

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post-Office, March 1, 1899, by Frank Tousey.

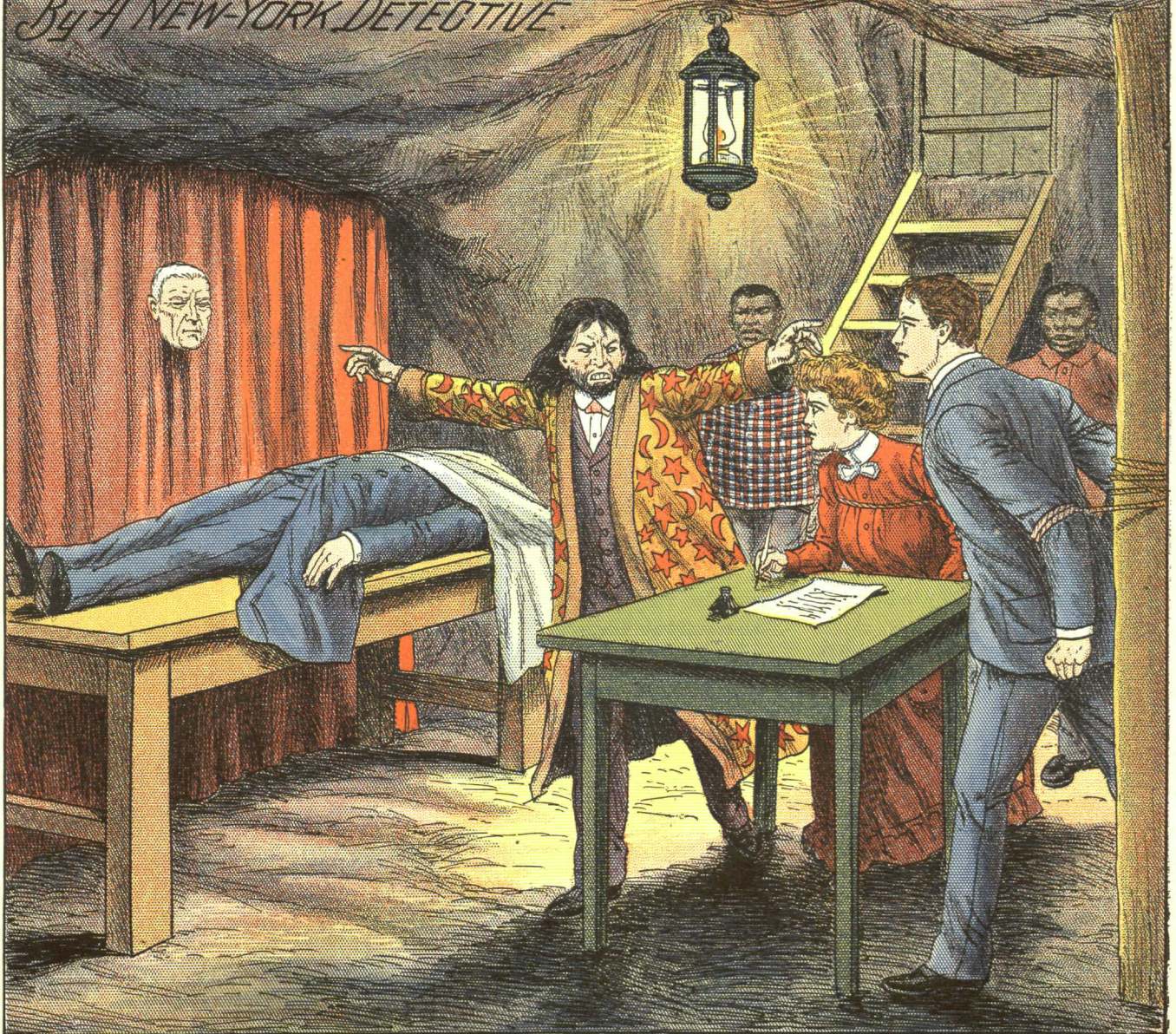
No. 444.

NEW YORK, JULY 26, 1907.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS AND "MR. MAGIC"; OR AFTER THE THUMBLESS LEAGUE.

By A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE.



"And now behold the face of the Departed!" cried Mr. Magic, stretching out both hands. The curtains were slowly parted. Between them Harry saw a head projected. The face seemed to take form. It was the face of Old King Brady.

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PRICE 5 CENTS.

CHAPTER I.

A PECULIAR APPOINTMENT.

When the midnight express over the Royal Blue Line reached the Market street station in the city of Philadelphia, a young gentleman, accompanied by an unusually attractive young lady, alighted from one of the Pullman cars.

It was between two and three o'clock in the morning, but there were as usual many people about the station, which, being a sort of half-way house between New York and Washington, is a scene of activity by night, as well as by day.

"Do you see anything of him, Harry?" asked the young lady as they walked about the big enclosure.

"Not yet," was the reply.

"It may not be so easy to identify him; so many gentlemen wear flowers in their buttonholes these days."

"His was to be a red daisy, Alice. That is something unusual."

"Never heard of such a thing."

"Oh, it exists. I asked a florist about it. He says that the real name is pyrethum roseum grandiflorum."

"Catch me! Say that again."

"I won't. I got it out safely that time, but it might break one of my teeth the next time."

"I should say there was danger of its breaking your jaw. But, never mind. The question is where is our man?"

"Don't worry. You know we have our rooms engaged at the Bingham House, where we can go in case he don't turn up."

"How long shall you wait?"

"Oh, I think we ought to give him half an hour at least. It isn't everybody who can keep an appointment in the middle of the night."

"Nor in the middle of the day either, for that matter. Well, let us look in the gentleman's waiting-room. His gilets may have fallen asleep in there."

They looked, but with no result.

Several slumberers were on the benches.

None of them had the requisite red daisy.

The young couple walked outside and stood at the top of the broad steps.

Just then a cab came dashing up.

It stopped in front of the station and a gentleman stepped out.

He was in evening dress and wore a light box overcoat, as the night, in spite of the fact that it was midsummer, was decidedly cool.

In the buttonhole of said coat, sure enough, was a red daisy.

"Ha! He cometh!" exclaimed Harry. "I see the requisite flower."

"The p. r. g.," laughed Alice.

"Exactly. Now be good."

"As though I was ever anything else."

"You are the best and loveliest specimen of feminine creation, but you will butt in occasionally in these preliminaries."

"Thank you for nothing. I was not aware that I possessed any such failing. I'll settle with you for that remark later."

"Hush! Here he comes."

The gentleman came bustling up the steps.

Harry stepped forward.

"Beg pardon," he said, "but you are Assistant Secret Service Commissioner Thomas, I presume?"

"Yes," replied the gentleman, raising his hat. "You are Young King Brady?"

"I am. Mr. Thomas, this is Miss Montgomery, of our firm."

Mr. Thomas acknowledged the introduction.

"We can talk best in the cab," he said, "if you will get in."

"One moment," replied Harry. "Have you had any direct communication with Old King Brady?"

"Oh, yes. I have a letter from him addressed to you. It came enclosed in one to myself, and I was instructed to present it in person."

They entered the cab and were driven up Market street.

Thus it will be seen that our young couple were the junior partner in the world-famous Brady Detective Bureau of New York.

They had come to Philadelphia by orders of the chief of the Secret Service Bureau at Washington.

Why they had been summoned they did not know.

The reason that Old King Brady was not with them may be explained in a few words.

Three weeks before the opening of our story the famous old detective had been asked to assist the Philadelphia police to break up a gang of sneak thieves and burglars which was supposed to exist in the Quaker City.

During these three weeks Old King Brady had only once reported to his New York office.

Upon this occasion he called up Harry on the telephone and had just finished saying that he was well and very busy when he was cut off.

Harry tried his best to get into communication with him, but utterly failed.

Thus when the Secret Service call came he had no means of knowing the whereabouts of his chief.

Such was the situation when Young King Brady and his able female associate, Miss Alice Montgomery, met the gentleman of the p. r. g. and were whisked away in the cab.

"I am under instructions to arrange matters only with Old King Brady in person. I hope you won't be offended," Mr. Thomas said.

"Not at all," replied Harry, quietly, for such "call-downs" were common. "But allow me to ask why, in that case, were we sent for at all?"

"I applied to the chief of police for information as to Old King Brady's whereabouts, as you suggested," continued Thomas.

"And the result?"

"I was told to write him and that the letter would be forwarded."

"And it was?"

"I presume so. I received in reply a note from him, saying that I must telephone you to come over on the midnight express and that I was to give you the enclosure."

"What did he say about taking up this Secret Service call personally?"

"Why, he did not say anything about it. I have always understood that your arrangement with the Secret Service Bureau was to take up any case of theirs at any time."

"It is, but they can hardly expect Old King Brady to drop an important case which he has partially worked up when his assistants are practically disengaged."

"How is it that you were not associated with him in this case, whatever it is?"

"For the same reason I have just stated. There was another case on hand when this Philadelphia call came. We could not all leave, so Old King Brady answered the call and left us behind to finish up."

"And you are through?"

"Quite through. I should like to see that letter, Mr. Thomas."

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I quite forgot."

The letter was produced.

"I am afraid you can't see to read it," said Mr. Thomas. "Shall I stop the cab?"

"Not at all. I can manage. Where are we going, by the way?"

"Old King Brady in my letter requested that I should put you out at Wingdon street. It is a bad neighborhood down in the old part of the city by the water front. Hardly a place to take a lady at this hour of the night, I should say."

"But when the lady happens to be a detective and used to going anywhere at all hours, it makes a difference," remarked Alice quietly.

"Ah, quite so," replied Thomas.

Harry now produced his flash lantern and read his letter.

He folded it up and returned it to the envelope, which he put in his pocket.

"Well?" demanded Thomas.

"There is nothing to tell you. The letter merely instructs me how to find Old King Brady."

Mr. Thomas looked immensely disappointed.

"This is very unusual on Old King Brady's part, is it not?" he asked.

"It is," replied Harry. "I never knew him to do it before."

"I don't see what I am to do."

"Did you tell Old King Brady in your letter that you would only deal with him personally?"

"I did."

"He does not like to be dictated to."

"I only carried out my orders as received from Washington."

"Did you state to him the nature of the case?"

"Yes."

"Then rely upon it that he has good reasons for treating the matter in this fashion. I shall see you to-morrow. No doubt I shall then have something definite to report."

And with this Mr. Thomas was forced to be satisfied.

In due time the cab reached Wingdon street.

The name we have chosen to give this locality is an assumed one.

Sufficient to state that it was well up on the Delaware River front.

Harry and Alice took leave of Mr. Thomas, who left them decidedly disgusted with the result of the midnight meeting.

"I shall look for you in the morning," he said to Harry, "but I shall hardly be at the office before eleven o'clock."

The cab was then driven away.

"Upon my word, this is a lovely spot," remarked Alice, looking around dubiously.

"Charming!" replied Harry. "Just a minute until I get my bearings, please. We have an appointment here."

The neighborhood certainly well deserved the sarcasm of Alice's remark.

There were warehouses, ill-smelling factories and wharves, with a few small, old-fashioned brick houses sandwiched in here and there.

Needless to add, there were the usual number of saloons which one expects to find in such a place.

"Ah, I see," said Harry, after a minute. "There is the gate."

"What gate?" demanded Alice.

"The letter mentions it."

"That wonderful letter. Do I find out what there is in it, then?"

"Certainly, it's no secret, Alice. It was only a few lines anyway. I can't see to read it here or I would."

"But in substance?"

"In substance this way: That he is and has been very busy; that we were to meet him, and that we would then see what could be done in the Secret Service matter. Meanwhile I was to say nothing to Thomas."

"And the gate?"

"We are to ring a bell. He describes the gate as being a high one alongside an old factory with a low chimney, one block up from the wharf. That outfit over there, I should say, filled the bill."

Harry pointed up an alley, which ran off from Wingdon street.

We shall call it "Bone Alley," though such was not its name.

"It looks like it," said Alice. "We better be quick. So far we have been blest by seeing no one, but you can't tell when somebody may come along."

The words were hardly spoken when footsteps were heard behind them.

"Someone coming now," said Harry. "Confound the luck!"

He turned and saw a policeman.

There was nothing to do but to wait.

"And what are youse doing here?" demanded the officer in a surly tone.

Harry showed his shield.

"This lady is a detective also," he said. "We are working on a case."

The shield displayed was that of the Secret Service men.

The officer became civil immediately.

"Dat's all right," he said. "Course, I didn't know."

"Certainly not. We are waiting for a party who agreed to meet us."

"It's a bad neighborhood and no place for a lady. You want to look out for yourselves. My beat is a short one. If you'll whistle in case you want me, I shall be sure to hear."

"All right. Thanks."

"Is there any way I can help?"

"No, thank you. Indeed I don't even know why we are here. We were ordered to report at this hour and place, that is all."

"Well, all right," said the policeman. "Cool for this time of year, isn't it?"

"Very."

"Well, solong."

He walked off along Wingdon street.

"He is right," said Harry. "The sooner we pull out of this the better."

They turned into the alley, and finding the gate bell, Harry gave it a pull.

It was too dark to discern what was behind the gate, although it was made of slats, but it appeared to be some kind of yard.

"There doesn't seem to be anyone in a hurry to answer," remarked Alice after a little.

"They will have to show up quick, then," replied Harry. "I don't propose to keep you in this place much longer."

"Don't you fret about me, Harry."

"But I do fret about you, Alice. I love you far too well to keep you long in such a desperate neighborhood as this appears to be."

Alice gave a light laugh.

"Dear me, Harry," she said, "certainly this is a highly appropriate spot for love-making, even if the hour is a little late."

Such was Alice's way with her young partner.

Many times has Harry spoken of the deep affection which he honestly cherishes for this charming girl, but so far Alice has invariably turned him off.

Her fascinating business seems to absorb all her thoughts.

But now the talk was cut short by the sound of footsteps behind the gate.

A light was seen approaching from the recesses of the factory yard.

Soon out of the shadows came a colored man carrying a lantern.

He paused at the gate, and holding up the lantern peered through the slats.

"What's the word?" he demanded.

"Internal revenue," Harry promptly replied.

"That's all right. I'se gwine ter open de gate, boss. Come in, quick. 'Twon't do for you to be seen hanging around hyar."

He shot a bolt and the gate opened.

Harry looked at the fellow askance.

He was a big, ugly-looking brute, as black as a stove.

Young King Brady as he drew Alice through the gate observed that the man's right hand, which held the lantern, was minus a thumb.

CHAPTER II.

A SECRET INTERVIEW WITH OLD KING BRADY.

Alice clung to Harry's arms as they passed through the yard, following the thumbless black.

They wound in and out among small brick buildings, big wooden tanks set on iron supports, through winding alleys and dark passages.

Of course, with no other light than that shed by the lantern, there was little chance of determining the true nature of the plant.

From the smell Harry judged that it might have once been used as a distillery.

Judging from broken windows and other indications, he came to the conclusion that no actual business had been conducted there in a long time.

The negro never opened his mouth.

"What do they make here?" Harry ventured to ask at last.

"Dunno nuffin' at all, boss," was the gruff reply. "I only obeys orders, and I hain't got none to talk."

This was a crusher.

"Now will you be good!" whispered Alice, which ended Harry's attempt to find out where they were at.

At last a turn brought them to the edge of a sort of basin, or "inset," from the Delaware.

Here lay a small steamer which had been partially burned.

Its iron plates were swelled and rusty, all deck woodwork was gone or in a charred and blackened condition.

This confirmed Harry's suspicion that the plant had been abandoned, otherwise there appeared to be no reason why the wreck should be tied up here.

At the stringpiece the black paused.

The wreck was not close to it, there was a space of some twenty feet; the remains of the steamer appeared to be anchored in the mud.

The thumbless one now put his fingers in his mouth and gave a low but shrill whistle.

In a moment an old man wearing a corduroy cap and a reefer's jacket came up out of the cabin.

In spite of his disguise and the uncertain light, Harry instantly recognized his great chief.

It was Old King Brady himself.

"What's the word?" the old detective called.

"Internal revenue," answered the black.

"The man has a word of his own," was the gruff reply. "Let him give it."

"Union!" called Harry.

"Correct. Put out the plank."

The black hurried away.

"He will be back in a minute," Old King Brady called across the break. "Meanwhile you stay there."

In a few minutes the darky returned, carrying what looked like a bundle of boards.

It proved, however, to be an ingenious sectioned gang-plank.

It was made of several parts hinged together.

A rope attached to it was thrown to the old detective and the sections opened up by the black.

Then the plank was pulled over the deck, forming a narrow but secure pathway over which Harry and Alice passed.

"You stand guard until they return," Old King Brady said to the black.

"Now, Mr. Snyder, this way, please," he added, and he led them down into the cabin.

Here there were traces enough of the fire, but the place had been repaired so as to make it habitable and was rudely furnished.

It was lighted by a swinging lamp hanging above a table beside which Old King Brady placed two chairs.

