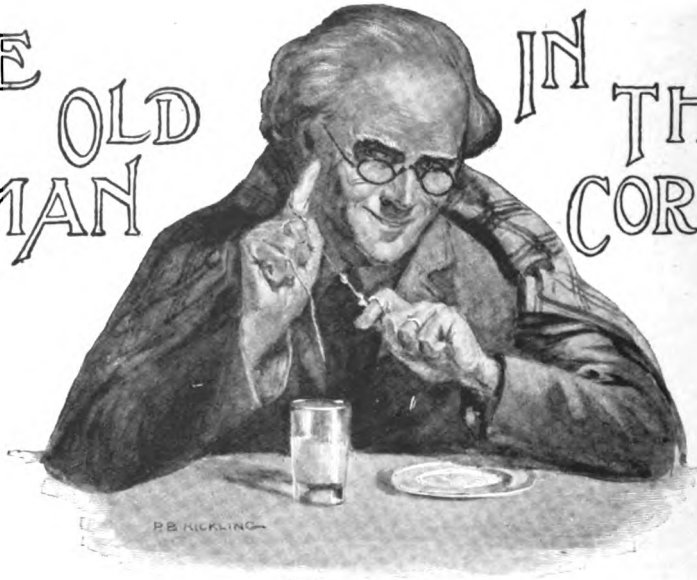


# THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER



## VII.—THE TREMARN CASE.

BY THE BARONESS ORCZY.

### DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER	Who unravels the mystery to—	HAROLD LE CHEMINANT... ..	The deposed heir.
THE LADY JOURNALIST ... ..	Who relates it to the ROYAL readers.	JAMES TOVEY ... ..	Butler to the Earl.
EARL OF TREMARN... ..	Uncle of the murdered man.	THOMAS SAWYER ... ..	Porter at the Junior Grosvenor Club.
PHILIP LE CHEMINANT ... ..	Heir to the Tremarn earldom.	CHARLES COLLINS ... ..	Witness at the inquest.

### I.

"WELL, it certainly is most amazing!" I said that day, when I had finished reading about it all in the *Daily Telegraph*.

"Yet the most natural thing in the world," retorted the man in the corner, as soon as he had ordered his lunch. "Crime invariably begets crime. No sooner is a murder, theft, or fraud committed in a novel or striking way, than this method is aped—probably within the next few days—by some other less imaginative scoundrel.

"Take this case, for instance," he continued, as he slowly began sipping his glass of milk, "which seems to amaze you so much. It was less than a year ago, was it not? that in Paris a man was found dead in a cab, stabbed in a most peculiar way—right through the neck from ear to ear—with, presumably, a long, sharp instrument of the type of an Italian stiletto.

"No one in England took much count of the crime, beyond a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders at the want of safety of the Paris streets, and the incapacity of the French detectives, who not only never discovered the murderer, who had managed to slip out of the cab unperceived, but who did not even succeed in establishing the identity of the victim.

"But this case," he added, pointing once more to my daily paper, "strikes nearer home. Less than a year has passed, and last week, in the very midst of our much vaunted London streets, a crime of a similar nature has been committed. I do not know if your paper gives full details, but this is what happened: Last Monday evening two gentlemen, both in evening dress and wearing opera hats, hailed a hansom in Shaftesbury Avenue. It was about a quarter past eleven, and the night, if you remember, was a typical November one

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—dark, drizzly, and foggy. The various theatres in the immediate neighbourhood were disgorging a continuous stream of people after the evening performance.

"The cabman did not take special notice of his fares. They jumped in very quickly, and one of them, through the little trap above, gave him an address in Cromwell Road. He drove there as quickly as the fog would permit him, and pulled up at the number given. One of the gentlemen then handed him up a very liberal fare—again through the little trap—and told him to drive his friend on to Westminster Chambers, Victoria Street.

"Cabby noticed that 'the swell,' when he got out of the hansom, stopped for a moment to say a few words to his friend, who had remained inside; then he crossed over the road and walked quickly in the direction of the Natural History Museum.

"When the cabman pulled up at Westminster Chambers, he waited for the second fare to get out; the latter seemingly making no movement that way, cabby looked down at him through the trap.

