, Dorothy L. Sayers’ description of the collaborative exercise is: “the detection game as played out on paper by certain members of the Detection Club among themselves. And later she writes: “Whether the game thus played for our own amusement will succeed in amusing other people also is for the reader to judge.” The fact that the book is being reissued yet again suggests that there are still plenty of readers out there willing to be amused by the game.

A lot of Golden Age crime novels were games. A murder mystery was an intellectual challenge rather on the same level as a crossword—and it’s interesting that the two forms of entertainment both developed around the same time. In the days before television, in the days of country house parties such games were very popular. Collections of crime puzzles—like F. Tennyson Jesse’s *The Baffling Book*, *A Parlour Game of Mystery and Detection*—sold in large numbers. It was indeed the age of the parlour game ... which hardly exists nowadays. People don’t have parlour games. Very few of them even have parlours.

But it is in the spirit of a parlour game that *The Floating Admiral* should be approached. The idea of a serious (should I use that awful word “literary”?) novel written by a relay of authors is incongruous. For a light-hearted work of crime fiction, though, the concept is fun, and I think it’s clear that the writers involved in *The Floating Admiral* enjoyed the intellectual challenge that faced them.

I have been involved in a couple of collaborative ventures of this kind and I very quickly discovered that the best job to get is that of the person who starts the story. In the first chapter you can sprinkle clues and inconsistencies with reckless abandon, secure in the knowledge that it won’t be you who has to tie up all the loose ends later. As a logical consequence of this, the worst job is writing the final chapter, pulling together all the threads of the story to produce a credible solution to the mystery. The temptation to begin that final chapter with the words “But it was all a dream ...” is strong.

In *The Floating Admiral* this particular short straw was drawn by Anthony Berkeley, which was probably just as well. The author of *The Poisoned Chocolate Case*, who also, under the pseudonym Francis Iles, produced the classic thriller *Malice Aforethought*, was equipped both as whodunit plotter and as someone who understood the psychology of the criminal mind. If he couldn’t make sense of the ending, nobody could, and I think it’s significant that his final chapter is entitled *Clearing Up the Mess*.

Berkeley is one of the contributors to *The Floating Admiral* whose name is still reasonably well known, at least to crime fiction buffs. The same could be said of Monsignor Ronald A. Knox, Freeman Wills Croft and Clemence Dane. Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, of course, are big hitters seemingly destined to endure forever, and G. K. Chesterton is still a well-known literary figure (though the Prologue he wrote to this volume seems to bear no relation to anything in the ensuing novel).

Some of the other contributors’ names have dropped off the radar almost completely—except in the consciousness of dedicated collectors—but I was interested to know a little about them, to help me visualise the composition of the Detection Club in its early years. So here are my findings:

Canon Victor L. Whitechurch was, as his title suggests, a clergyman, whose fictional creation Thorpe Hazell was a vegetarian railway detective, intended to be as different as possible from Sherlock Holmes. Whitechurch was one of the first crime writers to submit his manuscripts to Scotland Yard to check he’d got his police procedural details right (an effort that many contemporaries

practitioners of the genre still don't bother to make).

G. D. H. (George Howard Douglas) and M. (Margaret) Cole were a husband and wife team of crime writers. Both left-wing intellectuals, in 1931 G. D. H. formed the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda, later to be renamed the Socialist League. Amongst the undergraduates he taught at Oxford was the future Prime Minister, Harold Wilson.

Henry Wade was the pseudonym of Henry Lancelot Aubrey-Fletcher, 6th Baronet, who was awarded both the D.S.O. and the Croix de Guerre for his bravery in the First World War. As well as writing twenty crime novels, he was High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire.

John Rhode was one of the pseudonyms of Cecil John Charles Street. Also writing as Miles Burton and Cecil Wayne, in his lifetime he published over 140 books.

Milward Kennedy was the pseudonym of Milward Rodon Kennedy Burge, an Oxford-educated career civil servant, who specialised in police procedurals. He also wrote books under the androgynous name Evelyn Elder.

Edgar Jepson had an enormously varied literary career. As well as crime novels and popular romances, he wrote children's stories and is probably best remembered now for his fantasy fiction. His son and daughter were both published authors and his granddaughter is the writer Fay Weldon.

So just a few snapshots of the 1931 Detection Club members who collaborated on *The Floating Admiral*. I find it intriguing to imagine the dinners they must have shared when they cooked up the ideas for this relay novel. Also the conversations ... I'm sure, like contemporary members of the Detection Club, though they talked a bit about the craft of crime writing, it was when they got on to other topics that they became more energised. I can visualise religious discussions between the Catholic convert Ronald Knox, the Anglican canon Victor Whiteside and the Christian humanist Dorothy L. Sayers. I wonder how the idealistic Socialism of G. D. H. and M. Cole went down with the aristocratic Henry Wade. And, writing all those books, John Rhode must have had difficulty finding time to attend the dinners.

But enough nostalgia. One thing I am sure of, though ... The dinners of the embryonic organisation during which the plot of *The Floating Admiral* was hatched, would have been conducted in just the same spirit of good humour and congeniality which, I am glad to say, still characterises to-day the Detection Club.

What can be wrong, after all, with an exclusive organisation of some sixty members which exists, in the words of Dorothy L. Sayers, "chiefly for the purpose of eating dinners together at suitable intervals and of talking illimitable shop"?

By Dorothy L. Sayers

THE FLOATING ADMIRAL

WHEN members of the official police force are invited to express an opinion about the great detective of fiction, they usually say with a kindly smile: "Well, of course, it's not the same for them as it is for us. The author knows beforehand who did the job, and the great detective has only to pick up the clues that are laid down for him. It's wonderful," they indulgently add, "the clever ideas these authors have upon, but we don't think they would work very well in real life."