"Sit down," he said. "Wait for a minute before we talk. While I have every reason to believe that we are the only persons on board this old hulk, it is necessary to make sure."

He hustled about, peering into the burned staterooms, opening and shutting doors.

"I have no doubt it is all right," he said at last. "And now, how are you? It seems an age since I have seen you, and I want you to understand that I am risking a lot in having you here to-night."

He shook hands with both and sat down wearily upon the table, for there were only the two chairs.

"Do take the chair, Governor," said Harry, jumping up. "You look all worn out and you are as thin as a rail. Where is this thing going to end?"

"Don't know, my dear boy. I haven't the slightest idea. You know we New Yorkers consider the Quaker City rather a slow proposition, and in this instance the slowness seems to extend even to my crook-trapping operations. I may have to remain here for weeks to come."

"But you look all used up."

"It's the poor food I've been getting," replied the old detective, dropping into Harry's chair. "Upon my word, I should relish a decent meal, but it can't be helped."

"It should be helped then, and that right away. I should hardly have known you."

"Nonsense! You exaggerate. You miss my trade-mark costume, as you are pleased to call it—that is all."

The allusion was to the peculiar style of dress which Old King Brady invariably adopts, the prominent features of which are a blue coat with brass buttons, an old-fashioned stock and stand-up collar and a white felt hat with an extraordinary broad brim.

"I should just like to see you in your trade-mark clothes then," said Alice. "Really, Mr. Brady, all joking aside, you are looking bad."

"Enough!" cried the old detective. "I didn't bring you here to comment on my personal appearance. Did you see Thomas?"

"Yes, of course. Otherwise I should not have been supplied with the passwords."

"Quite so. When are you to meet him again?"

"To-morrow at eleven."

"Did he tell you what the nature of the Secret Service call was?"

"No; he refused. He says his orders are to only tell you personally."

"He will have to break his orders then. I shall not leave here."

"He said that he had already told you something about it."

"He said in the letter he wrote me that it was a case of stolen revenue stamps. Now tell him that I am shadowing one of the most desperate and peculiar gangs of crooks which was ever organized in the United States. Tell him further that I have every reason to believe that the stamps in question were stolen by this same gang. Finally tell him that I can best serve the interests of the Secret Service Bureau by sticking to my present work, and that I propose to do so, and that he must accept the services of yourself and Alice in this particular case."

"Very well. I shall do just as you say, and now what have you learned here?"

"Not enough to talk about, nor will it be safe for me to attempt to talk now."

"But you can at least give us a hint?"

"Well, I am working for the gang on probation, Harry. If I suit inside of a year I may have the honor of being made a member of the Thumbless League."

"Is that what they call themselves?"

"Yes. Every member is minus a thumb on his right hand."

"Why?"

"I do not know."

"I noticed that darky had lost a thumb."

"Yes; he is a member."

"Are they all negroes?"

"Oh, no. They are of different nationalities."

"And the leader?"

"I haven't seen him yet."

"What is his name?"

"I don't know his true name, and I shan't tell you what they call him. I told you at the start that I didn't want to talk. You have already drawn more out of me than I intended you should."

"If the case is so strenuous I don't know how you dared to bring us here to-night."

"Fortunately I had the opportunity. These people have a large quantity of stolen revenue stamps, principally whisky and tobacco, which they are trying to work off. You are supposed to represent a big whisky distillery in New York and I am supposed to try to sell you some thousands of dollars worth of stamps."

"I see. Well, the scheme was not so bad. Is there anything more coming our way?"

"In the line of information? Nothing. How is business in New York and things at the office generally?"

"Very quiet. Everything runs smoothly, however."

Some further talk of a personal nature followed.

Old King Brady then informed Harry and Alice that it was time for them to go.

And as the old detective's will is final, they rose to depart.

He escorted them on deck and they crossed the plank.

"See the gentleman and lady out first before you pull in your plank," the old detective said.

The black obeyed in silence, and Harry and Alice were conducted back to Bone Alley and the gate locked behind them.

They got out of the neighborhood as quickly as possible.

On Arch street they were fortunate enough to come upon a belated night hawk cab, and, engaging it, they were driven to the Bingham House, where their rooms were engaged.

It was not until Harry was undressing that it occurred to him that he had made no arrangements for seeing nor even communicating with Old King Brady again.

This was certainly a very serious omission.

Young King Brady regretted it deeply, but he felt that when his chief was ready to communicate with him he would find a way.

Harry had arranged with Alice that they should breakfast at nine o'clock, and at the appointed hour they met at the table.

"I think," said Harry, "that I shall try to look around there on Wingdon street again and alone before the day is out. I want to locate that place more definitely."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to take a boat and see if you can reach the old steamer from the river in case of necessity?" suggested Alice.

"It certainly would, and I think I shall try it," replied Harry. "We ought to know more of that place."

At eleven they called upon Mr. Thomas and made their report.

"I suppose it will have to do," said Thomas. "If Old King Brady is working on the case it will fill the bill and I can so report."

"Do you propose to put us to work?" inquired Harry.

"Yes. Here are the papers. Look them over. You can decide for yourself how you ought to act."

Young King Brady spent some twenty minutes in studying the papers.

"There doesn't seem very much to build upon," he finally said.

"Next to nothing. That is why Old King Brady's superior judgment and experience was wanted, I suppose."

"You will get both. I shall see him again. Meanwhile I shall jump right in and do the best I can."

Harry left with Alice soon after.

"What about the case?" the latter inquired as they walked along Chestnut street.

"Let us go into the park by Independence Hall and sit down," said Harry. "We can talk matters over there."

"It is like this," he resumed when they found themselves seated in the park. "There was a burglary in the internal revenue office at Pittsburg about eight months ago and a large amount of whisky and tobacco stamps were stolen.

"Local detectives and Secret Service men handled the case, but with no success.

"Recently a distiller in Baltimore was approached by means of an anonymous letter which offered him whisky stamps at cut rates.

"The letter was postmarked Philadelphia. The local Secret Service men and the postoffice detectives were set at work on the case, but they utterly failed to trace out the writer. There the work ended and the order was issued to put the Bradys on the case. That is all."

"And as you remarked to Mr. Thomas, there is very little to build on?" said Alice.

"Next to nothing. But for what the Governor told us last night, I should be all at sea."

"It would almost seem as if the best thing we could do would be to get back to New York and leave Old King Brady to finish his work."

"That won't do. I have an idea."

"Hold on to it, then. It may get away from you."

"I was thinking that we might hire an office in some prominent building, and by a series of carefully worded advertisements attract the attention of these stamp thieves."

"It is not a bad scheme, Harry. I can play stenographer."

"At the start, yes; but we shall probably find something more important for you to do. I wish I had asked the Governor about it while I had the chance."

"He told you to go right ahead in your own way without any reference to him."

"I know it. All the same, I think that before I try to do anything else I will look up that old steamer again, as you said."

And this Harry at once started in to do.

While Alice went back to the Bingham House Young King Brady set out on his dangerous mission.

CHAPTER III.

BY THE ORDER OF DALKAN THE DWARF.

Old King Brady had indeed been having a strenuous time of it.

By hard and persistent effort, by lowering himself to the level of the lowest, he had at last succeeded in getting an introduction to a member of the Thumbless League, the very existence of which he did not know when he took up work for the Philadelphia police.

It was a simple case of the blowing of a safe in a large clothing store on Chestnut street, which the old detective first started in to investigate, and it was here that he discovered the impression of a thumbless hand upon the dust of a window sill.

This was his starting clew.

To get details as to how he followed up his work is not necessary.

Sufficient to repeat what has been said before that by hard work and persistency, Old King Brady now found himself a member of the Thumbless League on "probation."

How long this probation was to last and what was to follow it he did not know.

Just at present he had been three days located on the old hulk in the basin by the abandoned distillery.

In the early morning he had received Harry and Alice, and once they departed he threw himself down in one of the staterooms, anxious to snatch a little sleep.

But even this was denied him.

He was just slipping off into the land of dreams when there came a loud knocking on the stateroom door.

The old detective jumped up and consulted the dollar watch which he was carrying.

It was just four o'clock.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"It's me, Wimble, Doctor," a gruff voice replied.

The voice was that of one "Jack Wimble," as the man called himself.

It was he who had introduced Old King Brady to the Thumbless League.

"Just a minute," the detective replied.

"Hurry up then," said Wimble. "I've got business on hand, and it's the kind that won't keep."

Old King Brady hurriedly adjusted his clothing and came out of the room.

"What's in the wind now?" he asked.

The man was a well-dressed person who looked the crook all over to an experienced eye, but who still would have passed as a gentleman in a crowd.

"There's a little trip by water in the wind," was the answer, "and a little job to be done at the end. We may need your help at chloroforming, old man."

"Ah!"

"Ready?"

"Certainly. I must get my stuff together."

Old King Brady, be it understood, had posed as a broken-down doctor, assuming the name of "James."

It had been understood when he joined the league that his work was to be an assistant in burglary cases where chloroforming was necessary.

It was through his claim to be expert at this that he obtained his first hold. The man who had attended to this end of the business had recently died.

"Hold on a minute," said Wimble, taking a cigar out of his pocket with his right hand, which was minus a thumb. "Did those people come?"

"Yes."

"Did Snyder bring his wife with him like he said in the letter?"

"Yes."

"You are sure they are not detectives?"

"Great Scott! What makes you ask such a question as that? Of course I am sure, or I should never have brought them here. I've known Snyder since he was a boy, and his father before him."

"Oh, it's all right, I suppose. What's doing?"

"He thinks he can place \$5,000 worth of those whisky stamps. In fact, he is sure of it. He expects to do it through the wife."

"I hope to goodness something comes of it, then. We have held that stock a long while. When are you to see him again?"

"He will go back to New York and see what he can do. He may be over to-morrow night."

"Where are you to meet?"

"Don't know. He said he would inform me. He's to write to our mail box."

"Well, all right. Get your things and we will make a start."

Old King Brady went into the stateroom and came out with a little grip.

This contained a bottle of chloroform and a physician's apparatus for applying the same.

He had hoped that he would not be called upon to use it.

But now that the call had actually come, he had no other intention than of putting it through.

Sometimes detectives find themselves so placed.

Old King Brady was pledged to break up the Thumbless League and to capture its head.

As yet he had not seen this man, and to back out now that his services were called for would be to ruin all his plans.

So he followed Wimble to the deck of the hulk.

Alongside was a boat, into which they got.

Wimble took up the oars and pulled down the basin towards two brick buildings which had been used as whisky warehouses in former days.

Here was the mouth of the basin.

Pulling out between the warehouses, Wimble and his companion found themselves on the Delaware.

"Where do we go?" asked the old detective.

"There's a tug down here," was the reply. "Some of the boys are aboard. We join them."

"And the boat?"

"Oh, we'll hitch it on behind."

They rowed on.

"If you make a success of this work you are going to be introduced to the boss to-night," remarked Wimble.

"That's good news. Do I finish my probation then?"

"Don't know. That's just as the spirits say."

"Spirits? What do you mean?"

Wimble laughed.

"Oh, say, you'll find out soon enough," he said. "You may be rejected altogether, you know."

"I hope it won't come to that."

"I hope not, I am sure, but until you part with your thumb that is liable to happen any time."

"This thumb business is a mystery which puzzles me more than a little, Jack."

"I suppose so. But I can't explain it. That will be explained when you are initiated. You know you agreed to sacrifice your thumb when you came in on probation. You can back out any time up to the moment you are initiated."

"Oh I've no disposition to back out. I'm too old to be of much good. If I can make a stake through you fellows and get enough to eat and a place to sleep, why, I don't see that I can ask any more."

"You will get all of that if you stick to us. If you put through that stamp sale I have no doubt that Mr. Magic will consent to have you initiated at once. You will get your rake-off on the sale, which will help you through while your hand is healing."

"Shall I have to go to a hospital?"

"No, no. Mr. Magic will take care of you. He is better than a dozen surgeons. You will have the time of your life while you are getting well."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you will stop with the boss, Mr. Magic, you know."

"Is he a good entertainer?"

"Is he! Just you wait and see."

They pulled on down the river for some distance.

At last Wimble ran the boat in alongside a tug which was tied up beside a slip between two wharves.

A man who was pacing the deck hurried forward and looked them over.

"So it's you fellows, is it?" he said. "Get aboard quick."

"Has word come from the boss yet?" demanded Wimble.

"Not yet."

"Blame strange that he should be sending us on a daylight job."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Orders is orders," he said.

He was a big bullet-headed fellow, who looked as if he might be an ex-convict.

Like Wimble, he was minus a thumb.

They went aboard the tug and the boat was made fast behind by "Terry," which was the only name Old King Brady knew for this man.

It did seem strange that a burglary should be planned for broad daylight.

It was now after four o'clock, and as the month was July, the sun would soon rise. But since his association with the Thumbless League Old King Brady had seen some strange things, and here was another.

These men seemed to have absolutely no wills of their own but to be guided in everything by this mysterious "Mr. Magic," about whom they were constantly talking, but who as yet Old King Brady had never seen.

Who the man was or where he kept himself was a complete mystery so far as the old detective was concerned, but it was evident that he was some sort of clairvoyant, fortune-teller, palmist or spirit medium.

Those of the Thumbless ones with whom Old King Brady had come in contact were constantly talking about "spirits," in which all were evidently firm believers.

That the burglaries in which they engaged were directed by their so-called spirits, they made no secret.

Thus Old King Brady could only conclude that Mr. Magic was the medium through whom these communications were obtained.

And upon this morning this fact was practically proved.

When Jack Wimble and Old King Brady went into the cabin they found three other members of the Thumbless League gathered there.

They were sitting around smoking and talking.

One called "Frenchy," whom the old detective took to be a Canadian, had the most to say.

Just now Frenchy was growling because orders had been held back.

As Old King Brady was playing a waiting game, he simply sat back and listened to their talk.

It soon became evident that none of these men had the faintest idea where they were going.

The thought was a puzzler.

In all his experience with the criminal classes Old King Brady had never come up against anything of the sort before.

At last two men not thumbless put in an appearance and the conversation suddenly ceased.

One proved to be the captain of the tug, the other the engineer.

Wimble, who was as much a leader in the gang as any—no one Old King Brady had met as yet seemed disposed to assume any authority—asked the captain if he had received "any word."

"No," was the reply. "I waited at Mike's till I was

tired. It was getting so light that I thought I would come ahead."

"Like enough the whole business will fall through," said one.

"Not on your life," replied Frenchy. "The boss never goes back on what he says. He told us to get the tug and wait here, and here we are and here we stay until we get the word."

"Mebbe he'll send Dalkan directly here," said Wimble. "You know he did once."

"You can't tell," replied Frenchy. "He never does anything twice alike, but he'll fix it somehow, that's a sure thing."

The captain and engineer now departed.

Pipes were filled and fresh cigars lighted, but there was no drinking done.

Old King Brady since his association with the Thumbless League had never seen one of them drink, even a glass of beer, nor had he smelled liquor on any one of them.

Wimble now motioned to the old detective to follow and passed out on deck.

"I suppose, doctor, you think we are a strange bunch," he said.

"I certainly do," replied Old King Brady.

"Well, we are. Of course you see now that we go entirely by what Mr. Magic tells us."

"Is he always right?"

"He never missed but once. Every job he has directed but that one has proved a success, and he certainly was not responsible for the failure that time."

"Of course the bargain was that I shouldn't ask questions, Jack, but if you are telling, I shouldn't mind knowing how that came to fail."

"Why, when we got to the crib we were going to crack we found it all afire," laughed Jack. "Of course, you could not hold the boss responsible for that."

"Nor his spirit guides."

"That's right. Just you give me time, doctor, and I'll make you believe in all that sort of thing."

"Well, I don't know; it is something pretty hard for me to believe."

"You haven't seen Mr. Magic yet."

"I am waiting for that privilege."

"It will come. You will be amazed. Ha! I thought so! There comes Dalkan now!"

Who was Dalkan? Until he heard the name spoken in the cabin Old King Brady had known nothing of this person.

A boat had just turned in from the river.

It was pulled by a big hulking fellow in his shirt sleeves.

In the stern sat a queer-looking creature.

He was a dwarf, but perfectly formed save for the head, which was abnormally large.

His face was of an olive color, decidedly greenish in its shade.

Long jet black hair hung down straight over his shoulders.

"Where did that freak grow?" asked Old King Brady.

"Look out! I believe he can hear with his toes and the ends of his fingers," whispered Jack. "That's Dalkan, the dwarf. He is the boss's right-hand man."

He hurried to the cabin door, and thrusting his head in, said:

"Dalkan!"

Frenchy immediately came out.

"Is Frenchy boss under Mr. Magic?" asked Old King Brady, when he came back, adding:

"You see, I am asking questions again."

"There is no boss under Mr. Magic," was the reply.

"We are all dead equal. The only point is Frenchy can talk to Dalkan and nobody else can."

"The dwarf looks like a Siamese."

"You have come pretty close to it. He is a native of Fonquin, French India."

"I see, and Mr. Magic comes from there also?"