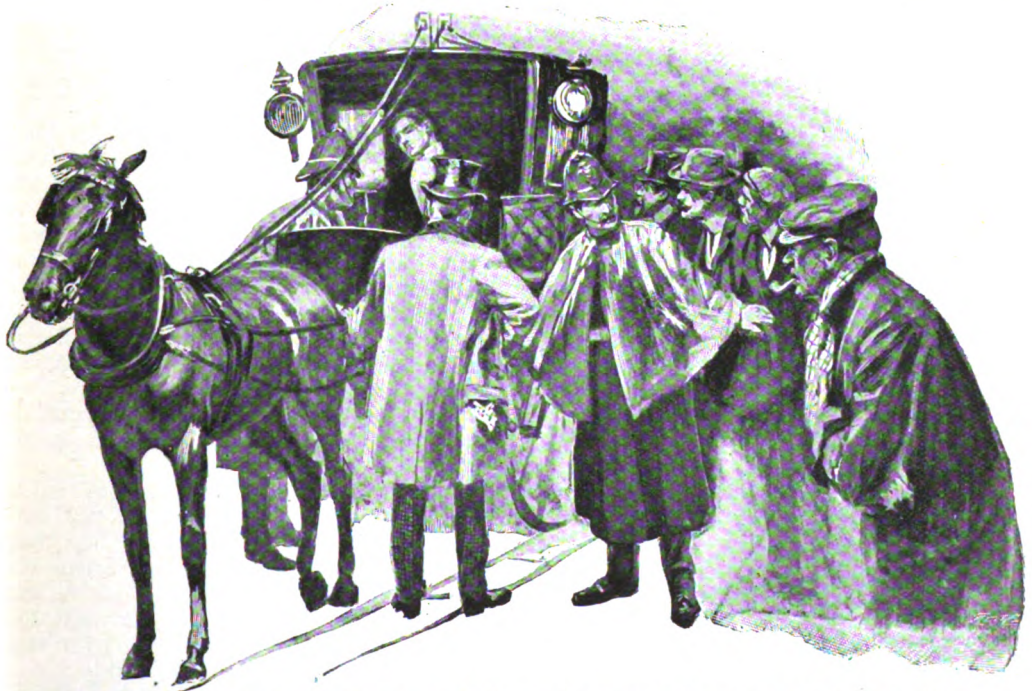
"'I thought 'e was asleep,' he explained to the police later on. 'E was leaning back in 'is corner and 'is 'ead was turned towards the window. I gets down and calls to 'im, but 'e

don't move. Then I gets on to the step and give 'im a shake. . . . There!—I'll say no more. . . . We was near a lamp-post, the mare took a step forward, and the light fell full on the gent's face. 'E was dead, and no mistake. I saw the wound just underneath 'is ear, and "Murder!" I says to myself at once.'

"Cabby lost no time in whistling for the nearest point policeman, then he called the night porter of the Westminster Chambers. The latter looked at the murdered man, and declared that he knew nothing of him; certainly he was not a tenant of the Chambers.

"By the time a couple of policemen arrived upon the scene, quite a crowd had gathered around the cab, in spite of the lateness of the hour and the darkness of the night. The matter was such an important one that one of the constables thought it best at once to jump into the hansom beside the murdered man and to order the cabman to drive to the nearest police-station.

"There the cause of death was soon ascertained; the victim of this daring outrage had been stabbed through the neck from ear to ear with a long, sharp instrument, in shape like an antique stiletto, which, I may tell you, was subsequently found under the cushions of the hansom. The murderer must have



"By the time a couple of policemen arrived upon the scene, quite a crowd had collected,"

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VOL. XII.—33.

watched his opportunity, when his victim's head was turned away from him, and then dealt the blow, just below the left ear, with amazing swiftness and precision.

"Of course the papers were full of it the next day; this was such a lovely opportunity for driving home a moral lesson, of how one crime engenders another, and how—but for that murder in Paris a year ago—we should not now have to deplore a crime committed in the very centre of fashionable London, the detection of which seems likely to completely baffle the police.

"Plenty more in that strain, of course, from which the reading public quickly jumped to the conclusion that the police held absolutely no clue as to the identity of the daring and mysterious miscreant.

"A most usual and natural thing had happened; cabby could only give a very vague description of his other 'fare,' of the 'swell' who had got out at Cromwell Road, and been lost to sight after having committed so dastardly and so daring a crime.