There is probably much truth in these observations, and they are, in any case, difficult to confute. Mr. John Rhode, for example, could be induced to commit a real murder by one of the ingenious simple methods he so easily invents in fiction, and if Mr. Freeman Wills Crofts, say, would undertake to pursue him, Bradshaw in hand, from Stranraer to Saint Juan-les-Pins, then, indeed, we might put the matter to the test. But writers of detective fiction are, as a rule, not bloodthirsty people. They avoid physical violence, for two reasons: first, because their murderous feelings are so efficiently blown-off in print as to have little energy left for boiling up in action, and secondly, because they are so accustomed to the idea that murders are made to be detected that they feel a wholesome reluctance to put their criminal theories into practice. While, as for doing real detecting, the fact is that few of them have the time for it, being engaged in earning their bread and butter like reasonable citizens, unblest with the ample leisure of a Wimsey or a Father Brown.

But the next best thing to a genuine contest is a good game, and *The Floating Admiral* is the detection game as played out on paper by certain members of the Detection Club among themselves. And here it may be asked: What is the Detection Club?

It is a private association of writers of detective fiction in Great Britain, existing chiefly for the purpose of eating dinners together at suitable intervals and of talking illimitable shop. It owes no allegiance to any publisher, nor, though willing to turn an honest penny by offering the present venture to the public, is it primarily concerned with making money. It is not a committee of judges for recommending its own or other people's books, and indeed has no object but to amuse itself. Its membership is confined to those who have written genuine detective stories (not adventure tales or "thrillers") and election is secured by a vote of the club on recommendation by two or more members and involves the undertaking of an oath.

While wild horses would not drag from me any revelation of the solemn ritual of the Detection Club, a word as to the nature of the oath is, perhaps, permissible. Put briefly, it amounts to this: that the author pledges himself to play the game with the public and with his fellow-authors. His detective must detect by their wits, without the help of accident or coincidence; he must not invent impossible death-rays and poisons to produce solutions which no living person could expect; he must write good English as he can. He must preserve inviolable secrecy concerning his fellow-member's forthcoming plots and titles, and he must give any assistance in his power to members who need advice on technical points. If there is any serious aim behind the avowedly frivolous organisation of the Detection Club, it is to keep the detective story up to the highest standard that its nature permits and to free it from the bad legacy of sensationalism, clap-trap and jargon with which it was unhappily burdened in the past.

Now, a word about the conditions under which *The Floating Admiral* was written. Here, the problem

was made to approach as closely as possible to a problem of real detection. Except in the case of Mr. Chesterton's picturesque Prologue, which was written last, each contributor tackled the mystery presented to him in the preceding chapters without having the slightest idea what solution or solution the previous authors had in mind. Two rules only were imposed. Each writer must construct his instalment with a definite solution in view—that is, he must not introduce new complications merely “to make it more difficult.” He must be ready, if called upon, to explain his own clues coherently and plausibly; and to make sure that he was playing fair in this respect, each writer was bound to deliver together with the manuscript of his own chapter, his own proposed solution of the mystery. These solutions are printed at the end of the book for the benefit of the curious reader.

Secondly, each writer was bound to deal faithfully with *all* the difficulties left for his consideration by his predecessors. If Elma's attitude towards love and marriage appeared to fluctuate strangely, or if the boat was put into the boat-house wrong end first, those facts must form part of his solution. He must not dismiss them as caprice or accident, or present an explanation inconsistent with them. Naturally, as the clues became in process of time more numerous, the suggested solutions grew more complicated and precise, while the general outlines of the plot gradually hardened and fixed themselves. But it is entertaining and instructive to note the surprising number of different interpretations which may be devised to account for the simplest actions. Where one writer may have laid down a clue, thinking that it could point only in one obvious direction, succeeding writers have managed to make it point in a direction exactly opposite. And it is here, perhaps, that the game approximates most closely to real life. We judge one another by our outward actions, but in the motives underlying those actions our judgment may be widely at fault. Preoccupied by our own private interpretation of the matter, we can see only the one possible motive behind the action, so that our solution may be quite plausible, quite coherent, and quite wrong. And here, possibly, we detective-writers may have succeeded in wholesomely surprising and confounding ourselves and one another. We are only too much accustomed to let the great detective say airily: “Cannot you see, my dear Watson, that these facts admit of only one interpretation?” After our experience in the matter of *The Floating Admiral*, our great detectives may have to learn to express themselves more guardedly.

Whether the game thus played for our own amusement will succeed in amusing other people also is for the reader to judge. We can only assure him that the game was played honestly according to the rules, and with all the energy and enthusiasm which the players knew how to put into it. Speaking for myself, I may say that the helpless bewilderment into which I was plunged on receipt of Mr. Milward Kennedy's little bunch of brain-teasers was, apparently, fully equalled by the hideous sensation of bafflement which overcame Father Ronald Knox when, having, as I fondly imagined, cleared up much that was obscure, I handed the problem on to him. That Mr. Anthony Berkeley should so cheerfully have confounded our politics and frustrated our knavish tricks in the final solution, I must attribute partly to his native ingenuity and partly to the energetic interference of the other three intervening solvers, who discovered so many facts and motives that we earlier gropers in the dark knew nothing about. But none of us, I think, will bear any malice against our fellow-authors, any more than against the vagaries of the River Whyn, which, powerfully guided by Mr. Henry Wade and Mr. John Rhoads, two twin luminaries of its tidal waters, bore so peacefully between its flowery banks the body of the Floating Admiral.