"Now you are asking too many questions, doctor. Cut it out."

"It is cut. I'll say no more."

Old King Brady continued to use his eyes, however, even if his tongue was silenced.

The boat came alongside the tug and stopped.

Dalkan called up something in French and he and Frenchy held an animated conversation in that language. It was brief, however.

Then Dalkan was pulled away.

Wimble followed Frenchy into the cabin, telling Old King Brady to keep outside.

In a moment he came out, and going to the captain, spoke a few words.

Immediately preparations were made for a start.

"Got your orders?" demanded Old King Brady when Jack returned to his side.

"Yes," was the reply. "As much as we ever get them. But hang me if I understand how the job is to be pulled off in broad daylight."

"Just what has been puzzling me. You propose to go ahead just the same, I suppose?"

"Oh, certainly. We have no other idea than to obey orders. I believe the boys would do that, even if they were sure of being pinched."

Just then the tug started and in a few minutes they were steaming down the Delaware.

CHAPTER IV.

YOUNG KING BRADY GETS A BITE FROM THE "THUMBLESS LEAGUE."

When Young King Brady reached Wingdon street he went up Bone Alley and had a look at the abandoned factory. Here he saw at once that the place had been a distillery. The sign "Keystone Malting and Distilling Co." was painted across the front. The gate through which he and Alice had passed in the early morning was now changed in appearance. To Harry's surprise he found it boarded up on the inside. This was certainly peculiar.

Young King Brady could only conclude that the boards formed an inner gate which could be opened and shut against the other at will.

Across the alley was a blacksmith's shop, and a good-natured looking Irishman was hammering a horseshoe on an anvil. Harry crossed over and bade him good morning.

The blacksmith, dipping the glowing horseshoe into his water tub, nodded and smiled.

"Was youse looking for anyone?" he asked.

"No; I was wondering about the property across the way. Is it for sale?"

"I dunno. I should t'ink likely."

"Has it been closed long?"

"It's six years come next summer since the thrust got a-hold of it. They closed it down, bad luck to them; there's been no business around here since."

"Is there any watchman around the premises? I'd like to get in there and have a look."

"No, there's no one."

"I should think they would be afraid on account of fire."

"Sure I believe they would like to have it burn down. What good is it as it stands?"

Evidently the blacksmith knew nothing about the place being a holdout of the "Thumbless League."

"Is there anyone around here who lets boats?" Harry next asked, and the blacksmith directed him to a man.

Here Young King Brady got his boat and pulled out on the river. He had no difficulty in locating the entrance to the basin. The same sign was painted across the face of the big warehouses at its mouth. Harry hesitated a few minutes and then decided to push his investigations to the limit. So he turned into the passage and pulled on to the basin. Here he saw the old hulk lying as he had seen her the night before. There was not a soul in sight.

Harry pulled about the basin this way and that, keeping a sharp lookout for the thumbless black. Seeing nothing of him, he at last ventured to pull alongside the hulk, and finally he mustered up the courage to go aboard. But it all came to nothing. The cabin door was secured by a heavy padlock. There was no way of getting a look into it. The skylight had been burned and its place was supplied by boards which were bolted down to the iron deck.

"The Governor has pulled out," thought Harry. "It is no use. There is nothing doing here."

He returned to his boat and pulled back to the float, where he had hired it. Thus the second attempt to communicate with Old King Brady failed. Harry returned to the Bingham House and reported to Alice.

"I had no idea it would prove so," she said. "When Old King Brady gets ready to communicate with us he will let us know."

"And in the meantime we must get to work. I have been thinking over that scheme of opening an office and I have determined to try it if we can only engage one ready furnished."

"Whoever heard of a furnished office to rent, Harry?"

"Well, that's so, but there might be a chance. Let us get on the move. We will tackle the janitors of the different office buildings and see what we can find."

And at this they worked hard until well on in the afternoon, when they stumbled upon just what they wanted.

In one of the smaller office buildings on Chestnut street near Fifteenth they found an office which had been long unoccupied by a stock broker. The man had gone to California for his health, and being a part owner in the building, he had retained his office, leaving instructions with the janitor to rent it furnished by the month to any respectable person if the opportunity offered. The janitor did not appear to be in the least particular as to what sort of business was to be carried on, providing the rent, which doubtless carried with it a perquisite to himself, was paid

in advance. So Harry, figuring as a "loan broker," had no difficulty in securing the office under the name of "John White."

The furniture was new and the whole place needed only soap and water and the dust brush to put it into commission. This the janitor promised to attend to.

Harry and Alice then hunted up a sign painter and arranged for the signs to be put on the door and the bulletin board first thing in the morning.

He then wrote out a carefully worded advertisement to the effect that cash advances would be made upon all sorts of doubtful securities at the highest rates by John White, No—Chestnut street. Of course the word doubtful was not used, but the wording of the advertisement implied it.

Harry drew the copy up several times until he was sure it was just what he wanted. He and Alice then made several copies and the "ads" were taken to the morning papers. The night passed and nothing was heard of Old King Brady. Harry could only assume that the situation was such that the old detective would not make a move to communicate with them. Next morning they opened up at the office. Business began shortly after twelve o'clock. As many as six brokers turned up with doubtful securities. Needless to say they went away disappointed. Harry was not able to identify any one of them with the "Thumbless League." As for the securities offered they could scarcely be termed doubtful. In each and every case worthless would have been a better term to apply. And still another night passed and nothing was heard from Old King Brady. The "ads" were kept in the papers. Several persons dropped in during the morning, but nothing they had to offer seemed to suit. At twelve o'clock Harry went to Boothby's for lunch, leaving Alice in charge. When he returned there was something to tell.

"I think we have had a nibble, Harry," was Alice's first remark as he came in.

"How is that?"

"There was a young man in here who asked if we ever bought stamps in quantity."

"What kind of stamps?"

"That's what I asked him, but he said he did not know."

"And what then?"

"Oh, I made it plain to him that we bought any kind that we could make money out of and then he went away."

"It is too bad that I wasn't here. If I could only have shadowed him."

"I know. I thought of doing it myself, but he had seen me and I was afraid of driving off the fish altogether which was nibbling at our bait."

"Oh, no, it would not have done at all. You were quite right not to go. Perhaps he will come again."

But he did not come that day. Several persons came in with various propositions. But this day seemed to exhaust the supply, for on the next there was nobody. The entire day passed without a solitary offering of worthless stock.

The following day was Sunday and there was nothing doing at the office. All this time it was the same story, nothing from Old King Brady. On Saturday afternoon Harry saw Mr. Thomas, but there had been no word from the old detective received at the Secret Service office either. The first thing Monday morning, Harry now becoming really alarmed, sought the chief of police. This gentleman was a stranger to him, as he was a compara-

tively new appointee, and it was some time since the Bradys had had a case in Philadelphia.

"Why, I haven't heard from the old man," said the chief. "You know what he is driving at, I suppose?"

"Certainly," replied Harry.

He told of his meeting with the old detective, but did not state where it took place.

"Well, that is the latest that has been heard from him then," replied the chief; "but I don't think there is any cause for alarm. He is in with the burglars on probation, as I understand it. Until he can contrive to be elected a full-fledged member of the gang there will be nothing doing. By the way, we have about decided that this double murder—the Dumars—is to be put up to them. You have seen it all in the papers, I suppose?"

"I read it only casually. The papers thought that Dumar had murdered his wife and shot himself."

"That was our first idea, but it has since come out that Mrs. Dumar had about sixty thousand dollars worth of diamonds with her that night. They were her own and the real goods. She is an actress, too, you know. Seeing that she had never had her diamonds stolen, her friends believed them to be fakes, but it appears they were not. I am strongly of the mind that this was the work of the same gang."

"I understood that you had some way of communicating with Old King Brady."

"So we had at first. We wrote in care of a certain cigar dealer on Arch street under the name of Dr. James, but the day before you came over from New York the fellow busted. His store is closed up, and where he went we have failed to learn."

And so it came about that Harry found himself cut off altogether from his chief.

Harry got back to the office at noon. Alice reported no callers. It seemed as if they had exhausted the doubtful securities market. But the afternoon mail brought a letter which looked like business. It read as follows:

"Mr. John White, City:

"Dear Sir—We have recently been informed by your assistant that you sometimes bought stamps in quantity. We have such material for sale at a large reduction—forty per cent.—if a sufficient amount is purchased.

"We propose to be perfectly frank with you. The goods are crooked. Do you want to invest? It is a big chance to about double your money if you have an outlet for such goods.

"On the other hand, if you are a detective or Secret Service man, you had best beware, for in that case negotiations with us would be pretty apt to terminate in your departure from this mundane sphere. We have associated with us a man who knows by sight every prominent detective in this country and every Secret Service man of any note. If you want to do business we shall know whether you are a detective or not before we communicate with you again, which will be in a day or two. Meanwhile think this proposition over, and here is how you must act: Tonight at ten o'clock come into the restaurant on Locust street near Fourth kept by Adolph Bruner and dine there. Before you leave we shall have you sized up. No particular sign of identification is needed. We shall know you.

"Per order of The Committee."

"Alice," said Harry as he handed over the letter to his fair partner, "there is no doubt in my mind that we have got a bite from the Thumbless League at last."

CHAPTER V.

BY THE ORDER OF MR. MAGIC.

The tug ran down the Delaware about sixteen miles.

At the start Old King Brady observed that the name on the pilot house, which was the "Tiger," was a recently painted sign and that a piece of tarpaulin which hung over the stern concealed the name there.

When at last the tug stopped it was in a wooded cove, where there were no houses to be seen.

A little beyond a town of some size could be seen in the distance.

The captain now looked into the cabin and said:

"Well, gentlemen, it seems to me that this is the place. If it isn't you will have to put me wise."

They all went out and looked around.

Including Old King Brady, there were five passengers all told.

"It looks right to me," remarked Jack. "Frenchy, what do you think?"

"There's the three big trees," replied Frenchy, "but I don't see the big rock."

"It is a little further on," said the captain. "I saw it, but you can't as you stand."

"Put us ashore, Cap, and then stand off. Two whistles will be the signal, mind you," said Jack.

The boat in which Jack and Old King Brady had come away from the basin was pulled in alongside and Jack rowed ashore.

They landed at the head of the cove, where there was a high bank with a winding path leading up to the level above.

But the thumbless ones seemed to be in no hurry to ascend.

They began now to talk and argue with each other.

It was evident that all were afraid to undertake a daylight burglary.

The conversation was general at the start.

Then the name of Mr. Magic was introduced by one, and as soon as he did so Frenchy ordered Old King Brady to stand back out of hearing.

Jack Wimble immediately objected.

"The doctor ought to be told," he declared. "It isn't a fair shake to drag him into this thing in the dark."

"I'll tell him nothing without orders," retorted Frenchy. "If you want to get anything out of me you'll have to get him out of hearing, that's all."

"Oh, don't quarrel over me, gentlemen," said Old King Brady. "I'll get back out of the way. I'm here to do just as I am told."

He walked down on the shore and sat upon a log.

The conversation lasted nearly a quarter of an hour.

Frenchy did most of the talking.

He seemed to be going over the same ground again and again.

To Old King Brady it was plain enough.

These men were questioning the wisdom of Mr. Magic's "spirits."

They were making Frenchy repeat in detail the orders as received from Dalkan, the dwarf.

To be ordered by the "spirits" to commit a burglary in daylight was a little too much for the faith.

But at last they appeared to come to some understanding, and Jack, separating himself from the others, came over to where the old detective sat.

"Doctor," he said, "it has been decided that you and I are to go ahead and look the ground over. What about that?"

"There is no kick coming from me," answered Old King Brady. "None at all. I am ready for anything you fellows want, as I have said lots of times before."

"Blamed if you ain't," replied Jack heartily. "You are the easiest fellow to deal with I ever worked into the Thumbless League—that's right."

"Probably that is because I am new to the burglary business and don't appreciate its dangers," Old King Brady laughingly replied.

"There's danger enough, I've no doubt," said Jack. "But orders are orders. As I told you before, we have won out on everything we have ever undertaken since this league was formed, and I don't see any reason for going back on orders now. Come on. You and I are about the most respectable-looking guys of the bunch. That's why we have been chosen. The boys have got a scare on them, and we must try to down it or this business is going to prove a flunk."

They ascended to the top of the high bank.

Here there was a stretch of woods through which they passed.

Presently they came to a barbed wire fence beyond which was a road.

"Cut off," said Old King Brady.

"Cut off nothing," replied Jack. "I'll fix that in short order."

He produced a pair of cutting pliers which certainly did make short work of the wire.

In a moment the way was clear.

Jack now hurried the old detective along the road, which wound down towards the edge of the bluff, afterwards following on a line with it.

The spot was a lonelier one than Old King Brady would have believed it possible to find in this section. There was not a sign of a house anywhere until they had gone about a quarter of a mile, when they came to the beginning of a gentleman's park.

A moment later a large octagon frame house was seen standing back among the trees.

Jack stopped with a short exclamation.

"By thunder, Dalkan brought the right word!" he exclaimed. "However he does it, Mr. Magic never fails."

"What now?" demanded Old King Brady.

Jack suddenly turned on him, saying:

"Look here, doctor, if I tell you something, can you keep a still tongue?"

"I surely can," replied the old detective. "You have tried me several times before. You ought to be satisfied of that now."

"As I said down below there," continued Jack, "it isn't a fair shake to keep you ignorant when the danger is to

be all yours. I'm going to tell you just what Dalkan said, or rather as Frenchy reports it. Blame me if I don't believe he has it twisted after all."

"Well?"

"You see, it's like this: We never know where we are going till we get the word from Mr. Magic. To-day Dalkan brought it, but it don't always come that way."

"And what was it?"

"First off, Mr. Magic told us that he was going to give us a big diamond haul, and that you were to be taken with us. I supposed it was to be a chloroforming job, so I told you to fetch your tools. It turns out different. Orders came to go down the river to a cove where there were three big oak trees in a row and a big rock. That was up to the captain, and he seems to have succeeded all right."

"And then?"

"And then we were to come up here and strike an octagon house standing alone in the woods—you see it—and let me tell you that this is the way all Mr. Magic's directions come out."

"Well?"

"Next we are told that there will be no opposition, no fight to put up, nobody to chloroform. Frenchy and I are to break in—just think of it in broad daylight, with dogs and servants mebbe. Blest if I can understand it, but Mr. Magic never fails."

"And where do I come in?"

"That's the singular part of it. The orders say that Frenchy and I will get nothing; that we are to come out and send you in, and that you will find diamonds."

"Ha! So? And what do I do with them?"

"You deliver them to Mr. Magic in person. We are to take you directly to him."

"Then at last I shall see that wonderful man! Well, I'm willing, but don't you fellows go to killing me for my diamonds. I shan't like that very well."

"No fear! If you find them you will keep them until you deliver them up to Mr. Magic all right, but don't for a moment think that you will get the chance to give us the slip. We shall look out for that."

The expression upon Jack's face was not a pleasant one as he said this.

So far the man had treated Old King Brady with every consideration.

But the old detective felt now that he had little to expect from the fellow in case he attempted to cross him.

"All right. I'm ready and willing to go right ahead," was the reply.

"We will look around a bit before we go back," said Jack.

They pushed on until they came to a gate.

Beyond was a broad driveway leading up to the house.

Upon a tree a sign had been nailed, which read:

"Shadyside Lodge."

After waiting a few minutes and seeing nobody, Jack opened the gate and they walked towards the house.

"Do you really mean to tell me that none of you know anything about this place?" Old King Brady asked.

"Certainly," was the reply. "Of course I can't actually answer for the others. They may be lying to me, but I don't think it. As for myself, I never saw nor heard of this place until now."

"There appears to be nobody living here."

"It looks so. The house is certainly all closed up. I'm blest if I can understand it."

Nor was the matter made any plainer after they had gone all around the house and examined the outbuildings and the grounds.

To all appearance Shadyside Lodge was entirely deserted.

There were no horses in the barn.

Doors and windows were tried and all were found fastened.

There was not another house in sight.

Such a beautiful chance for a daylight burglary Old King Brady with all his experience could scarcely have imagined.

"Your Mr. Magic is certainly a wonderful man, Jack," he said as they started for the road. "Apparently there is no trouble about pulling off this job in broad daylight."

"Well, it looks so, but all the same we have to exercise a whole lot of caution. Let's hurry. The longer we wait the greater the risk."

They ran after they got into the woods.

In a few minutes they were back at the cove.

"Well?" demanded Frenchy, "what did you find?"

"It is all just as Dalkan said," replied Jack. "The house stands alone in the woods. It's shut up tight. I don't believe anybody lives there. No trouble about making a day job of it, though."

"Then come ahead," said Frenchy. "If the boss is right in one thing he sure is in the rest. This is going to be a winner."

They all started for Shadyside then.

When they came in sight of the place conditions remained unchanged.

The burglars, however, sneaked into the grounds one by one.

But when it came to Jack he took Old King Brady along with him.