"This was scarcely to be wondered at, for the night had been very foggy, and the murderer had been careful to pull his operahat well over his face, thus hiding the whole of his forehead and eyes; moreover, he had always taken the additional precaution of only communicating with the cabman through the little trap-door.

"All cabby had seen of him was a clean-shaven chin. As to the murdered man, it was not until about noon, when the early editions of the evening papers came out with a fuller account of the crime and a description of the victim, that his identity was at last established.

"Then the news spread like wildfire, and the evening papers came out with some of the most sensational headlines it had ever been their good fortune to print. The man who had been so mysteriously murdered in the cab was none other than Mr. Philip Le Cheminant, the nephew and heir-presumptive of the Earl of Tremarn."

## II.

"In order fully to realise the interest created by this extraordinary news, you must be acquainted with the various details of that remarkable case, popularly known as the 'Tremarn Peerage Case,'" continued the man in the corner, as he placidly munched his cheese-cake. "I do not know if you followed it in its earlier stages, when its many details—which read like a romance—were first made public."

I looked so interested and so eager that he did not wait for my reply.

"I must try and put it all clearly before you," he said; "I was interested in it all from the beginning, and from the numerous wild stories afloat I have sifted only what was undeniably true. Some points of the case are still in dispute, and will, perhaps, now for ever remain a mystery. But I must take you back some five-and-twenty years. The Hon. Arthur Le Cheminant, second son of the late Earl of Tremarn, was then travelling round the world for health and pleasure.

"In the course of his wanderings he touched at Martinique, one of the French West Indian islands, which was devastated by volcanic eruptions about two years ago. There he met and fell in love with a beautiful half-caste girl named Lucie Legrand, who had French blood in her veins, and was a Christian, but who, otherwise, was only partially civilised, and not at all educated.

"How it all came about it is difficult to conjecture, but one thing is absolutely certain, and that is that the Hon. Arthur Le Cheminant, the son of one of our English peers, married this half-caste girl at the parish church of St. Pierre, in Martinique, according to the forms prescribed by French laws, both parties being of the same religion.

"I suppose now no one will ever know whether that marriage was absolutely and undisputably a legal one—but, in view of subsequent events, we must presume that it was. The Hon. Arthur, however, in any case, behaved like a young scoundrel. He only spent a very little time with his wife, quickly tired of her, and within two years of his marriage callously abandoned her and his child, then a boy about a year old.

"He lodged a sum of £2000 in the local bank in the name of Mme. Le Cheminant, the interest of which was to be paid to her regularly for the maintenance of herself and child, then he calmly sailed for England, with the intention never to return. This intention fate itself helped him to carry out, for he died very shortly afterwards, taking the secret of his incongruous marriage with him to his grave.

"Mme. Lecheminant, as she was called out there, seems to have accepted her own fate with perfect equanimity. She had never known anything about her husband's social position in his own country, and he had left her what, in Martinique amongst the coloured population, was considered a very fair competence for herself and child.

"The grandson of an English Earl was

taught to read and write by the worthy curé of St. Pierre, and during the whole of her life Lucie never once tried to find out who her husband was, and what had become of him.

"But here the dramatic scene comes in this strange story," continued the man in the corner, with growing excitement; "two years ago St. Pierre, if you remember, was completely destroyed by volcanic eruptions. Nearly the entire population perished, and every house and building was in ruins. Among those who fell a victim to the awful catastrophe was Mme. Lecheminant, otherwise the Hon. Mrs. Arthur Le Cheminant, whilst amongst those who managed to escape, and ultimately found refuge in the English colony of St. Vincent, was her son, Philip.

"Well!—you can easily guess what happened, can't you? In that English speaking colony the name of Lecheminant was, of course, well-known, and Philip had not been in St. Vincent many weeks, before he learned that his father was none other than a younger brother of the present Earl of Tremarn, and that he himself—seeing that the present peer was over fifty and still unmarried—was heir-presumptive to the title and estates.

"You know the rest. Within two or three months of the memorable St. Pierre catastrophe Philip Le Cheminant had written to his uncle, Lord Tremarn, demanding his rights. Then he took passage on board a French liner and crossed over to Havre *en route* for Paris and London.