By G. K. Chesterton

“THE THREE PIPE DREAMS”

THREE glimpses through the rolling smoke of opium, three stories that still hover about a squalid opium joint in Hong Kong, might very well at this distance of time be dismissed as pipe dreams. Yet they really happened; they were stages in the great misfortune of a man's life; although many who played their parts in the drama would have forgotten it by the morning. A large paper-lantern coarsely scrawled with a glaring crimson dragon hung over the black and almost subterranean entrance of the den; the moon was up and the little street was almost deserted.

We all talk of the mystery of Asia; and there is a sense in which we are all wrong. Asia has been hardened by the ages; it is old, so that its bones stick out; and in one sense there is less disguise and mystification about it than there is about the more living and moving problems of the West. The dope peddlers and opium hags and harlots who made the dingy life of that place were fixed and recognised in their functions, in something almost like a social hierarchy; sometimes their vice was official and almost religious, as in the dancing-girls of the temples. But the English naval officer who strode that instant past that door, and had occasion to pause there, was in reality much more of a mystery; for he was a mystery even to himself. There were bound up in his character, both national and individual, the most complex and contradictory things; codes and compromises about codes, and a conscience strangely fitful and illogical; sentimental instincts that recoiled from sentiment and religious feelings that had outlived religion; a patriotism that prided itself on being merely practical and professional; all the tangled traditions of a great Pagan and a great Christian past; the mystery of the West. It grew more and more mysterious, because he himself never thought about it.

Indeed there is only one part of it that anybody need think about for the purposes of this tale. Like every man of his type, he had a perfectly sincere hatred of individual oppression; which would not have saved him from taking part in impersonal or collective oppression, if the responsibility were spread to all his civilisation or his country or his class. He was the Captain of a battleship lying at that moment in the harbour of Hong Kong. He would have shelled Hong Kong to pieces and killed half the people in it, even if it had been in that shameful war by which Great Britain forced opium upon China. But when he happened to see one individual Chinese girl being dragged across the road by a greasy yellow ruffian, and flung head-foremost into the opium-den, something sprang up quite spontaneously within him; an “age” that is never really past; and certain romances that were not really burned by the Barber; something that does still deserve the glorious insult of being called quixotic. With two or three battering blows he sent the Chinaman spinning across the road, where he collapsed in a distant gutter. But the girl had already been flung down the steps of the dark entry, and he precipitated himself after her with the purely instinctive impetuosity of a charging bull. There was very little in his mind at that moment except rage and a very vague intention of delivering the captive from the uninviting a dungeon. But even over such a simple mood a wave of unconscious warning seemed to pass; the blood-red dragon-lantern seemed to leer down at him; and he had some such blind sensations as might have overwhelmed St. George if, charging with a victorious lance, he had found himself swallowed by the dragon.

And yet the next scene revealed, in a rift of that visionary vapour, is not any such scene of doom or punishment as some sensationalists might legitimately expect. It will not be necessary to gratify the refined modern taste with scenes of torture; nor to avoid the vulgarity of a happy ending by killing the principal character in the first chapter. Nevertheless, the scene revealed was perhaps, in its ultimate effects, almost more tragic than a scene of death. The most tragic thing about it was that it was rather comic. The gleam of the tawdry lanterns in the dope-den revealed nothing but a huddle of drugged coolies, with faces like yellow stone, the sailors from a ship that had put into Hong Kong the morning, flying the Stars and Stripes; and the final feature of a tall English naval officer, wearing the uniform of the Captain of a British ship, behaving in a peculiar way and apparently under rather peculiar influences. It was believed by some that what he was performing was a horn-pipe, but that was mingled with motions designed only to preserve equilibrium.

The crew looking on was American; that is to say, some of them were Swedish, several Polish, several more Slavs of nameless nationality, and a large number of brown Lascars from the ends of the earth. But they all saw something that they very much wanted to see and had never seen before. They saw an English gentleman unbend. He unbent with luxuriant slowness and then suddenly bent double again and slid to the floor with a bang. He was understood to say:

“Dam’ bad whisky but dam’ good. Whadlmeansay is,” he explained with laborious logic, “whisky dam’ bad, but dam’ bad whisky dam’ good thing.”

“He’s had more than whisky,” said one of the Swedish sailors in Swedish American.

“He’s had everything there is to have, I should think,” replied a Pole with a refined accent.

And then a little swarthy Jew, who was born in Budapest but had lived in Whitechapel, struck up piping tones a song he had heard there: “Every nice girl loves a sailor.” And in his song there was a sneer that was some day to be seen on the face of Trotsky, and to change the world.

The dawn gives us the third glimpse of the harbour of Hong Kong, where the battleship flying the Stars and Stripes lay with the other battleship flying the Union Jack; and on the latter ship there was turmoil and blank dismay. The First and Second Officers looked at each other with growing alertness and alarm, and one of them looked at a watch.

“Can you suggest anything, Mr. Lutterell?” said one of them, with a sharp voice but a very vague eye.

“I think we shall have to send somebody ashore to find out,” replied Mr. Lutterell.

At this point a third officer appeared hauling forward a heavy and reluctant seaman; who was supposed to have some information to give, but seemed to have some difficulty in giving it.

“Well, you see, sir, he’s been found,” he said at last. “The Captain’s been found.”

Something in his tone moved the First Officer to sudden horror.

“What do you mean by found?” he cried. “You talk as if he was dead!”

“Well, I don’t think he’s dead,” said the sailor with irritating slowness. “But he looked dead-like.”

“I’m afraid, sir,” said the Second Officer in a low voice, “that they’re just bringing him in. I hope they’ll be quick and keep it as quiet as they can.”

Under these circumstances did the First Officer look up and behold his respected Captain returning to his beloved ship. He was being carried like a sack by two dirty-looking coolies, and the officers hastily closed round him and carried him to his cabin. Then Mr. Lutterell turned sharply and sent for the ship’s doctor.