As they drew near the barn they saw Frenchy standing by the door.

The other thumbless ones were not in evidence, wherever they had hidden themselves.

"Well," said Jack, "what's the word?"

"Aw, say," growled Frenchy, "there sure hain't nobody living in that house."

"Don't look so, that's certain," assented Jack; "but then you can't tell. This job is being pulled off by the order of Mr. Magic. You know what that means?"

"Of course. We'll crack de crib all right."

"I should say so! If there was a dog barking out of every window I should make a stab at it rather than go back on the orders of the boss."

"Do we go now?"

"I'm ready."

"Well, then, let's go ahead. Every moment we hold back increases the risk of someone coming."

"Ready. And the doctor?"

"He can stand right here and watch. He's such a respectable-looking old guy that he can easy make up a yarn to fit if anybody comes along."

"And if anybody does come, what is to be the signal?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Oh, never you mind about the signal. There are others

watching you all right who will attend to that," replied Jack.

They walked over to the rear door of the octagon house then.

Old King Brady, watching, saw Frenchy produce a jimmy.

It was a sectional affair, and the burglar proceeded to put it together.

Once he tackled the door, Frenchy showed himself an expert in his craft.

Just how he went about it Old King Brady could not exactly make out, for Jack stood in front of him.

At all events, Frenchy had the door open in a moment and both burglars vanished within the octagon house.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF THE BURGLARY.

Old King Brady could have told his burglarious companions one or two things which might have interested them if he had chosen.

Although he kept his mouth shut, the old detective's eyes were wide open all the time.

He had discerned wheel marks on the driveway.

His experienced eye told him that they were fresh and could not have been made further back than some time during the previous night.

Then there were marks on the front piazza which made the detective certain that two persons at least had entered the house.

Under one of the windows lay some faded flowers, which had been in water.

Old King Brady was ready to assume that this window had been opened the previous night and the flowers thrown out.

In short, these and other suggestive points made the old detective think it altogether probable that there was someone in the house, and certain that it had at least been occupied the night before.

"And I am to go in there alone," thought Old King Brady. "I wonder if it will come to that. Certainly this is a very, very singular gang."

But the old detective was gunning for Mr. Magic, and he was prepared to put up with almost anything which would enable him to get a sight of that remarkable man.

He expected a considerable wait, but it did not come that way.

Within five minutes the two burglars came out.

One glance at their faces was sufficient to show that their experience had been a startling one.

They hurried towards the old detective, talking excitedly, but in tones too low to be overheard.

"What luck?" demanded Old King Brady as they drew near.

"Luck!" said Jack sarcastically. "There's no luck in that house unless you bring it our way!"

"Then Mr. Magic was right!"

"I should say so. It's your turn, doctor."

"What am I to do? I know nothing of all this."

"You see for yourself, Frenchy, that he has to be told. It will spoil everything if he isn't."

"I donno," growled Frenchy. "We weren't told what we had to expect. Let him go and take his chances."

"But how in thunder is he going to find—you know what—unless he is told what to look for?"

"Tell him that much then, but don't go no further."

"You are to look for diamonds, doctor," said Jack. "I can't tell you any more."

"Diamonds," repeated Old King Brady, putting in his most innocent expression. "That's a big house, gentlemen. It will take a long time to search it thoroughly."

"Go ahead," said Frenchy. "If you are to find 'em, you'll find 'em, that's all."

"He shan't go without knowing what he's going to run up against," broke out Jack.

"Doctor," he hastily added, "there are two dead ones in there!"

"Dead! Did you kill them?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Now you have queered the whole business," snarled Frenchy. "By thunder, I'll tell the boss!"

"Do it if you dare!" hissed Jack.

"Come, come, don't you two quarrel," put in Old King Brady. "Did you fellows do up those two?"

"No, no," replied Jack. "The man must have killed the woman and then shot himself. We don't know no more about it than you do. But hurry up, doctor, for gracious sake!"

"I'll go now."

"Hold on! Have you seen anybody?"

"Not a soul."

"It's a wonder. This place is certainly very remote." Old King Brady hurried towards the house.

The case was growing more interesting every moment. He entered at the door which had been forced and made his way upstairs.

The closed windows made it pretty dark inside and the old detective got out his flash lantern.

As he afterwards said, he seemed to move by instinct.

A strange oppression was strong upon him.

It was as if some invisible hand was guiding his footsteps.

Without the least hesitation he went to a certain door, one of many which opened into an octagon hall.

The door stood slightly ajar, and perhaps that is what made him choose it, but at all events he hit it right—one glance into the darkened room told him that.

The apartment was handsomely furnished in modern style.

Upon the bed, lying crosswise as though she had fallen there, was a blonde young woman fully dressed in what seemed to be a traveling suit.

She was quite dead and had evidently been choked into insensibility, if not so killed.

Her face was swollen and her neck all black and blue, showing every mark of the strangler's deadly work.

But, besides this, she had been shot in the forehead.

Seated in a chair before a mirror was a dark young man, without coat or vest, also dead and shot in the same place.

The blood had streamed down over his face and shirt. Upon the floor, as if it had dropped from his hand, was

a revolver with two empty chambers, as Old King Brady subsequently discovered.

To the experienced eye of the old detective, the case was plain.

The man had strangled the woman to death. Subsequently he had shot her.

But little blood had flowed from the woman's wound, which went to prove that she must have been dead some time when the shot was fired.

Finally the man had shot himself.

His position before the mirror absolutely proved it to the old detective's mind.

Beside the chair in which the dead man sat was a table with a fancy lamp upon it.

This lamp had burned itself out, as the lack of oil and the condition of the wick absolutely proved.

But why had the crime been committed?

Putting what Jack had told him together with the condition of the room, Old King Brady did not find it hard to determine.

The room had been ransacked from one end to the other.

Drawers had been pulled out and thoroughly searched; their contents lay tumbled about the floor.

It was the same with the closet.

The woman's clothes had been pulled from the hooks and lay scattered about in every direction.

The carpet had been pulled up in the corners and the floor examined.

The bed had been pulled out and pushed back again, showing that the examination had been continued underneath it.

"He killed her for her diamonds, and failing to find them, killed himself," murmured the old detective as he looked around.

But would he be more successful?

Mr. Magic had said it.

And it was one of the many singular features of this singular case that the old detective did succeed.

Not on the instant, but very close to it.

Of course Old King Brady saw everything with an experienced eye.

Ignoring the furniture, Old King Brady went straight to the closet.

Here he studied conditions for about twenty minutes, aided by his flashlight.

Then dropping on his hands and knees, he fumbled about in one corner and pressed a secret spring set in the baseboard.

A small section of the floor dropped.

Old King Brady flashed his light into the opening between the floor beams.

Thrusting in his hand, he drew out an oblong wooden box.

He was now growing a bit excited.

If he did find diamonds, should he give them to these men?

He could not bring himself to any such thought.

"And if I don't I am surely in the greatest danger," he said to himself. "What shall I do?"

But his course was to be marked out for him in a way he little dreamed.

Taking the box, he hurried to the table and pried up the lid with a small tool which he always carries.

Inside were various plush and leather cases, such as jewellers use.

Opening these, the old detective's eyes were fairly dazzled with the brilliancy revealed.

Here were diamonds galore.

All that Mr. Magic had predicted had come to pass.

And more!

Each piece of jewelry had its counterpart, the one genuine, the other false.

But Old King Brady, who is a most excellent judge of diamonds, had never seen such false gems before.

They must have been made by some expert abroad.

Seen as he saw them then, not one man in a thousand could have told the false from the real.

But Old King Brady could.

Instantly his resolve was taken.

Even at the risk of their being found by the detectives who were sure to come, he would restore the genuine stones to their hiding place and take the fakes to Mr. Magic.

It was impossible for him to do otherwise, he felt, and yet the old detective had come out with these men fully resolved to assist them in their evil schemes.

So Old King Brady pocketed the fakes, put the real diamonds back in the box and restored the latter to the secret hiding place.

Then he calmly went downstairs and passed out of the house.

Frenchy and Jack hurried forward to meet him.

"Well?" demanded the latter. "What luck?"

"I got 'em," replied Old King Brady, "but I don't know whether they are the real goods or not."

"Gee!" gasped Frenchy. "Much?"

"Oh, a lot! Beautiful pieces of jewelry. Sunburst pins, earrings, bracelets, a coronet, a necklace, all sorts of things. See my pockets how they bulge out? Want to see the goods now?"

"No, no, no!" cried Frenchy in some excitement. "That's against orders."

"We have to take them to Mr. Magic," said Jack, "and you do the taking. It would bring us bad luck to have anything to do with them."

"Pshaw!" said the old detective. "What harm can there be in taking a squint at them? I know nothing about diamonds. They may all be fakes for all I can tell."

"Never!" said Jack. "Mr. Magic makes no such mistakes."

"Say, Jack, Doc is dead right," said Frenchy. "It can't do no harm to have a look."

"Sure not," replied Old King Brady. "I'll never give you away."

"Mushka will know it sure," said Jack. "We'll have it thrown at us from behind the curtain."

But Old King Brady, who had placed the case containing the coronet uppermost in his left-hand coat pocket, now pulled it out.

"I won't look," declared Jack, and he turned his back.

But Frenchy's curiosity was now fully aroused.

Old King Brady opened the case.

The coronet was of solid gold and the colored stones were real.

Only the diamonds were false, but it was in these that the chief value of the thing lay.

"Gee!" gasped Frenchy. "Who ever seen a thing like that?"

"Think it's straight goods?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Sure thing. Jack, take a look. You're a judge."

"Won't do it," retorted Jack. "Doctor, put it up if you ever expect to get into the Thumbless League."

Old King Brady shut the case and restored it to his pocket.

"Well, it has come out as you fellows said," he remarked, "and now what's doing?"

"It's the back track for ours," said Jack. "What did you think about them stiffs? The man killed the woman because she wouldn't tell where the diamonds was hid—yes?"

"Likely," replied Old King Brady, "but I'm no detective. Don't ask me."

"Where did you find 'em anyway?" asked Jack.

"Hidden in the bed."

"So? S'pose he didn't guess that or didn't like to disturb the corpse. He seemed to have looked about everywhere else all right."

"That's what. Now do we go?"

"Yes," said Frenchy, and he gave a whistle.

Jack went ahead to the gate to see if the coast was clear, and there he whistled.

Old King Brady and Frenchy then followed him out.

They made tracks for the cove.

Old King Brady saw nothing of the rest of the gang until after they reached the cove, when they came trailing in one by one.

All wanted to know what success there had been, and to each one Frenchy told the whole story.

Old King Brady particularly observed that no one asked to look at the gems and that Frenchy was very careful not to mention the fact that he had taken a peep.

The tug was called in and they started for Philadelphia, landing at the same place from which they had set out.

Before leaving Jack gave the tug captain a big roll of bills.

He was the first to leave the tug and Frenchy and Old King Brady went with him.

What became of the rest of the gang Old King Brady did not know.

And now do I see Mr. Magic?" demanded the old detective as they hurried along the water front.

"You go where we expect to see him," was Jack's reply, "but whether we will hit him or not I can't say."

The walk was a long one, and it ended at Buttonwood street.

Covering two squares here, they pulled up at an old-fashioned three-story brick house opening directly off the street in the old Philadelphia style.

Jack rang the bell three times in quick succession.

The wait was scarcely a minute.

Then the door was opened by the thumbless black.

"Boss here, Caesar?" demanded Jack.

"Yes," replied the negro. "He am came dis hour. He am waitin' for you in de magic room."

"And the doctor is to go right down?"

"Yep! Dat's what he says."

"Come, doctor," said Jack. "Your curiosity is about to be gratified. You will see Mr. Magic at last."

CHAPTER VII.

HARRY STARTS A DEAL WITH THE THUMBLESS LEAGUE.

That evening Young King Brady and Alice dined at Adolph Bruner's famous table d'hote.

This, it will be observed, was in accordance with the letter received from the "Committee."

Bruner's place we have termed famous, and so it is, but its fame is strictly of the Bohemian sort.

It is a place frequented by newspaper men, race-track sports, and people in search of the "Philadelphia elephant," if there is such a beast; in short, a resort for men-about-town.

Harry and Alice were on hand at the appointed hour, and were fortunate in getting a good table without waiting.

The place was crowded, as it always is of an evening. Alice sat taking in everyone curiously.

Harry devoted himself to her, and leaned over the table, talking in a low, confidential tone, Alice scarcely appearing to appreciate his remarks.

This was by previous arrangement.

To the observer they seemed like a pair of lovers.

The closer observed would have been ready to pronounce Harry as a most devoted lover, and Alice as decidedly indifferent to his advances.

But this gave Alice her chance to size everybody up, and as curiosity is ever a woman's privilege, this was as it should have been.

At last Alice appeared to pay more attention to her escort.

"I think I have studied every face, Harry," she said in a whisper, which could not have been heard beyond the next table.

"Well, do you see anyone who appears to be watching us particularly?"

"No. I can't spot anyone who appears to take an interest in us beyond being amused by your love-making."

"If they only knew how genuine my love-making was!"

"If, indeed! But I question if any of them doubt that."

"That shows that Bruner's guests are people of sense, for my love-making is the genuine article."

"Do quit, Harry. This is business. Time enough for the other thing."

"But the time never comes, Alice, and I don't believe you ever intend it shall."

"Wait and see. This case may decide me to give up the detective business, listen to your protestations of love, and to announce myself ready for housekeeping. Who can tell?"

"I can only wish it may indeed prove so."

"Meanwhile let us get down to business. I think— But here comes the waiter at last. Order, please."

The order was given, and once more came the opportunity to talk.

"You were saying?" said Harry.

"Really, I forgot what I was going to say," replied Alice.

"It couldn't have been of much consequence, then."

"Probably it wasn't; but— Why, Harry, what a peculiar man!"

The person to whom Alice referred came slowly down among the tables, and seated himself at one nearly opposite.

He was tall and almost as dark as a negro, which the long, straight, black hair hanging down over his shoulders proved that he was not.

His dress was a faultless suit of black.

In his black scarf he wore a diamond of great value.

But it was the face which most attracted attention.

This was partially covered with a fine black beard. It was not a handsome face, but it was decidedly striking, and the little, deep-set, glittering eyes seemed to read Harry through and through as they were now suddenly turned upon him.

Young King Brady turned his head away with a shudder.

"Why, Alice, he's a dreadful looking man!" he murmured.

"Do you really think so?" demanded Alice. "I consider him rather good-looking."

"How can you say so?"

"Because I think so."

"Certainly there is no accounting for tastes."

"What nationality should you say he was, Harry?"

"Oh, an Oriental of some sort. He is certainly not a negro, and I don't think he has Indian blood in him, either. But drop him. I don't care to look at the fellow again. There is something about his eyes that gives me the creeps."

"He might be our man, Harry."

"Well, of course that is so, but I sincerely hope not."

The soup came; they were eating roast duck when Alice, who could not keep her eyes off the mysterious individual on her right, much to Harry's disgust, suddenly gave a slight exclamation.

"What now?" demanded Young King Brady.

"Why, Harry," whispered Alice, "that man has lost a thumb on his right hand! No, don't look now! You will attract his attention. There! You would do it!"

"Couldn't help it. If you are fascinated so am I by what you tell me, and it is so!"

"Of course. You wouldn't believe me."

"Oh, it wasn't that, Alice. I just wanted to make sure that you were not mistaken, that's all."

"Have you any doubts now about his being here to observe us?"

"None."

"I wish you were better disguised."

Harry had changed the expression of his face somewhat, and his clothes were quite different from those he usually wore, but he had used neither a wig nor a false moustache.

The case promised to be a long one, and in summer such things are hard to manage.

"It will be all right," he said. "Don't worry."

"Oh, I'm not worrying, but I'm afraid of that man. I seem to feel that he is going to make trouble for us."

"Don't be superstitious, Alice."

"Don't you look at him again, then."

"Well, I won't. I don't suppose that either of us need to look at him for, that matter."

"Not at all. Let any overture come from him."

None came.

If the Hindoo, as Harry began to call him, particularly observed them they did not see it.

Certainly there was nobody else who did.

The dinner finished, Young King Brady and Alice did not linger, but immediately left the place.

Next day they were at their office as usual, and still no word had been received from Old King Brady.

Their anxiety for his safety had been wrought up to the highest pitch, but they could come to no conclusion as to what they ought to do.

The morning glided away, and it was almost closing-up time, when a man entered the office and inquired for Mr. White.

He was a tall and rather good-looking person, dressed in correct style.

The only really peculiar feature about him was that he wore gloves, in spite of the fact that the day had been an excessively hot one; but of course this is something which many gentlemen might do.

"Did you wish to see me, sir?" asked Harry, stepping forward.

"Yes," replied the man. "Can I see you alone for a moment?"

"Certainly. Step in here."

Harry led the way into a small private office, and closed the door.

"I am one of the committee," said the man. "I prefer not to state my name."

"Ah! In the stamp matter?"

"Yes."

"Did I pass muster, then?" inquired Harry.