"He and his mother—both brought up as French subjects—had, mind you, all the respect which French people have for their papers of identification; and when the house in which they had lived for twenty years was tumbling about the young man's ears, when his mother had already perished in the flames, he made a final and successful effort to rescue the papers which proved him to be a French citizen, the son of Lucie Legrand, by her lawful marriage with Arthur Le Cheminant at the church of the Immaculate Conception of St. Pierre.

"What happened immediately afterwards it is difficult to conjecture. Certain it is, however, that over here the newspapers soon were full of vague allusions about the newly-found heir to the Earldom of Tremarn, and within a few weeks the whole of the story of the secret marriage at St. Pierre was in everybody's mouth.

"It created an immense sensation; the Hon. Arthur Le Cheminant had lived a few years in England after his return from abroad,

and no one, not even his brother, seemed to have had the slightest inkling of his marriage.

"The late Lord Tremarn, you must remember, had three sons, the eldest of whom is the present peer, the second was the romantic Arthur, and the third, the Hon. Reginald, who also died some years ago, leaving four sons, the eldest of whom, Harold, was just twenty-three, and had always been styled heir-presumptive to the Earldom.

"Lord Tremarn had brought up these four nephews of his, who had lost both father and mother, just as if they had been his own children, and his affection for them, and notably for the eldest boy, was a very beautiful trait in his otherwise unattractive character.

"The news of the existence and claim of this unknown nephew must have come upon Lord Tremarn as a thunderbolt. His attitude, however, was one of uncompromising incredulity. He refused to believe the story of the marriage, called the whole tale a tissue of falsehoods, and denounced the claimant as a bare-faced and impudent impostor.

"Two or three months more went by; the public were eagerly awaiting the arrival of this semi-exotic claimant to an English peerage, and sensations, surpassing those of the Tichborne case, were looked forward to with palpitating interest.

"But in the romances of real life it is always the unexpected that happens. The claimant did arrive in London about a year ago. He was alone, friendless, and moneyless, since the £2000 lay buried somewhere beneath the ruins of the St. Pierre bank. However, he called upon a well-known London solicitor, who advanced him some money and took charge of all the papers relating to his claim.

"Philip Le Cheminant then seems to have made up his mind to make a personal appeal to his uncle, trusting apparently in the old adage that 'blood is thicker than water.'

"As was only to be expected, Lord Tremarn flatly refused to see the claimant, whom he was still denouncing as an impostor. It was by stealth, and by bribing the servants at the Grosvenor Square mansion, that the young man at last obtained an interview with his uncle.

"Last New Year's Day, he gave James Tovey, Lord Tremarn's butler, a five pound note, to introduce him, surreptitiously, into his master's study. There uncle and nephew at last met face to face.

"What happened at that interview nobody

knows; was the cry of blood and of justice so convincing that Lord Tremarn dare not resist it? Perhaps.

"Anyway, from that moment, the new heir-presumptive was installed within his rights. After a single interview with Philip Le Cheminant's solicitor, Lord Tremarn openly acknowledged the claimant to be his brother Arthur's only son, and therefore his own nephew and heir.

"Nay, more, everyone noticed that the proud, bad-tempered old man, was as wax in the hands of this newly-found nephew. He seemed even to have withdrawn his affection from the four other young nephews, whom hitherto he had brought up as his own children, and bestowed it all upon his brother Arthur's son—some people said in compensation for all the wrong that had been done to the boy in the past.

"But the scandal around his dead brother's name had wounded the old man's pride very deeply, and from this he never recovered. He shut himself away from all his friends, living alone with his newly-found nephew in his gloomy house in Grosvenor Square. The other boys, the eldest of whom, Harold, was just twenty-three, decided very soon to leave a house where they were no longer welcome. They had a small private fortune of their own, from their father and mother; the youngest boy was still at college, two others had made a start in their respective professions.

"Harold had been brought up as an idle young man about town, and on him the sudden change of fortune fell most heavily. He was undecided what to do in the future, but in the meanwhile, partly from a spirit of independence, and partly from a desire to keep a home for his younger brothers, he took and furnished a small flat, which, it is interesting to note, is just off Exhibition Road, not far from the Natural History Museum in Kensington.

"This was less than a year ago. Ten months later the newly-found heir to the peerage of Tremarn was found murdered in a hansom cab, and Harold Le Cheminant is once more the future Earl."