“Hold these men for the moment,” he said, pointing to the coolies; “we’ve got to know about this. Now then, Doctor, what’s the matter with him?”

The doctor was a hard-headed, hatchet-faced man, having the not very popular character of a cand

friend; and on this occasion he was very candid indeed.

~~“I can see and smell for myself,” he said, “before I begin the examination. He’s had opium and whisky as well as Heaven knows what else. I should say he’s a bag of poisons.”~~

“Any wounds at all?” asked the frowning Lutterell.

“I should say he’s knocked himself out,” said the candid doctor. “Most likely knocked himself out of the Service.”

“You have no right to say that,” said the First Officer severely. “That is for the authorities.”

“Yes,” said the other doggedly. “Authorities of a Court Martial, I should say. No; there are no wounds.”

Thus do the first three stages of the story reach their conclusion; and it must be admitted with regret that so far there is no moral to the story.

By Canon Victor L. Whitechurch

CORPSE AHOY!

EVERYONE in Lingham knew old Neddy Ware, though he was not a native of the village, having only resided there for the last ten years; which, in the eyes of the older inhabitants who had spent the whole of their lives in that quiet spot, constituted him still a “stranger.”

Not that they really knew very much about him, for the old man was of a retiring disposition and had few cronies. What they did know was that he was a retired petty officer of the Royal Navy, subsisting on his pension, that he was whole-heartedly devoted to the Waltonian craft, spending most of his time fishing in the River Whyn, and that, though he was of a peaceful disposition generally, he had a vocabulary of awful and blood-curdling swearwords if anyone upset him by interfering with his sport.

If you, being a fellow-fisherman, took up your position on the bank of the River Whyn in a spot which Neddy Ware considered to be too near his, he would let drive at you with alarming emphasis; and boys—his pet aversion—annoyed him in any way by chattering around him, his language became totally unfit for juvenile ears. Once young Harry Ayres, the village champion where fisticuffs were concerned, had the temerity to throw a stone at the old man’s float; he slunk back home afterward white in face and utterly cowed with the torrent of Neddy Ware’s lurid remarks.

He lived in a small cottage standing quite by itself on the outskirts of the village, and he lived there alone. Mrs. Lambert, a widow, went to his cottage for a couple of hours every morning to tidy up and cook his midday meal. For the rest, Neddy Ware managed quite well.

He came out of his cottage one August morning as the church clock, some half a mile distant, was striking four. Those who knew his habits would have seen nothing unusual in his rising so early. The fisherman knows the value of those first morning hours; besides which, the little River Whyn, which was the scene of his favourite occupation, was tidal for some five or six miles from the sea. For those five or six miles it meandered, first through a low valley, flanked by the open downs on one side and by wooded heights on the other, and then made its way, for the last four miles, through a flat, low-lying country till it finally entered the Channel at Whynmouth. Everyone knows Whynmouth as a favourite South Coast holiday resort, possessing a small harbour at the mouth of its river.

Twice a day the tide flowed up the Whyn, more or less rapidly according to whether it was “spring” or “neap.” And this fact had an important bearing on the times which were favourable for angling. On this particular morning Neddy Ware had planned to be on the river bank a little while after the incoming tide had begun to flow up the stream.

Behold him, then, as he came out of his cottage, half-way up the wooded slopes of “Lingham Hangar,” crossed the high road, and made his way down to the level of the river. He was fairly on his old years, but carried those years well, so much so that there was only just a sprinkling of grey in his coat and black hair. A sturdy-looking man, cleanshaven, but with a curious, old-fashioned twist of hair allowed to grow long on either side of his head just in front of his ears; brown, weatherbeaten, lined face; humorous mouth and keen, grey eyes. Dressed in an old navy blue serge suit, and wearing—as he invariably did—a black bowler hat. Carrying rods, landing net, and a capacious basket containing all kinds of the impedimenta of his craft.

He reached the grassy bank of the river, put his things on the ground, and very slowly filled

blackened clay pipe with twist tobacco—which he rubbed in his hands first—and proceeded to light glancing up and down the river as he did so.

Where he was standing the river took a curve, and he was on the outer side of this curve, on the right bank. Away to the left the stream bent itself between the heights on the one side and open meadows on the other. To the right, bending away from him, was the flat country, the river's edge bordered with tall-growing reeds. From this direction the tide was flowing towards him, swirling round the bend.

His first task was to haul in three or four eel lines he had thrown out the evening before, the ends being tied to the gnarled roots of a small tree growing on the bank. Two of the lines brought to land a couple of fair-sized eels, and, very dexterously, he detached the slippery, twisting fish from the hook, washing the slime off afterwards. Then, slowly, he commenced putting one of his rods together, arranging his tackle, baiting with worms, and casting into the stream. For some little time he watched the float bobbing about in the swirl of the eddies, now and again striking when it suddenly disappeared beneath the surface, once landing a fish.

He glanced around. Suddenly his float lost interest. He was gazing down-stream, as far as he could see around the bend. Slowly a small rowing-boat was coming up-stream. But there was something peculiar about her. No oars were in evidence. She appeared to be drifting.

The old sailor was quick to recognise the little craft.

“Ah,” he muttered, “that’s the Vicar’s boat.”

Lingham Vicarage stood, with its adjacent church, quite apart from the village proper, about half a mile down the river. The grounds ran down to the water’s edge, where there was a rough landing stage. The Vicar, he knew, kept his boat at this stage, moored by her painter to a convenient post. There was a little creek running into the grounds, with a wooden boat-house, but, in the summer months, especially when the Vicar’s two boys were home from school, the boat was generally kept on the river itself.

As it came nearer, Ware laid down his rod. He could see now that there was someone in the boat—not seated, but, apparently, lying in the bottom of her, astern.