"You did."

"You and your associates are satisfied that I am neither a fakir nor a Secret Service man?"

"We are."

"Good! Then we can talk business."

"I am ready. How heavy are you prepared to go in on this deal?"

"Oh, to almost any reasonable amount."

"What do you call a reasonable amount?"

"Say five thousand."

"Could you work off five thousand dollars' worth of stamps?"

"Tobacco and whisky stamps, yes."

"That is the kind we have. Do you mean five thousand in face value, or that you are prepared to invest five thousand?"

"Either way. I don't know that it makes any difference to me."

"You must be well capitalized."

"I am."

"Where are you from?"

"New York."

"Where do you propose to sell the stamps?"

"Does that make any difference?"

"You don't want to offer them in Pittsburg."

"I should not think of doing so."

"I should like to know."

"I propose to place them in New York with a man who can and will sell them out in small lots."

"I warn you and him against Pittsburg."

"Very well. The warning shall be strictly heeded."

"Are you prepared to pay cash?"

"On the nail."

"Very well."

"And the terms?"

"Forty per cent discount, as our first letter stated."

"I don't consider it enough. The risk is great. It should be half face."

"I don't think the committee will listen to that proposition."

"That's my offer. I have been thinking it over, and I don't care to trade any other way."

"You can put it up to them."

"I am to see them then?"

"Yes. I have no power to complete the trade."

"Have you samples of the goods with you?"

"No. I have never even seen them. I am merely a go-between."

"Very well. If you think there is any possibility of our coming to terms I am ready to go ahead."

"I think you better see the boss."

"Very well. When and where?"

"It will be to-night. I will meet you at the Pennsylvania station. I shall have a cab. You will accompany me."

"All right."

"You will have to submit to being blindfolded."

"Indeed! I confess I don't like that very well."

"Still, it has to be."

"Why this mystery? I have dealt a lot with your kind. You are perfectly welcome to bring the goods here."

"It cannot be done. There is only the one way."

Young King Brady demurred further, but ended in yielding, as he had intended to do at the start."

Little as he liked the prospect, he felt that it was certain that he was dealing with a member of the Thumbless League.

With Old King Brady so long silent, Harry felt that it was up to him to run some risk to learn what this silence meant.

Watching the gloved right hand of his visitor as they talked, he observed that while the fingers moved occasionally, the tumb remained rigid.

Was it a false thumb fitted into the finger of the glove? Young King Brady thought so.

Indeed, the more he watched the more convinced he became that it was so.

He resolved to go ahead with the deal, come what might.

"At what time shall I meet you?" he asked, when at last they came to terms.

"Say nine o'clock."

"That will suit. When may I expect to get through if all goes well?"

"Oh, it ought not to take long. I should say you can count upon getting away in an hour."

"Very well. Nine o'clock, Pennsylvania station, it is."

And the unknown left.

Harry reported to Alice.

"At last the ball begins to roll," she said, "and I am

glad. If it will only bring us some word of Old King Brady I don't care what risk I personally run."

"You must not run any. This is too dangerous a gang for you to have anything to do with, Alice."

"Well, I think I see myself counted out!"

"Oh, it has got to be so this time."

"You are not my lord and master yet, Harry. Give me something to do or I promise you I shall get busy on my own account."

"Well, I'll see."

"Decide now."

"Then, if you must, shadow the cab that takes me away, but don't let it go beyond that."

"Very good. So be it. I'll guarantee to find out where you go."

"It makes little difference where it is, so long as I can get sight of the Governor again."

CHAPTER VIII.

MUSHKA.

The thumbless negro preceded Wimble and Old King Brady down a flight of stairs.

The old detective had observed that the house had no basement, so he knew that he must be on the cellar level.

They halted in a narrow hall, and the negro pulled a bell which jangled discordantly in the distance.

"Dalkan him come, he look after yo', Mass' Wimble," he said.

"All right, Cæsar," replied Jack. "Cooking again?"

"Yair. I gottor git back to the kitchen."

"You like that better than watching on the wharf?"

"Yair; whole lot better."

"We don't go back to the old factory again for the present, I believe."

"So I heered. Know why?"

"No, I don't, Cæsar, do you?"

"No, Massa. I dunno nuffin about it. Specs hit am jest one ob de boss's ideas."

"His ideas are all right."

"Dat's what dey am. Yah, yah! Don't tink I'se gwine back on Mushka. No, no!"

He turned and went back up the stairs.

"We may have to wait here some time," said Jack.

"You can never tell when Mr. Magic will let you in."

"He appears to be a very peculiar man," said Old King Brady.

"He is, in everything he does. You can never tell what move he is going to make."

The wait was a long one, but it came to an end at last, and the door was suddenly opened by Dalkan the dwarf.

This strange little manikin looked somewhat different now.

He was dressed in a suit of yellow silk, and was all ablaze with colored gems; possibly the real goods, Old King Brady thought.

There were emerald ear-rings hanging from his ears, a necklace of garnets and turquoises about his neck, and on every finger was a ring carrying a different colored stone.

"He speaks no English," whispered Jack. "We are to follow him, I suppose."

It proved to be so. Dalkan made a sign and they passed through the door.

Advancing a few feet the dwarf pointed to an open trap door, saying something in French.

He then turned and descended a ladder.

Jack told Old King Brady to go after him, and both went down into a narrow passage boarded on both sides.

Dalkan produced a flash-lantern, and lighted them through to the end.

Old King Brady reckoned that they must have gone two hundred feet in a southerly direction.

This would carry them through to the lot on the next street. It seemed certain that the passage was underground.

Here Dalkan knocked on a door.

"Entrez vous!" called a voice in French.

They passed into a small room, cheaply furnished, when Dalkan opened the door.

It was without windows, and lighted by a hanging lamp.

Here at a table was seated the same man seen by Harry and Alice at Bruner's restaurant, but he now wore a shabby old dressing gown instead of the black coat.

Before him on the table was a large parchment-covered volume which he appeared to be studying.

He did not even raise his eyes when they entered.

Jack stood in respectful silence, Old King Brady doing the same.

Dalkan closed the door, and dropped on the floor beside his master, sitting cross-legged, with his arms folded.

This then was the mysterious Mr. Magic, and Dalkan was his yellow dog.

Fully ten minutes passed before the man deigned to take the slightest notice of them.

Then, marking a place in his book by a slip of paper, he closed the volume and looked up.

"So you have come, Wimble," he said, in a soft, silvery voice, precisely the opposite from what Old King Brady had expected him to use. "And this is your probationer? What is the name?"

Jack nudged Old King Brady to speak up for himself.

Then the old detective gave out a yarn which he had carefully prepared, and which he had been waiting for weeks to give to this singular man.

Whether it was believed or disbelieved he could form no idea.

Mr. Magic sat there like a Sphinx.

"Dr. James," he then said, "I am pleased to meet you. I hope that we may become better acquainted, and may grow to be fast friends, but the end of your probation is not yet, nor can I say now when it will end."

"I shall have to be patient, I suppose," said Old King Brady.

"You will; there is no other way. Wimble!"

"Yes, sir."

"Were my orders carried out?"

"Yes, sir; to the letter."

"And the result?"

"Was as it always is. Everything came out just as you said."

"You have the gems, doctor?"

"I have what I found," replied Old King Brady. "I am no judge of such things. I cannot say whether the gems are real or false."

"Produce what you have."

Old King Brady began to empty his pockets.

"Shall I open the cases?" he asked.

Mr. Magic nodded.

Certainly the display looked genuine enough and brilliant enough when all the cases were spread out open on the table.

Jack gave an exclamation of gratified surprise.

Seen by artificial light the display was certainly a brilliant one.

Old King Brady almost began to doubt his own judgment, but then he had seen the real and the false side by side.

It was impossible that the actress should have duplicated her diamonds and other gems.

"What do you think of them, sir?" he asked.

"Like yourself, I am no judge," replied Mr. Magic.

"They will be passed upon by another. I presume they are the real thing."

It was a relief to hear him say it.

"You will leave these things with me," added Mr. Magic. "When we come to divide up you get your share, just as though you were a member of the band. That is satisfactory, I suppose?"

"Oh, quite."

"That is all, Wimble. Doctor, I propose to-night to give an exhibition of my magic powers to the members of the Thumbless League. It is one of a series of meetings which we have been holding. If you care to attend I shall be pleased to have you do so."

"I should be greatly pleased to do so," replied the old detective.

"Very well, then. Wimble, see that Dr. James is shown to the magic room to-night. Eight o'clock, as usual."

"Do I take him in the usual way?" demanded Jack.

"Ah, so! He is still on probation. I forgot for the moment. Well, no. I think he better come here. Dalkan, you will admit this gentleman at any time."

The dwarf bobbed his head.

"And now, gentlemen, if you will kindly excuse me," said Mr. Magic, opening his book again.

Then Old King Brady was hustled right out.

And now the old detective made up his mind to strike for what he had not been able to get since he was made a probationary member of the Thumbless League, and that was an hour to himself.

Thus far not for one moment had he been able to detach himself from some member of the league.

Even while he was on board the old hulk it was so. He knew then that the negro was ever watching him, and that he would have been instantly challenged by the fellow if he attempted to desert his post.

But even now it was not to be.

Old King Brady when they got on the street proposed it to Jack.

"Doctor, don't ask me," was the reply. "That's the only thing I can't do. You see what sort of a man we are dealing with. Now, understand, he knows everything that is going on. If I was to attempt in any way to go

back on his orders, it would be put up to me quicker than lightning in the magic room. You'll see.

"But tell me," added Jack, "what is it you want to do? I'll go with you anywhere you say."

"No," replied Old King Brady. "It isn't that I want to go anywhere in particular, Jack, but I'm not like the rest of you fellows."

"I know that. You are an educated man, and naturally want your freedom. I understand. Well, it will come in a few days. If Mushka pronounces favorably on your case to-night you will be initiated this coming week. After that you will be free to go and come as you please."

And so the plan the old detective had formed of communicating with Harry and Alice was nipped in the bud.

He went with Jack to a certain saloon, and there they remained playing dominoes for hours, that being Jack's favorite game.

Later they went to a room which they had hired in common since Old King Brady got in with the man.

In the evening they turned up at Buttonwood street again, and being admitted first by the negro and then by Dalkan, as before, they found themselves once more in Mr. Magic's room.

But the magician was not there.

"Do we go right in, Dalkan?" asked Jack.

The dwarf grinned and showed his teeth.

"Pshaw!" growled Jack. "I am always forgetting that he can't understand English. I suppose we will just have to wait."

There was an inner door to the room, and soon voices were heard behind it.

Dalkan then opened the door and passed in.

He was out again in a minute, and holding the door open motioned to them to enter.

They passed into a larger apartment supported by wooden posts.

Here there was a flight of steps leading up to a door.

There were also two tables and a dozen or more cheap wooden chairs.

The place was lighted by a large round lantern, which hung suspended from the ceiling and burned bright and clear.

At last Old King Brady had got among the Thumbless League for fair.

Ten of the chairs were occupied by these men.

Terry and Frenchy were there, and Cæsar came in after a moment with another negro.

They all sat facing a sort of cabinet made by suspending curtains from iron rods in one corner of the room.

It looked to Old King Brady like nothing else than the seance room of some spiritualist medium, and such, in fact, it was.

After a little Mr. Magic came stalking into the room.

"Now I get it if he has discovered the fraud," thought Old King Brady.

But Mr. Magic never even looked his way.

Nor did he speak to anyone else.

He took his stand near a small table in the middle of the room.

He was dressed as before, with the exception of the gown.

Instead he wore a silk gown, all embroidered with

crescent moons and stars, which gave him a decidedly astrological appearance.

In a moment Dalkan came into the room, dressed in white fleshings, which made him look if anything uglier than before.

He picked up a long table, and pushed it in front of the cabinet.

Then, springing upon the table, he lay down at full length.

Mr. Magic took a cloth and threw it over the face of the dwarf.

Then, reaching up, he turned down the light to a mere glimmer.

"Don't be frightened at anything which may happen," Jack whispered in Old King Brady's ear.

"Oh, I am used to most anything," replied the old detective. "You needn't concern yourself about me."

He watched Mr. Magic, while the others watched the curtain.

The magician just stood there motionless, with folded arms.

At last, from behind the curtain, a voice began talking in a foreign language.

Mr. Magic went up to the table and answered the voice. The conversation was a brief one.

Mr. Magic then turned to his audience, and said:

"Gentlemen, they want me inside to-night for some reason. I had rather it were otherwise, as it usually is, but the commands of the spirits must be obeyed. Wimble, be good enough to restore the table to its place after I pass in."

He pulled the table aside then, and passed behind the curtains, Wimble pushing the table back.

In a few minutes the curtains suddenly parted above, and a head was thrust out.

"Hello, Mushka! Good-evening, Mushka! How are you, Mushka?" the different crooks called.

"Good-evening, boys!" a gruff voice answered. "Glad to see you all again."

"That's Mushka, Dalkan's controlling spirit," Jack whispered. "You want to pay particular attention to what he says. It is from him that we get the most of our points."

It may have been all very wonderful, but Old King Brady could not see wherein the exhibition differed from any ordinary fake spiritualist seance.

As near as he could make out the head in the very dim light it was just a reproduction of Mr. Magic's head, but with short black hair instead of the flowing locks of the latter, which might very readily have been a wig.

But the eyes seemed larger and they glowed as if phosphorus had been rubbed around them.

All this Old King Brady was observing when the voice suddenly called out:

"Doctor, what did you mean by it? Speak!"

Old King Brady was ready to sit up and pay attention then, be very sure.

"What did I mean by what, Mushka?" he demanded.

"By hiding the real gems and bringing Mr. Magic the fakes," the "spirit" replied.

"There! I'm up against it," thought the old detective in dismay.

"Mushka, you are mistaken," he said. "What I found

I brought to Mr. Magic. As I told him, I do not know whether they are real or false."

"You lie, old man!" cried the "spirit, "and now let me tell you something. You are a spy, you are a fake and a fraud!"

This was spoken with a rising inflection, each accusation being louder than the one before it.

In an instant every man was on his feet.

"Don't turn up the light!" cried Mushka. "Patience a moment, brothers of the Thumbless League. I will tell you what to do with this man!"

CHAPTER IX.

ALICE TACKLES PROFESSOR TAKUT RABAMJA.

Of course, if Harry and Alice could have known of the outcome of the visit of Old King Brady to Mr. Magic's seance room, it would not have had a very quieting effect upon their fears during the days which followed.

But this was not to be.

At the appointed time Harry met the "committeeman" at the Pennsylvania station.

He left Alice at the Bingham House, just entering a cab with which to trail him.

The driver was an intelligent young man who had been liberally paid in advance by Young King Brady to perform the work of the evening.

He picked out a place where Alice could readily see all that was going on.

Harry did not have to wait a minute.

A hand was waved to him out of the cab.

Next minute he was talking to the stranger at the window.

Then he entered the cab and was driven away.

The driver had assured Alice that she need not disturb herself about matters at all, that he would let her know just when to act.

The ride was a long one.

At last the cab stopped, and the driver got down and opening the door looked in.

"Well, I've located them, Miss Montgomery," he said.

"Yes," replied Alice. "Shall I get out?"

"You can see the house better if you will."

"Does there appear to be anybody on the watch?"

"No."

"And the cab?"

"It is gone."

"I'll get out."

Nervous over Harry's experiment from the start, Alice was even more so now.

It had seemed to her from the first that the whole thing was wrong; that they were suspected, and this was all a trick of the enemy to capture Harry.

She had said as much to the young detective, but he positively refused to listen to her.

The driver led her around the corner and pointed to one of those interminable rows of brick houses with marble trimmings for which old Philadelphia is noted.

"It's the ninth house down there," he said. "I am positive sure of the count. That's where they went in."

"Did the cab go away as soon as they got out?" asked Alice.

"No; not until after they went into the house and the door was shut," was the reply. "I noticed that particularly."

"I see. Why did you come around the corner before stopping?"

"I thought it would be best."

"You were right. You would make a good detective. Stay where you are. I'll be back in a moment."

Alice walked past the house.

It looked as neat and prim as the abode of any Quaker.

We shall name the locality Fairbairn street, mentioning that, like Buttonwood street, the name is assumed.

The neighborhood, once respectable, was now decidedly off.

Most of the houses were let in lodgings; there were many doctors' signs, and on the ninth house was a sign reading:

"Takut Rabamja, Hindoo Palmist. Hours 11 to 2."

Alice instantly thought of the thumbless Oriental in Bruner's restaurant.

The name was suggestive enough.

The shades were all drawn half-way down in front of muslin curtains, and the gas was lighted on two floors.

There was nothing whatever to cast suspicion on the place except the palmist's sign and the neighborhood in which it was located.

Alice walked to the end of the square, turned, and came back on the other side.

She had instructed the driver to watch and the man did so.

He reported that no one had passed out of the house since Alice left.

"We will watch for a while," said Alice.

An hour passed, and Harry did not appear.