### III.

"The papers, as you know, talked of nothing else but the mysterious murder in the hansom cab. Everyone's sympathy went out at once to Lord Tremarn, who, on hearing the terrible news, had completely broken down, and was now lying on a bed of sickness, from which they say he may never recover.

"From the first there had been many rumours of the terrible enmity which existed between Harold Le Cheminant and the man who had so easily captured Lord Tremarn's heart, as well as the foremost place in the Grosvenor Square household.

"The servants in the great and gloomy mansion told the detectives in charge of the case many stories of terrible rows which occurred at first between the cousins. And now everyone's eyes were already turned with suspicion on the one man who could most benefit by the death of Philip Le Cheminant.

"However careful and reticent the police may be, details in connection with so interesting a case have a wonderful way of leaking out. Already one other most important fact had found its way into the papers. It appears that in their endeavours to reconstruct the last day spent by the murdered man the detectives had come upon most important evidence.

"It was Thomas Sawyer, hall-porter of the Junior Grosvenor Club, who first told the following interesting story. He stated that deceased was a member of the Club, and had dined there on the evening preceding his death.

"'Mr. Le Cheminant was just coming downstairs after his dinner,' explained Thomas Sawyer to the detectives, 'when a stranger comes into the hall of the club; Mr. Le Cheminant saw him as soon as I did, and appeared very astonished. "What do you want?" he says rather sharply. "A word with you," replies the stranger. Mr. Le Cheminant seemed to hesitate for a moment. He lights a cigar, whilst the stranger stands there glaring at him, with a look in his eye I certainly didn't like.

"'Mind you,' added Thomas Sawyer, 'the stranger was a gentleman, in evening dress, and all that. Presently Mr. Le Cheminant says to him: "This way, then," and takes him along into one of the club rooms. Half-an-hour later the stranger comes out again. He looked flushed and excited. Soon after Mr. Le Cheminant comes out too; but he was quite calm, and smoking a cigar. He asks for a cab, and tells the driver to take him to the Lyric Theatre.'

"This was all that the hall-porter had to say, but his evidence was corroborated by one of the waiters of the club who saw Mr. Le Cheminant and the stranger subsequently enter the dining-room, which was quite deserted at the time.

"'They 'adn't been in the room a minute,' said the waiter, 'when I 'eard loud voices, as if

they was quarrelling frightful. I couldn't 'ear what they said, though I tried, but they was shouting so, and drowning each other's voices. Presently there's a ring at my bell, and I goes into the room. Mr. Le Cheminant was sitting beside one of the tables, quietly lighting a cigar. "Show this—er—gentleman out of the club," 'e says to me. The stranger looked as if 'e would strike 'im. "You'll pay for this," 'e says, then 'e picks up 'is 'at, and dashes out of the club helter-skelter. "One is always pestered by these beggars," says Mr. Le Cheminant to me, as 'e stalks out of the room.'

"Later on it was arranged that both Thomas Sawyer and the waiter should catch sight of Harold Le Cheminant, as he went out of his house in Exhibition Road. Neither of them had the slightest hesitation in recognising in him the stranger who had called at the club that night.

"Now that they held this definite clue, the detectives continued their work with a will. They made inquiries at the Lyric Theatre, but there they only obtained very vague testimony; one point, however, was of great value, the commissioner outside one of the neighbouring theatres stated that, some time after the performance had begun, he noticed a gentleman in evening dress walking rapidly past him.

"He seemed strangely excited, for as he went by he muttered quite audibly to himself: 'I can stand it no longer, it must be he or I.' Then he disappeared in the fog, walking away towards Shaftesbury Avenue. Unfortunately the commissioner, just like the cabman, was not prepared to swear to the identity of this man, whom he had only seen momentarily through the fog.

"But add to all this testimony the very strong motive there was for the crime, and



"Show this—er—gentleman out of the club."

you will not wonder that, within twenty-four hours of the murder, the strongest suspicions had already fastened on Harold Le Cheminant, and it was generally understood that, even before the inquest, the police already had in readiness a warrant for his arrest on the capital charge."

#### IV.

"It would be difficult, I think, for anyone who was not present at that memorable inquest to have the least idea of the sensation which its varied and dramatic incidents caused among the crowd of spectators there.