The boat was only about fifty yards away now. The swirl of the tide was bringing her round the outer side of the bend in the river, but Neddy Ware, who knew every current, saw that she would pass beyond his reach. With the quick action of the sailor he did not waste an instant. Diving into his basket he produced one of the coiled up eel lines with its heavy, lead plummet. And then stood in readiness, uncoiling the line and throwing the slack on the grass.

On came the boat, about a dozen yards from the bank. Skilfully he threw the plummet into her bows, and then started walking along the bank up-stream, gently but steadily pulling on the line till, a short length, he brought her close up to the bank and laid hold of the painter at her bows. The end of the painter was dragging in the water. As he pulled it out he glanced at it. It had been cut.

He made it fast to a tree-root. The boat swung round, stern up-stream, alongside the bank. And Ware got into her. The next moment he was on his knees, bending over the man who lay in the stern.

He lay there on his back, his knees slightly hunched up, his arms at his sides, quite still. A man of about sixty, with iron-grey hair, moustache and close-cropped, pointed beard, dark eyes open with a fixed stare. He was clad in evening dress clothes and a brown overcoat, the latter open at the front and exposing a white shirt-front stained with blood.

Sitting on one of the seats, Ware made a swift examination of the boat.

A pair of oars lay in her, the metal rowlocks were unshipped. Apparently the dead man was hatless—no—there was a hat in the boat, lying in the bows; a round, black, clerical hat, such as Mr. Mourant, the Vicar, usually wore.

Neddy Ware, having looked around, got out of the boat and glanced at his watch. Ten minutes to

five. Then, leaving the little craft moored to the bank, he hurried off as fast as he could go, gained the high road, which was some hundred yards away from the river, and started in the direction of the village.

Police Constable Hempstead, just on the point of turning into bed after having been on duty a night, looked out of the window in answer to Ware's knock at the door.

"What is it, Mr. Ware?" he asked.

"Something pretty bad, I'm afraid."

Hempstead, wide awake now, slipped on his clothes again, came down and opened the door. Ware told him what had happened.

"I must get the Inspector out from Whynmouth—and a doctor," said the constable, "I'll phone the station there."

He came out again in two or three minutes.

"All right," he said. "They'll run over in a car at once. Now you come along with me and show me that boat and what's in it. You haven't been messing about with anything—moving the body and so on, I hope?"

"I shouldn't be such a fool," replied Ware.

"That's all right. You haven't seen anyone else?"

"No one."

The policeman went on asking questions from time to time as they hurried along. He was a smart man, this young constable, eager for his stripes, and wanted to make the most of the opportunity. As soon as they reached the river bank he took a glance at the boat and its contents, and exclaimed:

"*Hullo!* Don't you know who that is, Mr. Ware?"

"Never saw him before that I know of. Who is he?"

"Why, it's Admiral Penistone. He lives at Rundel Croft—that big house the other side of the river just opposite the Vicarage. Leastways, he's been in residence there about a month. He only bought last June. A new-comer."

"Oh! Admiral Penistone, is he?" said Neddy Ware.

"That's the man, right enough. But, look here: are you sure this is the Vicarage boat?"

"Certain."

"Queer, eh? That seems to mean something happened *this* side of the river, for of course there's no bridge till you get to Fernton—three miles lower down. Ah, and the parson's hat, eh? Let's see; what time did you first see the boat coming along?"

"A little after half-past four, I should say."

Hempstead had his note-book out and was making pencilled jottings in it. Then he said:

"Look here, Mr. Ware, I want you, if you will, to go back to the road and stop Inspector Rudge when he comes along in his car."

"Very well," replied Ware; "nothing more I can do?"

"Not yet, at any rate."

Hempstead was an astute man. He waited until Neddy Ware was out of the way before he began a little examination on his own account. He knew very well that his superior officer would take the case fully in hand, but he was anxious to see what he could, without disturbing anything, in the meantime.

As he got into the boat, he noticed a folded newspaper, half sticking out of the dead man's overcoat pocket. He took it out, gingerly, looked at it, and replaced it.

"Ah," he murmured, "the *Evening Gazette*, last night's late London edition. He wouldn't get this here. The nearest place where it's sold is Whynmouth."

He would very much have liked to examine the contents of all the pockets of the dead man's clothes, but felt he had better not. So he got out of the boat, sat down on the bank, and waited.

After a bit the sound of a car running along the main road was heard, and in a minute or two, for men came across the meadow; Neddy Ware, a police inspector in uniform, and two men in plain clothes, one of them a doctor, the other a detective-sergeant.

Inspector Rudge was a tall, thin man, with sallow, cleanshaven face. He came up to Hempstead.

"You haven't moved anything?" he asked curtly.

"No, sir."

Rudge turned to the doctor.

"I won't do anything, Doctor Grice, till you have made your examination."

Doctor Grice got into the boat and proceeded to examine the body. It was only a few minutes before he said:

"Stabbed to the heart, Inspector, with some narrow-bladed instrument—a thin knife or dagger. Death must have been instantaneous. There'll have to be a post-mortem, of course."

"How long has he been dead?"

"Some hours. He probably died before midnight."

"Nothing more?"

"Not at present, Inspector."

"Very well. I'll have a look now."

He turned the body over, shifting it slightly.

"No sign of blood under him," he said, "or anywhere else in the boat that I can see. Let's have a look in his pockets—ah, it wasn't robbery. Gold watch and chain—wallet full of notes—they were none after that. Evening paper here—last night's date. That must be noted. Now—we've got to be as quick as possible. Tell me, Hempstead, what do you know about him?"

"He's Admiral Penistone, sir. Retired. A new-comer hereabouts. Bought Rundel Croft, a big house on the other side of the river, a few months ago. Took up residence there lately. I believe he has a niece living with him. But it's not in my district, sir."