"What shall you do?" demanded the driver. "Go for the police?"

"Not yet. I shall put in another hour here. You may go if you are in a hurry."

"Not at all. I will stay here. Suppose you get into the cab. I can watch."

"I suppose I am attracting attention."

"Well, a little. A good many have looked at you. I think it would be better for you to go inside."

Alice yielded, and another hour passed.

At the end of that time Alice gave it up.

That something had happened she felt certain.

Still, it might not be so, and she knew Harry too well to run the risk of interfering with his plans by making a police raid on the house of the palmist.

Thus there was nothing to do but to wait.

Alice put in a thoroughly uncomfortable night.

Morning brought no Harry, and no word from the old detective.

Alice was all at sea.

Her first thought after breakfast was the police, but still she could not bring herself to it.

Somehow it seemed to her that she must absolutely manage the case alone.

Alice knew enough of the Hindoo character to make her feel sure that nothing would come of a police raid, even if she was to bring such a thing about.

"If Harry has been captured they have him located so that no ordinary person can find him," she said to herself. "Either that or the poor fellow is dead."

She waited until ten o'clock, and then determined to take the matter in hand herself.

The first thing she did was to call on the chief of police and tell him just what had occurred.

She was listened to with every attention.

"I don't know the house and I don't know the man," said the chief, "but some of my people must know both. I will ascertain."

He went to work with his desk telephone, and was soon ready with his report.

"That party is a professional fortune-teller," he said. "He is a quiet man, and there has never been any complaint against him. I have an accurate description of him from one of the wardmen."

He proceeded to give it, and Alice at once perceived that it was the same thumbless Oriental whom she and Harry had met at the restaurant.

"I will send men there with you if you wish?" the chief said.

"No," replied Alice. "I prefer to go there alone, but someone may shadow me. If I don't come out it will be time enough to raid the place."

"Very well," replied the chief. "I advise you not to take too big chances, though. Old King Brady has been missing some time now, and here goes another of your firm. It seems to me a good time to go slow."

"I propose to," replied Alice. "All the same, I first want to see that man."

She had been seized with an idea, and she determined to carry it out hit or miss.

Alice now hurried to the hotel and arranged her disguise.

It would have fitted a female fortune-teller, or some other person of the same class.

The clothes she put on were old and worn, but tawdry in appearance, and cheap jewelry was much in evidence.

Thus attired she hurried over to Fairbairn street.

Before tackling the house she went around the block.

This was carrying out an old-established rule of Old King Brady's.

"If you have to enter a house where you have reason to believe you may be captured by crooks, always find out in advance what is in the rear of it," the old detective always said.

Alice took her measures with decision, and the result was she located the Buttonwood street house directly in the rear of that of the palmist.

She hung around on the block for about half an hour.

Her patience was rewarded by seeing an ill-looking, dark fellow ring the bell of the suspected house and pass in.

This would have been nothing but for the fact that the man was minus a thumb on his right hand.

Of course, this was very significant.

Alice felt that she was surely up against the Thumbless League.

And knowing what she did this alone would have been enough to deter some people from the course she had laid down for herself.

But not with Alice!

The plucky detective was all the more determined to proceed.

She went around on Fairbairn street now, and boldly rang the palmist's bell.

It was within the office hours, and Alice had every reason to suppose that the man was in attendance.

The door was opened by an ugly little dwarf with a tremendous head.

It was Dalkan, of course, and he was clothed this time in a sort of Oriental dress, with a Turkish fez on his head and a sort of Chinese blouse of blue silk with the blazing sun done in gilt thread upon his breast.

And now it turned out that Dalkan's inability to speak or understand English was all a fake.

"You want professor?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Alice, rather thickly.

She had swallowed a glass of wine before starting, so as to make her breath smell of liquor.

"Dis way," said Dalkan, eyeing her curiously.

He led her to a middle room, where there were several women seated.

Two of these were fashionably dressed, and wore diamonds.

Evidently Professor Takut Rabamja was a man who did considerable business in his peculiar line.

Alice seated herself in a corner.

The room would have been quite dark save for a large hanging lamp which was studded with false gems of many colors; this shed a dim, religious light over the place.

The wallpaper was yellow, with black stars and little moons all over it.

The ceiling was done in red, with golden suns.

Every care seemed to have been observed to make the room fit the professor's business.

It was fearfully hot, and the waiters kept fanning themselves.

At last a pair of folding doors were thrown back, and there stood the thumbless Hindoo in his seance gown, as Old King Brady had seen him.

"Next!" he said, with a peculiar accent.

One of the diamond-bedecked women arose and passed into the other room, the professor softly closing the folding-doors.

None of the women seemed to be acquainted, and a long, silent wait followed, until the Hindoo once more opened the doors and said "Next!" again.

Alice sat waiting, devoutly hoping that no one else would come in, for she felt that this might interfere with her plan.

And in this fortune favored her, for no one did.

At last her turn came.

However the people passed out it was not through the waiting-room.

"Next!" said the professor, opening his door, and Alice walked into a room still more elaborately fitted up in astrological style.

It is needless to describe the place.

It was manifestly the room of a faker, bent upon imposing upon the credulity of the ignorant. Alice could see that at a glance.

"Be seated," said the palmist, himself dropping into a

chair. "Ah, miss, I can see some very wonderful things about you."

"Now, look here," said Alice, "don't give me anything like that. I've been in the business myself, professor. I'm not here to get my fortune told. I'm looking for a job."

The Hindoo stared.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Oh, pshaw!" said Alice, "we understand each other. I'm an old faker myself, I ran a palmist's joint in London three years, and another in San Francisco. I started up in New York a while ago, but one of my clients happened to fall into a trance and there were diamonds missing afterwards, so I just had to skin out or get pinched. Just now I'm down on my luck. Didn't know but what you could use an assistant, so I thought I'd call around. You will find me up to my business every time."

The Hindoo listened with partially closed eyes.

"You would be very beautiful, miss, if you dressed differently," he said. "What is your name?"

"Good! I've got him!" thought Alice. "I can twist you about my finger, Mr. Man, sharp as you think yourself no doubt, and that is just what I am going to do."

CHAPTER X.

OLD KING BRADY FINDS HIMSELF IN A VERY BAD FIX.

Old King Brady had now put himself in a very bad position.

He felt as he stood there surrounded by the Thumbless League that his chance of continued existence was very doubtful.

For the moment the order of "Mushka" had saved him, but what would come next?

What actually did come next was the prompt end of the seance.

What kind of a show Mr. Magic was ordinarily in the habit of putting up for his thumbless followers it is hard to say, but at all events Old King Brady saw no more that night.

The curtains were violently torn apart, and the magician came out as promptly as the head of Mushka disappeared.

"Seize that man!" he cried, pushing the table aside and striding into the room. "Frenchy! Wimble! Bring him after me!"

It was useless to protest.

In such cases Old King Brady never attempts it.

He was seized by two men and hustled after Mr. Magic without ceremony.

They passed through an inner door and along a corridor. Then an iron door was opened, and the old detective being pushed through it clanged after him.

And there Old King Brady was destined to remain in darkness and foul air for days to come.

He learned to know the place after a little.

It was just a large vault with brick walls on three sides, and the iron door on the fourth.

There was absolutely nothing in the place in the way of furniture.

Old King Brady could stand or sit on the dirty floor, just as he pleased.

Get out he could not.

The door was as firm as a rock.

It was hours before he saw anyone.

At last, toward midnight, four men entered.

Jack Wimble and Frenchy were among them.

Not a word was spoken.

While Wimble held a lantern Frenchy fastened leg-irons upon the old detective, and he was chained to a big iron ring set in the wall.

One held him covered with a cocked revolver while this was being done, and then he was searched.

Nothing was found upon him to identify him as a detective.

His revolver, which he had secreted in case of emergency, was discovered, however, and taken away.

The door was then closed upon him, and once more the old detective was left alone.

Morning came at last.

There was a ventilator high up on one of the walls, through which a glimmer of light came.

It grew gradually brighter, until at last Old King Brady knew that day had come.

Perhaps an hour later Cæsar came with an old stool and a very poor breakfast.

The best part of it to Old King Brady was a can of water, for he was almost choked.

He tried to talk to the negro, but could get nothing out of him.

Cæsar stood silently by until the detective had finished eating, and then he took the tray away.

Two or three hours passed.

Like most people in similar situations, Old King Brady was beginning to lose the run of time.

At last a key grated in the lock, and the door opened to admit Mr. Magic.

He closed it behind him, and folding his arms across the old dressing-gown fixed his terrible eyes upon the old detective.

"He is trying to hypnotize me," thought the old detective, "but he won't succeed."

Clearly Mr. Magic had no such intention, for he immediately spoke.

"What is your name, old man?" he demanded.

"James," replied Old King Brady, with all the calmness he could assume.

"Don't lie to me," hissed the magician. "I have received the straight tip on you."

"From the spirits?"

"From a living spirit. The trash as I put out in my seance room may serve to humbug such a gang as I have chosen to draw about me, but not a man of the shrewdness and intelligence of yourself."

"Well?"

"Your name is not James."

"Wrong. My name is James."

"You are Old King Brady, the detective."

"My name is James Brady."

"Old man, did you ever hear of your English proverb about the pitcher going to the well too often?"

"You think this is my last trip?"

"I am sure of it. You know what my men say of me?"

"That you are generally successful?"

"Yes. Mr. Magic never fails."

"They say the same thing about Old King Brady."

"And so I have heard. But this time your proverb will fail, for out of this place you will never go alive unless—"

"Well? I am interested in that unless."

"Then restrain your curiosity until I get ready to gratify it," replied Mr. Magic, suddenly turning on his heel and opening the door and going out, clanging the door behind him. And it was twenty-four hours before he saw anything more of him. Meanwhile it was only Cæsar and scarcely food enough to keep a bird alive. But at last the magician put in an appearance again. This time his whole manner had changed. He was followed by Cæsar, who brought with him a really elegant spread, including a bottle of excellent wine and a bunch of expensive cigars.

"Well, Mr. Brady, how are you feeling to-day?" he demanded. "More comfortable, I hope. I thought you would enjoy a little change of diet, so I have arranged for it. Don't be afraid to eat, man. I won't poison you. Just make a good meal for once, and afterwards we will discuss that unless. Cæsar, fetch another stool. Mr. Brady can't eat so. Bring two chairs out of the seance room, in fact. I think I will sit down myself."

This was done and Cæsar retired. Old King Brady determined to eat, so he fell to and made a hearty meal. Mr. Magic meanwhile sat quietly smoking, and beyond a few passing remarks never said a word. But after Old King Brady pushed the stool which held the tray away he knocked the ashes off his cigar, and passed the bunch to the old detective.

"Light up now, and we will talk this situation over man to man," he said.

Old King Brady lit his cigar. It was a relief to be able to sit on the chair after all he had been through.

"Now, then," said Mr. Magic, "what about that jewelry of the Dumars?"

"Who are the Dumars?"

"Don't balk me, Brady. You know very well that I refer to that dead couple at Shadyside. I have spies everywhere. The orders I gave for that daylight robbery were given for reasons. Mrs. Dumar and her husband had quarreled—they were always quarreling. He, Reginald Dumar, reduced in health by a fatal disease, reduced in pocket by too close attention to the races, maddened and desperate, resolved to obtain his wife's jewels at any cost. The woman was thrifty and hardworking. They had leased that place for the summer for several years running. On the night before the robbery Dumar met his wife there; she had just returned from the West. Her maid was taken sick on the train, and had to be sent to a hospital, and so it happened that this loving couple was left alone in that house. You know what followed. Dumar killed his wife when she refused to reveal the hiding place of her gems. Ruined and half distracted as he was when he failed to find them, he killed himself. I knew all this, and sent my men to the place by daylight, as you know. I sent you with them because of your well-known skill in such cases. I counted upon you finding the gems."

"Then you knew who I was at that time?"

"I knew who you were from the first moment you were taken into the Thumbless League on probation. Do you imagine that a man who could successfully organize and

control such a gang as I have succeeded in gathering around me is going to give away his secrets to a fellow like you? Why, man, I have even made these poor fools sacrifice a thumb each, in imitation of their master, who lost his right thumb by accident years ago. You see the hold I have over them. I intend to keep my secrets to myself. But now back to business. You found in that house two sets of gems. The real and the false. You deliberately brought me the latter. What did you do with the others? That's what I want to know."

"Since your spirits have told you so much can't they tell you the rest?"

"Never mind my spirits. Answer or your time on earth is short."

It seemed to Old King Brady, although he was far from believing all the assertions made by Mr. Magic, that his best plan was to speak the truth.

"I left the others where I found them," he quietly said.

"Oh," said Mr. Magic, "you did. Honest man! It is as I supposed. And where was this?"

"That is my secret, and I propose to hold on to it as the only means I now have of preserving my life."

"Mr. Brady, you will have to tell me where you left those gems."

"I will only do it on condition that you set me free."

"I will agree to that."

"I will not trust you."

"Then what do you propose? How can we get at it?"

"I will go with you to that house and show you the place, and with you alone."

For a few minutes the Hindoo reflected.

"I agree to that," he then said, "but we cannot go now, for the police detectives are in charge of the place. We shall have to wait. Do you think there is any chance of them finding the gems?"

"None whatever."

"So sure? There must be others in this world as sharp as yourself."

"Perhaps I exaggerate. Let me say there is one chance in a thousand."

"Well, I accept your offer. The fact is, I am tired of the life I am leading, and now that the police have caught on to my curves I am beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable. I have accumulated a good bit of money through the work of the Thumbless League and by other business, and now, if I can get these gems, I propose to bid good-bye to it all and return to my native country, where I can live like a prince on what I have."

"And where is that, may I ask?"

"Cambodia. Well, that is all, I believe. As soon as it is safe we will go to Shadyside together, if the police don't find the gems in the meantime."

Days passed and no relief came. Twice Mr. Magic looked in, reporting that the police detectives were still in possession of the house at Shadyside, and that as far as he knew the gems had not been found.

One night Cæsar suddenly appeared, and unfastening the chains bade the old detective follow him.

Old King Brady was now past putting up any fight. It was all he could do to stand on his feet. He was led to the seance room, and here a surprise awaited him, which brought with it some hope. Mr. Magic was there, clothed

in his astrological dressing-gown, and there, seated at the table, was Alice somewhat disguised.

"I am here to save you," she said, by a secret sign. And then followed another sign which was not quite so reassuring. It said:

"They have captured Harry, too!"

CHAPTER XI.

YOUNG KING BRADY IS INTRODUCED TO MUSHKA AND WITH DISASTROUS RESULTS.

That Young King Brady made a miss of it in going with the stranger as he did we are certainly bound to admit. But the thing had followed naturally upon the trap he set for the Thumbless League, so it is small wonder that Harry walked into it. When Harry entered the house on Fairbairn street he was shown into Takut Rabamja's room by Dalkan the dwarf. He looked around curiously. Not until he had seen the palmist's sign on the door did Harry suspect that there was anything of the occult mixed up with the doings of the Thumbless League. His conductor, who was none other than Jack Wimble, watched him with evident interest.

"Well, Mr. White," he said, "I've nothing further to do with the business. You will have to deal with the boss, and don't imagine for an instant that you can slip out of it. Just open that door and take a look out in the hall."

Mechanically Harry obeyed. There in the hall were two giant negroes, both thumbless. They were standing by the front door talking to each other in an undertone. One was Cæsar, and Young King Brady immediately recognized him. If the black saw through Harry's rather insufficient disguise he showed it by no sign. Young King Brady stepped back into the room with a decidedly uneasy feeling growing upon him.

Harry dropped into a chair feeling that he had made a grave mistake. The wait was a long one. Mr. Magic was not a man to hurry himself for anyone. But at last he came, wearing his astrological gown. Harry recognized him on the instant as the Oriental of Bruner's restaurant, and he knew that the man also recognized him. Wimble jumped up and introduced the palmist by the name on his sign. Mr. Magic shook hands cordially, and told Harry to be seated.

"Now, then, Mr. White, you have come here prepared to pay cash at my office to-morrow upon the delivery of the goods."

"Quite satisfactory. It is necessary to be sure of our ground, however, before we go ahead. I presume our friend here told you that it will be necessary for you to submit to a test."

"Yes; but I thought I had already submitted to a test."

"It is so; but the test failed. I thought when I saw you in Bruner's restaurant with that woman that I should be able to determine your true character. Frequently I am able to do so merely at a glance, but in this instance I failed. Do you believe in spirits?"

"If you mean to ask if I believe in spiritualism, then I say no."

"Then I say for myself yes. I am able to raise the spirits of the dead. I have accepted certain ones as my guides. They will decide on your case, and to their judgment you will have to submit. If the spirit whom I pro-

pose to consult pronounces favorably on you all will be plain sailing; otherwise not."

There seemed nothing for it but to submit.

"Go ahead with your test, then," said Harry, "and the sooner it is over the better."

"Ah, that is the way to talk. It gives me confidence in you. Mere matter of ceremony, Mr. White. It will all work out right, I daresay. Be good enough to follow me."

They took Harry to the seance room, and he was told to seat himself in front of the cabinet. Everything was as Old King Brady had seen it, except that the gathering of the thumbless ones was missing. Mr. Magic produced his big book, and for fully half an hour sat reading in silence. At last he closed the book and stood up.

"The time is propitious, and the spirits are ready," he said. "Ring for Dalkan and we will get to work."

Jack jumped up and pulled a bell. In a minute the dwarf came in. Mr. Magic spoke to him in French. Dalkan immediately left the room, and after a brief wait Cæsar and his sable companion appeared. Then came a test which Harry was unprepared for, having ceased to think of the matter.

"Cæsar," said Mr. Magic, suddenly, "is this man the one who came to the steamer with the woman that night?"

Harry's heart almost stood still, it came so suddenly. Cæsar looked at him attentively for a few minutes, and then said:

"No, sah! Him hain't de man."

"That is all," said Mr. Magic. "To your places."

The blacks posted themselves on either side of the steps, which led up to the door previously mentioned. Another wait, and then came Dalkan in his robes. He jumped upon the table, lay down, and Mr. Magic covered his face with the cloth. The light was turned down, and the music-box played. Soon the voice spoke, and Mr. Magic held an extended conversation in a language of which Young King Brady could make nothing. At last the head of Mushka appeared between the curtains.

"Hello, Mushka!" cried Wimble.

"Good-evening, Mushka! Good-evening!" Cæsar and the other darcy called out. And here, it will be observed, was a difference between this seance and the one which Old King Brady attended. Upon that occasion Mr. Magic was in the cabinet. This time he was outside. Harry watched him attentively. While Mushka's head was outside the curtains Mr. Magic's head sank low upon his breast, and the magician appeared to be asleep.

Harry also noticed the strong resemblance between Mushka and Mr. Magic. Probably on this occasion Frenchy, who did not look unlike the palmist, personated the supposed "spirit." This mystery, however, was never explained. And now Mushka spoke.

"Young man," he said, "step up here. I want to shake hands with you."

Harry arose and walked to the cabinet.

A hand came out from between the curtains and grasped his. There was no shaking done, however. The hand simply held on to Harry's for a few minutes, and then let it drop.

"That is all. You may sit down," said Mushka.

The voice was soft and silvery, and very like Mr. Magic's. Harry was completely deceived by it.

He thought then that he had passed the test successfully.

The moment he resumed his seat Mushka pulled in his head.

Immediately Mr. Magic looked up and seemed to pull himself together.

"Did you get Mushka?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Wimble, "he came."

"Mushka!" called Mr. Magic, "are you there, Mushka?"

"I am here," replied the voice behind the curtain.

"Well, what is the report on this gentleman? He is all right, I suppose?"

"He is all wrong. He is another detective in disguise. He is connected in some way with that man!"

Mr. Magic darted forward and turned up the light.

Before he could help it Jack had Harry covered with a cocked revolver.

Cæsar and the other black jumped in and seized him by the arms.

Mr. Magic alone remained calm.

"And so," he said, "you have failed to stand the test!"

"So it seems," replied Harry, with all the calmness he could muster. "If you call such nonsense a test then I have failed."

"If you are connected with the other detective, as Mushka says, then you must be Young King Brady."

"So you say. I say it is all nonsense. I am John White. You know my business here. If you try to detain me you will do it at your peril. I tell you that straight."

Mr. Magic laughed.

"Mushka makes no mistakes," he said. "Away with him, boys."

"Does he go in with the other?" demanded Cæsar.

"No! Put him in the other room!"

Then Harry was dragged out and in the end found himself in a similar fix to Old King Brady.

He was chained to the wall in a narrow cell-like compartment, and for many hours he remained there without seeing a living soul.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

At a little before noon Alice again entered the office of the chief of police.

"Ah, Miss Montgomery," exclaimed that official, "and how did you make out?"

"Very well indeed," replied Alice, who seemed thoroughly well pleased. "It could not have been better, I should say."

"Have you found Old King Brady?"

"No, nor Young King Brady, either, but I have taken the first steps toward doing so."

"You saw the palmist?"

"Yes."

"Get next?"

"With a vengeance."

"And how?"

Alice told what passed between her and Takut Rabamja up to the point recorded in a previous chapter.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the chief, interrupting then.

"And did you get your job?"

"Oh, yes! It took time, but I got there."

"And you really are going to work for that man?"

"Yes, and more!"

"How more?"

"I am going into partnership with him."

"Good! Here in Philadelphia? I'm afraid we shall have to break up that firm."

"Not here. I am to work for him for a few days, and then we are to run away together. We are to jump to London and start a palmist business there. It appears that he has long wanted a skilled female assistant. I appear to have come in the nick of time."

"Look out, Miss Montgomery. I am afraid you are treading on ticklish ground."

"You will think so when I tell you something else, which I did not mention this morning."

"Which is?"

"Mr. Takut Rabamja is minus a thumb on his right hand."

The chief jumped out of his chair in his excitement.

"You don't mean it!" he cried. "Now at last we get a definite clew to the Thumbless League."

"It is as I tell you. We must get busy at once. That joint must be raided to-night, but before it is done there are other things to do."

"Well?"

"There is a peculiar-looking house in the rear of the palmist's on Buttonwood street. It is all closed up, and I want to know more about it. It strikes me that there may be a connection between the two places, and if a raid is to be made it can best be done from that end."

"Easily arranged."

"Will you go there with me?"

"Impossible to-day. I can send a man, but don't you think it is a little imprudent for you to show yourself that way?"

"Not as I propose to do it. I shall be disguised beyond the possibility of recognition."

"Very well."

"Can I have a talk with the man?"

"Yes, and he may know more about the place than you imagine."

The chief worked his desk telephone.

"Send Gilroy to me," he called.

Then he hung up the receiver, saying:

"Sorry, Miss Montgomery, but he is out just at present. I will have him here in an hour's time."

"Let him meet me on the corner of Buttonwood and — street in an hour's time. I shall be disguised as a man, and shall wear a pink carnation in my buttonhole."

"Very well. I should greatly like to go with you myself, but I cannot possibly spare the time."

"The ward detective will no doubt answer every purpose," said Alice, and she withdrew.

Promptly on time she appeared at the designated corner in male attire.

In this Alice is an expert.

As she has long since sacrificed long hair to the necessities of her business, she makes up splendidly.

Wardman Gilroy soon appeared, and spying the pink carnation he came forward, raising his hat.

"Is this Mr. Gilroy?" demanded Alice.

"Yes," replied the detective. "I am pleased to have the honor of meeting you—er—"

"Mr. Henson."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Henson. I have heard so much of your successful work, and—er——"

"No compliments, please, Mr. Gilroy. I presume the chief has told you about this case?"

"Yes, indeed. I've been after the Thumbless League myself, but I never succeeded in getting next. Which house is it?"

"The ninth from this corner."

"So? Well, that has been closed these three years, as you see it now. All the time it has been occupied by two negroes. They lived there on the quiet, and paid full rent, so the agent tells me. It was agreed that they should never show themselves in the daytime. They are supposed to be night watchmen somewhere."

"So you thought it best to see the agent?"

"Well, I didn't see what harm it could do."

"Perhaps none; still, I should not have done it. But no matter. What do you know about the house back of the time these negroes took possession?"

"A lot. It was for years run by a Dr. Galloway, who conducted a private inebriate cure. He dealt only with the rich. He had cells built underground, where he used to chain his patients when they were violent. There was a lot of scandal about the place, and it was finally raided. Galloway was arrested and indicted, but died before his case came to trial. The house belongs to his estate now."

"How could the rich use such a place?"

"How? Why, to put away people they wanted to get rid of. I could tell you stories——"

"Don't bother now, Mr. Gilroy. Have you the key?"

"Yes. It seems that the negroes gave up the place yesterday, and it is to rent. We can go right in."

And they did.

There was nothing to be seen inside but dirt.

Upstairs was a room which had evidently been occupied by the blacks.

They descended into the cellar, but Alice was not lucky enough to find the trap-door.

They went out in the back yard, and found that an unusually high fence surrounded it. Only the upper windows of the palmist's house could be seen.

Here there was another entrance to the cellar through a low door, which was closed and locked.

"This is strange," said Alice. "I didn't see that door when we were in the cellar."

"Nor I," replied Gilroy. "Let's go back and have a look."

They did so, and discovered by measuring that the cellar wall in the rear did not run quite back to the rear of the house.

"A false wall," said Alice. "We must open that door."

They went back to the yard and Gilroy kicked the door in. Here they saw the double wall.

There was a space of about five feet between the two, and down into it ran a flight of steps, which ended at another and similar door.

While they were examining this they suddenly heard voices talking behind it, and they beat a hasty retreat, closing the door behind them.

Without losing a moment they got out on the street, and all this by Alice's request.

"What made you chase yourself?" demanded Gilroy. "I wouldn't have hesitated to break in that other door."

"Walk with me," said Alice, "and listen to what I have to say; then you will understand the whole case."

She concealed nothing. Gilroy entered into all her plans heartily.

When they parted Alice felt that they entirely understood each other, and that she could count upon the assistance of the Philadelphia police to carry out a plan which she had formed.

This meant the capture of Mr. Magic.

But whether it was going to lead to the rescue of Old King Brady and Harry or not, the brave girl could only guess.

At six o'clock Alice went again to the house of the Hindoo palmist and dined with him alone.

This was by appointment.

Upon what happened at that dinner we need not dwell. Enough to say that Alice lost no opportunity to charm this peculiar person.

Had Harry been present he would have been ready for any desperate deed.

But Alice got just where she wanted to.

By the time dinner was over Takut Rabamja was completely in the toils.

Strange what wonders a woman's charms can work!

This man, who had shown himself the shrewdest of the shrewd, had promptly succumbed to Alice's powers of fascination, it would seem.

"And now, Miss Lombard," he said, after dinner was over, calling Alice by the name she had given, "I am going to put you to the test. You say you stick at nothing; then pose as my secretary to-night, as I told you, and you will see something of my supernatural powers. Believe me, they are real, but there are times when I cannot exert them, like all others who profess to deal with spirits. At such times I need just such a person as you to help me."

"It's just as I told you," replied Alice. "I am game for anything. Trot out your real spirits. I'd like to see one. It would be the first, and I have played spirit in twenty materialization cabinets in my time."

"Your curiosity shall be gratified," said the unsuspecting palmist. "Make yourself at home in my consulting room for a while. It may be an hour or more. Dalkan shall call you when the time comes."

And with this Mr. Magic left Alice to her own devices. Devoutly the brave girl hoped that it would not be more than an hour.

It was now nearly seven o'clock.

She was thinking of her appointment with Wardman Gilroy, which, based upon something which Mr. Magic had said at his previous interview, she had set for eight.

It was just a quarter to eight when Dalkan came.

"You are to follow me," said the dwarf.

Alice was led down into the cellar, and then through a cleverly concealed door, and by an underground passage she passed underneath Dr. Galloway's house.

Alice was able to keep her bearings perfectly.

She saw that she had made no mistake.

When she entered the seance room and saw the flight of wooden steps and the door above her hopes rose.

"I've got him," she said to herself. "Heaven grant there is no slip!"

Mr. Magic was in the room, and he chased Dalkan out. "Now, then, Miss Lombard, you see this paper on the table," he said. "Take this pen and carefully note every word that is said by the spirit who will show his head between these curtains."

Then came the shock.

There was something lying upon the long table in front of the cabinet covered with a white sheet.

Mr. Magic drew the sheet up higher, revealing what to all appearance was the lower portion of a human body, one hand only showing.

And then Alice, recognizing the well-known blue coat, felt that she was too late.

For it was Old King Brady's coat, beyond a doubt.

Mr. Magic laughed and withdrew.

In a few minutes Alice got another jolt.

The door opened, and Cæsar and his fellow-black came in, dragging Old King Brady.

The old detective's head was seized, and his mouth forced open, Mr. Magic emptying the contents of a wine glass down his throat.

Old King Brady collapsed at once.

Alice could hardly keep from screaming as they dragged him behind the curtain, and dropped him on the floor unconscious.

Again Cæsar & Co. departed, and now for Alice came the worst jolt of all.

In a moment they returned, this time dragging Harry between them.

They tied him to one of the posts which supported the floor above, and then took their stand on each side of the steps. Mr. Magic then got busy.

"And now, Mr. Young King Brady," he said, "you see what your excellent detective work has brought you to! There, upon that table, lies your great chief dead. I propose to raise his spirit. Know why?"

"I don't know why," replied Harry. "Say your say, do your worst, only let this thing come to an end."

He had recognized Alice, although she could not feel sure of this. It gave him hope.

"Then I will explain why," continued Mr. Magic. "That foolish man held a secret. He refused to give it up on my order, so I have disposed of him, as you see. What he would not tell in the flesh he will in the spirit. You must question him, and he will answer."

"And what am I to ask him?"

"You are to say to him: 'Where did you find those gems? Answer truly if you would save my life.'"

"Very well."

Mr. Magic went over to a little table in one corner, where there was a music-box. This he wound up, and it started on a lively air. Returning, he lowered the light to its usual glimmer, and stood in his astrological dressing-gown between the table and the cabinet.

The curtains were slowly parted. Between them Harry saw a head projected. The face seemed to take form. It was the face of Old King Brady. The eyes were closed.

"Put your question," said Mr. Magic.

Harry did so. The lips parted, and in a low voice—and it was the voice of Old King Brady—the head spoke.

"I found the gems in the closet, in a secret——"

Bang! Crash!

At this instant the door at the head of the steps was burst open, and the police came tumbling in. Alice could restrain herself no longer.

"There he is! Arrest him!" she cried. "He is the head of the Thumbless League!"

Gilroy rushed forward. The others—there were four—held the negroes covered.

At the same instant Mr. Magic raised his hand and turned the light out. Gilroy tried to grab him, but clutched the air. As quick as possible Alice lighted the lamp.

Cæsar & Co. were in the toils, but Mr. Magic had disappeared. Nor did anyone present on this memorable occasion ever see this strange man from the Far East again.

Gilroy's plans had been well arranged. Both houses were guarded by competent officers. All stood ready to swear that nobody had passed out of either the Buttonwood street house or that of the palmist, and yet neither Mr. Magic nor Dalkan the dwarf were found, nor was the slightest trace of them ever discovered.

Of course, Harry was instantly freed. He and Alice flew to the rescue of their chief. Old King Brady was found lying unconscious upon the floor of the cabinet in a drugged sleep, out of which he came in due time, and none the worse for it.

Frenchy crouched in a corner and owned to playing spirit.

Old King Brady positively declared that he remembered nothing from the moment he swallowed the drug. The supposed corpse on the table proved to be Old King Brady's clothes stuffed with hay. There was no head, and the hand was a wax one, which had doubtless been used in many another seance. The two negroes fell all over themselves to see which could turn State's evidence first when they found that Mr. Magic was really gone.

Through their disclosures and Old King Brady's tips the police arrested eight members of the Thumbless League, including Terry and Jack Wimble. All went to the Easton Penitentiary on long terms in the end. The rest of the band made good their escape.

The Bradys and the chief of police went to Shadyside next day, and recovered the Dumar gems, which had been overlooked by the police. The police accepted Old King Brady's story of the double killing as given by Mr. Magic.

Thus the case ended.

Where were Takut Rabamja and Dalkan the dwarf?

By what secret passage did they succeed in escaping?

Months have passed since all this occurred, and a cloud of mystery still hangs over the case of The Bradys and Mr. Magic.

THE END.

Read "THE BRADYS' DOUBLE TRAP; OR, WORKING THE NIGHT SIDE OF NEW YORK," which will be the next number (445) of "Secret Service."

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ITEMS WORTH READING.

Dr. Arthur L. Day, of the new Geophysical Laboratory, Carnegie Institution, has discovered a method of manufacturing in large quantities quartz glass, which is obtained from melting pure rock crystal. This glass, hitherto, has been worth its weight in gold.

A new way of preventing deer from doing damage to a holding has been adopted by the occupier of Haddon Farm, in the heart of the Devon and Somerset staghound country. Discarding the use of tarred ropes and other strong-smelling materials in fences, he walks through his turnip fields two or three times a night, smoking a strong pipe, the smell of which, he says, frightens the deer away. Before he adopted this device his farm used to be visited by scores of deer nightly.

The approximate cost of the fourteen tunnels now burrowing their way under the waters surrounding Manhattan Island is stated to be \$200,000,000, or about one-fifth of a billion dollars. They are built for one purpose only—to save time. It is estimated that at least a million people go in and out of Manhattan every day. At the average of 25 cents an hour in value, this will mean a saving of \$62,500 a day, or \$23,000,000 a year. The construction of these tunnels constitutes one of the most notable engineering achievements of the age, not less costly and difficult in execution than the Panama Canal, though not the occasion of domestic or international agitation.