"I know."

The Inspector turned to Ware.

"You say the boat belongs to the Vicar here?"

"Yes."

"How long would it take for the tide to bring it up from his place?"

"Forty to forty-five minutes," replied Ware promptly, "with the tide as it is to-day."

"I see. Now, the question is how are we to move him? We might pull the boat back against the tide. Won't do, though. Those oars must be tested for finger-prints before they are handled. Let's see—Vicarage on the telephone, Hempstead?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. I'll go there now. I want to see the Vicar. We'll phone to Whynmouth for an ambulance. Have to run him to Rundel Croft round by Fernton Bridge. You remain here, Hempstead, and if anyone comes along don't let 'em touch anything. I shall want you, Sergeant—we'll have to put you across the river from the Vicarage if we can get a boat there; I want you to mount guard over the Admiral's boat and boat-house. Perhaps you won't mind coming too, Mr. Ware. You may be useful. There! We'll get a move on. Come along, Doctor."

In a very short time the Inspector was driving the car down the short bit of road leading from the highway to the Vicarage. The front door of the latter faced the river, a lawn stretching down to the bank. Opposite, about a hundred yards from the bank, stood a large, red-brick, Tudor mansion, with a broad sweep of lawn in front and a boat-house.

The Inspector, the Vicar's hat in his hand, got out of the car and rang the bell; the others followed. It was a few minutes before the maid, who evidently had only just come down, opened the door and

said her master was not up yet.

“Will you kindly tell him that Inspector Rudge wants to see him at once. Say I’m sorry to disturb him, but it’s most important.”

“I’ll tell him, sir. Won’t you come in?”

“Thank you, no. I’ll wait here.”

“Hullo, I say, are you a policeman?”

He turned. Two boys had come across the lawn, aged, respectively, about sixteen and fourteen, dressed in flannel trousers and shirts open at the neck, and carrying bathing towels. They were regarding him eagerly.

“Yes,” he said, “I am.”

“Good egg!” exclaimed the elder, “just what we want, isn’t he, Alec? Look here; some blighter has taken our boat—cut the painter. Perhaps you’ve heard about it, though? Is that what you’ve come about?”

The Inspector smiled grimly.

“Yes—that’s what I’ve come about, young gentlemen,” he replied, dryly, “but you needn’t worry about your boat. It’s been found.”

“Hooray!” exclaimed the other boy. “Got the beggar who took it?”

“Not yet,” said Rudge, with another grim little smile, “that may not be so easy. Have you got another boat handy?” he asked.

“Only our old punt—she’s in the boat-house.”

“Well, do you two young gentlemen think you could manage to put my detective-sergeant here across the water in her? He wants to pay a call at Rundel Croft.”

“Rather!” Peter Mount looked with boyish admiration at the sergeant. “Is there going to be a man-hunt? Cheerio! We’ll help you. But you don’t suspect old Admiral Penistone of sneaking our boat, do you? He crossed back in his own last night. He’d been dining here, you know.”

“Oh, had he!” said the Inspector. “No, we don’t suspect him. Now—will you do what I asked?”

“Come on,” said Alec to Sergeant Appleton, “the tide’s running pretty strong, but we’ll put you across all right.”

They went down to the boat-house with the sergeant.

“Good morning, Inspector. Good morning, Doctor Grice—ah—it’s you, Ware, I see. What’s the meaning of this early morning deputation?”

The Vicar had come out of the house; a man of about fifty, of medium height, sturdily built, with clear-cut features and hair a little grey. He asked the question of the Inspector, who replied:

“I’ll explain directly, Mr. Mount. Is this your hat?”

The Vicar took it and looked at it.

“Yes; certainly it is.”

“Then would you mind telling me if you remember when you had it last?”

“That is quite simple. To be absolutely accurate, at twenty minutes past ten last evening.”

“And where?”

“You are very mysterious, Inspector. But I’ll tell you. My neighbour who lives opposite was dining with us last evening, with his niece. They left just about ten. I went down to the river to see them off and put my hat on. After the Admiral had crossed the stream in his boat with his niece I sat down in that little summer-house and smoked a pipe. I took off my hat and laid it on the seat beside me—and absent-mindedly, I forgot to put it on again when I returned to the house. It was then that I set my watch by the clock in the hall—twenty minutes past ten. But will you tell me why you ask me this—and what you have all come about?”

“I will, sir. This hat was found in your boat early this morning. Your boat was drifting with the tide

up-stream. And in her was the dead body of your opposite neighbour, Admiral Penistone—*murderer*
Mr. Mount.”

By G. D. H. and M. Cole

BREAKING THE NEWS

“MURDERED! Good God!” the Vicar said—and it was well known, the Inspector reflected, that the Vicar of Lingham had a ridiculously exaggerated respect for the Third Commandment. He had stepped back a pace at the shock of the news, and some of the colour was fading from his cheeks. “But—murdered. ... How—what do you mean, Inspector?”

“I mean,” said Rudge, “that Admiral Penistone was stabbed to the heart some time before midnight last night—and his body placed in your boat.”

“But what—why ... ? How could he have been?”

“And your hat,” the Inspector remorselessly amplified, “was lying in the boat beside him. So you see,” he added, “that the first thing I had to do was to make enquiries at your house.”

The Vicar turned on his heel abruptly. “Come into my study,” he said. “We can talk better there—don’t suppose you want my sons, at present?” The Inspector shook his head, and followed him into a quiet, brown room with wide sash windows, the very model of what a clerical study, owned by a non-too tidy cleric, should be. As he led the way in, the Vicar stumbled over something, and with a little gasp caught hold of the table for support. “You—you must excuse me,” he muttered, as he motioned the Inspector to a chair and sank into one himself. “This is—a very great shock. Now, will you tell me what I can do for you?”