Why does the signorina marry? In seeking the answer to this question I chose very young women for my experiments, directing my questions to ninety-five between the ages of fifteen and seventeen years, scattered all over Italy, with the following results: Five answered that they married in order to go out walking alone; ten in order to have a good time, in contrast with the austerity of their life up to that time; five in order to travel; seven in order to have homes of their own; and sixty-one for no reasons at all in particular. Three really didn't want to marry anyhow, while only four dwelt upon the joys of home and housekeeping. Only four had been educated properly in the school of the household! To the majority marriage seems to mean only freedom from the convent-like seclusion of the young girl, the getting out into the great world and seeing something of life. Our young women are nicely prepared for marriage!

When the workmen in the Benson lumber yard on Main street, adjoining St. Joseph's Hospital, Paterson, N. J., broke the seal of a lumber car and pushed back the door they found the emaciated body of a man who had evidently been accidentally imprisoned in the car and had died of starvation. The man's face showed that he had died in great agony, and bruises on his hands indicated that he had made fruitless efforts to effect his release or make it known that he was imprisoned in the car. There was nothing found on the body

that would reveal the man's identity or whence he came. The car had been two weeks on the way from North Carolina.

The statement was recently published that a certain set of fashionable young men were wearing diamonds in their shoe tops. Diamond ornaments in shoes hark back to the days of the Revolutionary War, and were worn by merchants of Boston in those days. Thomas Russell, of Charleston, who died in 1796, was one of the most active of business men of his day in Boston, and the first to engage in the American trade with Russia after the Revolution. His dress was typical of his time, and is thus described in an old print: "He usually wore a coat of some light-colored cloth, smallclothes, diamond buckles at the knees and in the shoes, silk stockings, powdered hair and a cocked hat; in cold weather a scarlet cloak."

H. B. Smith, of Monterey, Mass., has a remarkable bay horse, Muggins, which appears to have more religious instinct than the majority of animals. The horse has been used by Mr. Smith for the last twenty-five years to draw the family to the village church. In the last twenty years there have been only two Sundays on which Muggins didn't have to carry some member of the family to church. The second occasion was a few Sundays ago. A year ago the horse was turned into the yard for a little Sunday recreation, and nothing more was thought of Muggins until the far-distant toll of the church bell was heard. Then the horse pricked up his ears, and realizing that he was late, started off at a quick pace for the church. He went directly under the shed, and took his accustomed place, where he remained until it was time to go home. A couple of weeks ago the horse made his second appearance at the church alone. Mr. Smith had placed Muggins in a stall and had left the stable door slightly ajar. The old bell tolled exceptionally loud and long, and Muggins could not resist the call. In some manner he slipped his halter and made his way from the stable to the church, where he remained until the service was over. The parson patted the horse affectionately as he trotted up to the door, and then he started on his homeward journey.

WITH THE FUNNY FELLOWS.

Teacher—Now, Ethel, who wrote the Elegy in a Country Churchyard? Ethel—Please, ma'am, it was Willie Smif. I seen him goin' in the churchyard at recess, ma'am.

Annette—Why did you accept Jack instead of Tom? Jack, you know, has nothing, and Tom has half a million. Eloise—Well, if you must know, Jack asked me, and Tom didn't.

"It seems to me," remarked the customer, as she watched the man at the market trim the slice of ham she had bought, "you are wasting a great deal of that meat." "Not at all, madam," he said, genially. "I weighed it first."

"What's the child a-cryin' so for, Matilda?" "Pie, ma'am." "Well, for gracious sake, give him pie, then!" "It ain't that he wants pie, mum. He's had too much, mum; he sat in one, mum!"

"Did that stuff revive you?" asked the intending physician of his impatient patient. "Revive me, Doc? Good heavens! Three doses of that medicine would resuscitate the dead languages."

"Are you ordinarily seasick?" I asked affably, for one must needs be affable on shipboard. "No," he replied, sadly. "I am extraordinarily seasick." And, indeed, there was a hollowness in his tone that corroborated his statement.

"Charley, dear," said young Mrs. Torkins, "you know you said we ought to put something by for a rainy day." "Yes." "Well, don't you think this bargain rain coat is perfectly lovely?"

"You must come and see me, my dear," said a lady to a little girl of her acquaintance. "Do you know my number?" "Oh, yes, ma'am," responded the innocent child. "Papa says you always live at sixes and sevens."

A VERY CLEVER CAPTURE.

By PAUL BRADDON.

One dark night in November Police Constable Weale was on duty in Metropolitan street, Southwick, England. It was the principal thoroughfare, and flanked with the best shops, but, as is often the case, the arteries to this heart of wealth and affluence shook hands in a manner of speaking with poverty. Weale was as stolid a man as ever took pride in his blue cloth and buttons. He was steady going, sober, phlegmatic, and as strong as an ox. He had never been known to lose his head, even under the most adverse circumstances, and the traps which had been laid for him had never been sprung. This astute constable paced the street until he came to a jeweler's shop owned by Messrs. Sheen and Shimmer. There were several holes in the shutters, and the gas was always alight between sunset and sunrise, so that the constable on night duty had no difficulty in casting his eyes around the place. At half-past one Constable Weale took three separate glances in at the shop, tested the fastenings of the revolving iron shutters, tried the side door round the corner, and went his way. Now, constables have a large experience in cats. He meets all sorts and sizes on his beat. The well-fed tabby mingles its music with the gaunt grimalkin, homeless, starved and uncared-for, and it is therefore no wonder that the guardian of the night pays but little attention to any promiscuous operatic music that may be borne to his ears. Metropolitan street had its share of feline Romeos and Juliets, and Constable Weale was generally dead to their voices; but on this particular early morning a cat-call of an unusual nature attracted his attention. It was like the cry of a cat with a violent cold in the head. Constable Weale whipped back the slide of his lantern, and the searching disc of light flashed thirty yards ahead; but the constable saw nothing, heard nothing, and plodded on to the end of his beat, where he found Sergeant Jandrews converting a lamp-post into a writing desk, and scribbling away in his note-book.

"All well?" queried the sergeant.

"Yes, sir," replied Constable Weale. "Not a creature about save a beastly cat, with something the matter with its throat."

"Ah!" responded Sergeant Jandrews. "Let me think. You are relieved by special permission at two o'clock?"

"Yes, sir. I've got a wedding party on at my house to-morrow, and—"

"All right; by the time you have done another turn you will find me and the relief here."

The sergeant's stalwart form melted away into the darkness, and Weale retraced his footsteps. All was well until he came to Messrs. Sheen and Shimmer's, and then if ever a man's hair rose to the crown of his hat, cap, helmet, or any kind of head-gear, it was Constable Weale's. The cases on the counter had been forced, the windows stripped of chains, bracelets, gold watches and valuable trinkets, only a few silver watches having been left by the burglars, and the side door round the corner was wide open, and swinging in the wind. Weale blew his whistle as soon as he could find sufficient breath to sound it, and in less than five minutes Sergeant Jandrews and two other constables came running up.

The burglary at Messrs. Sheen and Shimmer's had been committed by experienced hands. It was what the police call a "put-up job," and as mysterious a one as the detectives connected with the force at Southwick had ever dealt with.

The windows and the counter cases were completely rifled of all portables, and the burglars had marched off with about ten thousand pounds' worth of valuables, which they could carry off comfortably. The local newspaper devoted two columns to the affair in a special edition, and all sorts of rumors were set afloat. That unfortunate constable, Weale, was questioned, cross-questioned, bullied, and badgered by his superiors, who, with all their wisdom, could arrive at no clew. The door had been forced in three separate places, there being three distinct locks, constructed on the most approved plan, and the detectives came to the conclusion that they must have been forced between the constable's beats. Weale, remember-

ing the peculiar cry he had heard, made certain that he had been watched, but he had examined every doorway and place where a man might hide, and was ready to swear that he had not seen a single individual or heard footsteps, save his own, for more than an hour previous to the moment of the discovery of the burglary. Messrs. Sheen and Shimmer were rich, and they bore the loss with commendable calmness.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Sheen to the detectives, "that it will be useless to offer a reward. Stones are easily removed from settings; and once gold finds its way into the melting pot, who can identify it? No, gentlemen, my partner and I are of the opinion that our property has found its way to the Continent, and has passed through a dozen hands."

Next to the door so cleverly entered was a small house and shop, occupied by a Mr. Lessmore, cheesemonger and butterman. He was a man of small stature, and meek and mild of disposition. When he heard of the burglary his light blue eyes grew round with terror, and his scant stock of fluffy hair bristled as if disturbed by a sudden current of air.

"Bless my heart!" he cried. "What a mercy the wretches did not pay me a visit! I have never banked my small savings, but this will be a lesson to me."

This he said to a detective named Tooney, who called upon him.

"Did you hear no sounds during the night?" the detective demanded.

"Not a whisper," Lessmore replied. "I woke up once in the night, and wished those howling brutes of cats were at the bottom of the Red Sea."

"Humph! There must have been at least one very clever cat with two legs among them. Let me see, Mr. Lessmore; you have not been long at Southwick?"

"Only six months. I came from Bertsea, and did well until a large firm started on the universal supply principle, and fairly settled my hash. If I had stayed in the place I should have found myself in the Bankruptcy Court!"

Tooney then left and walked straight back to the police-station.

"Ask Bertsea station," he said to the man in charge of the telegraph, "what they know of Andrew Lessmore."

The answer came back quickly. "Lived here twelve months. Quiet and respectable. Member of several societies. Attended church regularly, and received a gift from the rector when he left."

"That is not enough," said Tooney. "I want to know if anything particular happened during Lessmore's residence at Bertsea."

Click, click, went the instrument, and in a few moments came the reply:

"Burglary at Lady Jocelyn's. Two men arrested, tried, and sentenced at Winter Assizes. Shall we send full particulars?"

"No use," said Tooney. "Lessmore is what he seems, and I cannot think what put it into my head to connect him with the case."

At that moment there passed into the office a dapper little man, who, the moment his name was mentioned, was received with profound respect. He was no other than Superintendent Hunter, from Scotland Yard, and had run down to Southwick to see how the inquiries were proceeding.

Every note made in connection with the case was placed before him, and every scrap of intelligence was given him.

"Sheen and Shimmer may say what they like," he said, nibbling at his thumb-nail, "but I don't believe that the stolen jewelry is out of the place yet. What made you call on the butter man, Tooney?"

"Well, sir, I thought he might have heard people about. The jimmy was used on three separate occasions, and some noise must have been made when the locks gave way."

"Good! Was that your only reason?"

"I thought I'd look him up, sir, as he is a comparative stranger to the place."

"Good again! What sort of a trade does he do?"

"A moderate one, I should say. He keeps only one assistant, and seems to be struggling to get a living."

Superintendent Hunter smiled grimly.

"Some people struggle for their living in peculiar ways," he

said. "Well, we will dismiss Mr. Lessmore. What about his assistant?"

"I know absolutely nothing about him, beyond that he seems to be very attentive to his work. I don't think that I ever saw him abroad save on Sunday."

"A very excellent character," remarked the superintendent. "I begin to take quite an interest in this good young man, and his no less praiseworthy master. A parcel is coming on for me. See that it is placed in the inspector's house, where I intended to sleep to-night."

About seven o'clock on the following morning Mr. Lessmore's assistant swept out the shop, burnished up the scales, washed and polished the marble counter, and then retired into the back room, which was used as a kind of warehouse. Selecting a tub of butter, he became very busy with a pair of wooden pats, making up butter into pound and half-pound rolls. So busily was he engaged, indeed, that he started violently when he felt himself touched on the elbow. Looking round he saw a little man at his side. He wore a coat of antique cut, a soft felt hat, and blue spectacles set firmly upon the bridge of his wrinkled nose.

"What made you come through the shop?" demanded the assistant. "You must have lifted up the counter-flap."

"So I did, but I knocked three times without making you hear."

"Well, sir, what can I serve you with?"

"A pound of butter. Ah!" he said, "I see you have some remarkably fine Dutch cheeses up there. Would you mind letting me taste one or two?"

"I cannot recommend them, sir," replied the assistant. "They are of inferior quality, and Mr. Lessmore intends to send them back to the manufacturer."

"What rascals these foreign importers are!" observed the customer. "I wonder people are not poisoned wholesale. This butter is a foreign make, too?"

"Yes, sir. It is not the best quality, but it is cheap, and poor people buy it. Would you mind," he added, in a fidgetty tone of voice, "walking back into the shop?"

"Certainly—oh, certainly. Well, I'll take a pound of the very best butter with me now, and call and select a cheese."

While the butter was being weighed and made into a neat parcel, the old gentleman sat on a stool and hummed to himself.

He paid with half a sovereign, counted his change carefully, and bade the assistant a civil good-morning, just as two constables in uniform strolled up.

"A queer customer that," said Mr. Lessmore's assistant, walking to the door. "I have never noticed him before, and ever since that affair next to us I have been suspicious of all strangers."

"The poor old gentleman does not look as if he was up to cracking a crib," said one of the officers, laughing.

"You never can tell," rejoined the assistant, fingering his apron-strings nervously. "That monster in human form, Charles Peace, acted many an artful part. I have heard that he played sacred music on the violin, and was well known for his love of dumb animals."

At that moment Andrew Lessmore entered the shop.

"Come, Chiston," said he, "bustle about! It is market day, you know, and we must make hay while the sun shines. Good-morning, constables. No news, I suppose?" jerking his thumb in the direction of the jeweler's shop.

"Not that I have heard."

"More's the pity," sighed Mr. Lessmore. "My wife has been so upset that I must try and find a little money to send her into the country for a change. Dear, dear! it is perfectly horrible to think that there are such villains roaming about the country. A big burly fellow came and stared into my shop last night, and I declare he made me feel quite nervous."

The constables passed on, and Lessmore and his assistant retired to the back room.

"Get out the case," said the proprietor, "pack it up and give notice to the railway people to call on the mid-day round—the sooner the better."

Chiston did his work like a man well used to it, and then went to his breakfast.

By eleven o'clock the business of Southwick was in full swing. People came to sell and buy, to barter, haggle, and squabble, as people at a country market will do, and so the day wore on until darkness began to set in and the streets became quiet and deserted. As the church clock was striking eight, a railway wagon pulled up at the door of Lessmore's shop. The cases of cheeses were in the shop, and Lessmore and Chiston stood ready to help the carman.

Their hands were on the bulky package when the early morning customer stumbled into the shop and coolly sat down upon it.

"Excuse me," he said, "a runaway horse in High street has given me such a dreadful fright. Please let me remain here."

"As long as you like; but would you mind sitting in some other part of the shop?" Lessmore replied, meekly. "Chiston, bring a chair."

"Thank you, I am very comfortable here," said the stranger.

"But, my dear sir," said Lessmore, "the carman is waiting to take this case to the station."

The case was carried out into the street; but no sooner had it been placed on the pavement when a whistle sounded, and in a moment a dozen constables appeared as suddenly as if they had risen from the earth.

Lessmore and Chiston were seized, and almost before they could comprehend what had happened they were handcuffed and pushed back into the shop.

"Bring that case back. I expect we shall find some rich cheeses in it."

As the quaint little man spoke he whipped off his blue spectacles, pitched a hat and wig on the counter, and the features of Superintendent Hunter were revealed.

Lessmore turned deadly pale, and Chiston, shuddering from head to foot, closed his eyes and appeared to swoon.

"Open that case," said Hunter, "and be quick about it. To expedite matters, perhaps Lessmore, or whatever his real name may be, will tell us where he keeps the jimmies."

Lessmore made no reply. He looked down at his manacled hands and bit his bloodless under-lip.

A crowbar was procured, and in a few minutes the lid of the case was wrenched off, and the topmost cheese handed to Superintendent Hunter.

"A very excellent specimen of colored beeswax," said he, "Give me a knife."

A small, sharp one was handed to him, and he commenced operations, cutting carefully round the dummy cheese. Presently he came to the end of the wax, then to something hard, and suddenly the "cheese" parted in two, and, neatly packed in cotton wool and tissue paper, lay a portion of the stolen property.

There is little more to tell. Lessmore had carried on systematic robberies of the most artful kind for years. His modus operandi was very simple. He moved about the country, looking out for a shop, close handy to one, or a house, containing rich booty, and after gaining a good character among the inhabitants, set to work.

If a mansion had to be looted, he gave information to expert burglars with whom he was in league, and so shared the plunder when they were successful. When they were caught and punished they, after serving their sentences, came to Lessmore, who set them up in "business" again.

Sheen and Shimmer's was a job after the rascal's own heart. Having made himself acquainted with the habits of the police on duty, he fixed his time, planted his assistant at a window to give him a signal when the constable had passed, and the rest, in such expert hands as his, was easy.

Chiston offered to turn Queen's evidence, but was put on his trial, with the result that he disappeared from the view of the general public for seven years, while the curtain of liberty descended on Lessmore for double that period.

It was a clever capture, and whatever reward Superintendent Hunter received at headquarters, he was not forgotten by Messrs. Sheen and Shimmer, who presented him with a fine gold watch and chain, a ring for his finger, and a bank-note to swell the contents of his purse.

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