Rudge scanned him a minute before replying. Undoubtedly he had received a very great shock. He was pale; his hands were none too steady; and his breath was coming and going quickly. Whether the cause was merely the sudden impact of violent death on a sheltered clerical life, or whether there was some graver reason, the Inspector did not know enough to decide. At any rate, there was no sense in causing further alarm at the moment. So when he spoke it was in a gentle reassuring tone.

“What I want to find out immediately, Mr. Mount, is exactly what happened last night, as far as you know it. Admiral Penistone, you say, came over to dine with his niece—what is the lady’s name, by the way?”

“Fitzgerald—Miss Elma Fitzgerald. She is his sister’s daughter, I understand.”

“About what age?”

“Oh—I should say a year or two over thirty.”

“Thank you. They arrived—when?”

“Just before seven-thirty. In their boat.”

“And left?”

“Slightly after ten. I can’t fix it to the minute, I’m afraid; but they were just taking their leave when the church clock struck, and Admiral Penistone said, ‘Hurry up, I want to get back before midnight’—or something of that sort; and within a very few minutes they were gone.”

“And you saw them off?”

“Yes. I went down to the landing-stage with them, and Peter—that’s my eldest son—helped them to start. It’s sometimes a little awkward getting off, if the current is running strongly.”

“Did you actually see them land?”

“Yes. It wasn’t dark. I watched them take the boat into the Admiral’s boat-house, and then, a little later, I saw them come out of the boat-house, and go up to the house.”

"I should have thought those trees at the back of the boat-house would have screened them from you," said the Inspector, who had made good use of his eyes. "Or do you mean they were crossing the lawn?"

The Vicar looked at him with respect. "No, they were in the trees," he said. "But Miss Fitzgerald had on a white dress, and I saw it showing through them."

"But Admiral Penistone hadn't a white dress?"

"No. ... I suppose," the Vicar reflected, "that now you mention it I couldn't say I saw the Admiral leave the boat-house—but seeing his niece I naturally concluded he was with her."

"Very naturally," Rudge concurred soothingly. "And you yourself stayed out smoking until—?"

"Twenty past ten."

"And then?"

"I locked the house up and went to bed."

"And you heard nothing more of your neighbour?"

"Nothing," said the Vicar. "Nothing at all," he repeated more loudly.

"What about your sons? Or your servants? Would they have heard anything?"

"I don't think so. They had all gone to bed when I came in."

"Thank you. Now, Mr. Mount, can you tell me this? Did Admiral Penistone seem in his usual spirits during the evening?"

The question appeared to distress the Vicar. "I—I don't think I can really answer that," he said. "You see, I haven't known the Admiral at all long. He has only recently come to the neighbourhood ... I really hardly know him."

"But still," Rudge persisted, "you might have noticed if he seemed distressed, or worried in any way. Did he?" And, seeing the Vicar still hesitated, he pressed his point. "If you did notice anything, Mr. Mount, I really think you should tell me. It's of the highest importance that we should find out everything we can about the poor gentleman's state of mind at the time—and I assure you I know how to be discreet."

"Well," said the Vicar, fidgeting a little. "Well ... it's nothing, probably. But I should say—yes—that the Admiral was perhaps a little worried. He was not as—as amiable as usual. And he was generally a very pleasant man—not at all snappish."

"He was snappish with Miss Fitzgerald, perhaps?" the Inspector suggested quickly; and the Vicar blinked.

"Oh, no ... hardly ... I shouldn't say that at all."

"But he acted as though there was something on his mind. ... I suppose you've no idea what it was?"

"I think—I don't know—it may have been his niece's marriage. He said something about it. Nothing much."

"Oh, she's getting married, is she? Who to?"

"Somebody called Holland, Arthur Holland. From London, I think. I don't know him."

"And Admiral Penistone didn't approve?"

"I don't mean that. I mean, I don't know. He didn't say. Only he seemed as though something might have gone a little wrong. Perhaps it was to do with her settlements; she has a good deal of money, as you understand, and the Admiral is—was her trustee. But I really don't know anything about it."

"I see. Had you, yourself, known Admiral Penistone long?"

"Only since he came here, about a month ago. I called on him, you know; and we got acquainted."

"And you saw each other fairly often?"

"Oh, two or three times in the week, perhaps. Not more."

"Ever hear him speak of any enemies—anyone who'd have a reason for killing him?"

"Oh, no, no!" The Vicar looked shocked, but hastened to add, "Of course, I really know nothing of his life before he came here."

"Had he many friends? In the neighbourhood? Or outside? Where did he live before?"

"Somewhere in the West, I believe. I don't remember his ever telling me the district. I don't think he knew many people about here well. Sir Wilfrid Denny, over at West End, saw most of him, I fancy. I believe he had old friends down to meet him, sometimes."

"Ever meet any of them yourself?"

"Oh, no," said the Vicar.

"I see. Well, I think I'd better be getting over to his place now," the Inspector said. "I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Mount. I'll want to have a word with your sons and your servants some time, just in case any of them noticed anything that might help us. But that can wait. By the way," he turned to the door to add, "can you tell me what sort of a young lady Miss Fitzgerald is? Liable to—to be very upset, I mean?"

The Vicar smiled a little, almost in spite of himself. "I shouldn't think so," he said. "I don't think Miss Fitzgerald is at all the fainting type."

"Very devoted to her uncle, eh?"

"I couldn't say, particularly. About as much as most nieces are to their uncles, I imagine. Perhaps she is rather a reserved young woman—has interests of her own. But this is just gossip—you can say for yourself what you think, Inspector."

"That's true enough. Well, I'll be going," the Inspector said, and noted the expression of relief which overspread the Vicar's face. "I know we aren't popular visitors," he thought to himself, "at the best of times. But need he show *quite* so plainly how glad he is to get rid of me? I wonder if there could be any other reason—if he knows anything more than he's said. But—the Vicar of Lingham, and a most respectable Vicar, from all I've ever heard of him! I must say it doesn't sound likely." And, so thinking, he made his way back to the car, and drove rapidly the three miles or so which he had to cover to reach the house a hundred yards away.

It was close on eight o'clock by the time he reached his destination; but Rundel Croft obviously did not keep early hours. One or two of the windows facing him still had their blinds down; and the hall when he was admitted to it, was obviously undergoing its matutinal clean-up. A rather down-at-heel butler, of the type which seems to have become a butler because its wife is a good cook and itself has no special ability of any kind, opened the door to him and blinked uneasily in his face. Rudge asked for Miss Fitzgerald, and was told that she was not yet about. Apparently she always breakfasted in bed. Rudge then asked for Admiral Penistone.

"He's in his room, still," the butler said, looking faintly hostile, as though he did not approve of early morning visitors.

"No, he isn't," Rudge said sharply. "He's had an accident." The butler goggled at him. "Look here—what's your name?"

"Emery."

"Look here, Emery, I'm Inspector Rudge from Whynmouth, and I must see Miss Fitzgerald at once. Admiral Penistone has met with a very serious accident—in fact, he's dead. Will you find Miss Fitzgerald's maid, if she has one, and tell her that I want to speak to Miss Fitzgerald as soon as she can possibly come down. And come back here when you've done it. I want a word with you."

With no more than an inarticulate noise the butler shuffled off, and it was ten minutes or so before he returned, with the news that Miss Fitzgerald would be down in a quarter of an hour. The Inspector took him aside into a square, rather beautiful morning-room, and began questioning him about his master's movements of the night before. But he got very little help from his interview. It seemed to him that the man must be either phenomenally stupid or else dazed with shock at his master's death.

and yet the latter did not seem to be the case. Beyond a muttering or two of "Dear, dear!" and the like he hardly appeared to have taken in the news; and the Inspector felt some surprise that a retired naval officer should keep so incompetent-looking a servant. Yet the house appeared well cleaned, if it did arouse itself somewhat late in the day.

Admiral Penistone, the Inspector learned, had last been seen by his staff at about a quarter past seven on the previous evening, when he and his niece had gone down to the boat-house to row themselves over to the Vicarage. (He never allowed anyone to disturb him in the morning until breakfast rang, which accounted for his absence being unknown.) As he was going to the boat-house, he had told Emery that he need not wait up, but was to lock the front of the house and go to bed, leaving the french window of the drawing-room, which led to the lawn and the river, unbolted. "I was to lock it," Emery said, "but Admiral Penistone always had his own key."

"Stop a moment. Was this window bolted when you came down this morning, or not?"

"No," Emery said; but added that that didn't mean anything. Half the time the Admiral didn't bolt it. It was locked, and nobody was likely to come burgling from the riverside.

Then he hadn't seen the Admiral again? No. Or Miss Fitzgerald? Yes, so to speak. He meant that, as he and his wife were going up to bed, a bit after ten, might have been quarter-past, they'd seen Miss Fitzgerald coming up the path from the boat-house. At least, they'd seen her dress; they couldn't see her properly in the dark. The Admiral wasn't with her then; but they supposed he was behind, locking up the boat-house. No, he didn't know if the boat-house was locked now; he supposed it was, but it wasn't his work to go down to the boat-house. No, he couldn't say they'd actually seen Miss Fitzgerald come in; she might have, or she might have stopped on the lawn. He and his wife weren't particularly noticing; they were going to bed.

And that was all Emery had to say. Questioned about his late master's mood of the previous evening, he seemed to have no idea, and simply stared with a moon-faced imbecility. He "supposed he was much as usual." The Admiral was occasionally "short" with his servants (the Inspector reflected that it would take a saint not to be short with Emery at least a dozen times a day); but beyond that his butler had nothing to say. Masters, apparently, were phenomena that were occasionally short, like pastry; but one accepted the fact, and did not conjecture about the cause. At least, not if one were as limp and uninterested as Emery appeared. No, his wife and he had only been a month with the Admiral; they had applied for the post from an advertisement; they were last with a lady and a gentleman in Hove, for a year and a half. At this point, somewhat to Rudge's relief, a much more intelligent-looking maidservant appeared, and announced that Miss Fitzgerald was awaiting him in the dining-room.

"She's ugly!" was the Inspector's immediate reaction on first beholding the niece of the late Admiral Penistone. And then: "No, I'm not so sure that she would be, in some lights. But she'd taken a good bit of making-up, I shouldn't wonder. And, jiminy! isn't she sulky-looking!"

Miss Elma Fitzgerald was very pale. But it was not the pallor of fear for a possible accident to her uncle, but that peculiar to a very thick, opaque skin. She was big and heavily-made, with long limbs and broad shoulders, and would have been better suited, obviously, by long trailing draperies than by the tweed skirt and jumper which she had rather carelessly put on. She had largish, strongly-marked but roughly-designed features, with a wide jaw and full chin, and dark brows nearly meeting in her white face. Her hair was dark and coarse, done in flat plaits around her ears, and under her eyes, which were so little open that the Inspector could not at first glance determine their colour, were lines and dark pouches. She was, to him, distinctly unattractive; and "a year or two over thirty" was, he thought, a generous description. Yet she was certainly a woman of personality, and in a kinder light and with artificial aids to lighten her skin and hide the disfiguring lines, she might even have been attractive.

"Yes?" she said in a voice that contrived to have a rasp and a drawl simultaneously. "What do you

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