"At first the proceedings were of the usual kind. The medical officer gave his testimony as to the cause of death; this was, of course, not in dispute. The stiletto was produced; it was of an antique and foreign pattern, probably of Eastern or else Spanish origin. In England, it could only have been purchased at some bric-à-brac shop.

"Then it was the turn of the servants at Grosvenor Square, of the cabman, and of the commissioner. Lord Tremarn's evidence, which he had sworn to on his sick bed, was also read. It added nothing to the known facts of the case, for he had last seen

his favourite nephew alive in the course of the afternoon preceding the latter's tragic end.

"After that the *employés* of the Junior Grosvenor Club re-told their story, and they were the first to strike the note of sensation which was afterwards raised to its highest possible pitch.

"Both of them namely, were asked each in their turn, to look round the court and see if they could recognise the stranger who had called at the club that memorable evening. Without the slightest hesitation, both the hall-porter and the waiter pointed to Harold Le Cheminant, who sat with his solicitor in the body of the court.

"But already an inkling of what was to come had gradually spread through that crowded court—instinctively everyone felt that behind the apparent simplicity of this tragic case there lurked another mystery, more strange even than that murder in the hansom cab.

"Evidence was being taken as to the previous history of the deceased, his first appearance in London, his relationship with his uncle, and subsequently his enmity with his cousin Harold. At this point a man was brought forward as a witness, who it was understood had communicated with the police at the very last moment, offering to make a statement which he thought would throw considerable light upon the mysterious affair.

"He was a man of about fifty years of age, who looked like a very seedy, superannuated clerk of some insurance office.

"He gave his name as Charles Collins, and said that he resided in Caxton Road, Clapham.

"In a perfectly level tone of voice, he then explained that some three years ago, his son William, who had always been idle and good-for-nothing, had suddenly disappeared from home.

"We heard nothing of him for over two years,' continued Charles Collins in that same cheerless and even voice which spoke of a monotonous existence of ceaseless, patient grind, 'but some few weeks ago my daughter went up to the West End to see about an engagement—she plays dance music at parties sometimes—when, in Regent Street, she came face to face with her brother William. He was no longer wretched, as we all are,' added the old man pathetically, 'he was dressed like a swell, and when his sister spoke to him, he pretended not to know her. But she's a sharp girl, and guessed at once

that there was something strange there which William wished to hide. She followed him from a distance, and never lost sight of him that day, until she saw him about six o'clock in the evening go into one of the fine houses in Grosvenor Square. Then she came home and told her mother and me all about it.'

"I can assure you," continued the man in the corner, "that you might have heard a pin drop in that crowded court whilst the old man spoke. That he was stating the truth no one doubted for a moment. The very fact that he was brought forward as a witness showed that his story had been proved, at any rate, to the satisfaction of the police.

"The Collins's seem to have been very simple, good-natured people. It never struck any of them to interfere with William, who appeared, in their own words, to have 'bettered himself.' They concluded that he had obtained some sort of position in a rich family, and was now ashamed of his poor relations at Clapham.

"Then one morning they read in the papers the story of the mysterious murder in the hansom cab, together with a description of the victim, who had not yet been identified. 'William,' they said with one accord. Michael Collins, one of the younger sons, went up to London to view the murdered man at the mortuary. There was no doubt whatever that it was William, and yet all the papers persisted in saying that the deceased was the heir to some grand peerage.

"So I wrote to the police,' concluded Charles Collins, 'and my wife and children were all allowed to view the body, and we are all prepared to swear that it is that of my son, William Collins, who was no more heir to a peerage than your worship.'

"And mopping his forehead with a large coloured handkerchief, the old man stepped down from the box.

"Well, you may imagine what this bombshell was in the midst of that coroner's court. Everyone looked at his neighbour, wondering if this was real life, or some romantic play being acted upon a stage. Amidst indescribable excitement, various other members of the Collins family corroborated the old man's testimony, as did also one or two friends from Clapham. All those who had been allowed to view the body of the murdered man pronounced it without hesitation to be that of William Collins, who had disappeared from home three years ago.

"You see, it was like a repetition of the Tichborne case, only with this strange difference: This claimant was dead, but all

his papers were in perfect order, the certificate of marriage between Lucie Legrand and Arthur Le Cheminant at Martinique, as well as the birth and baptismal certificate of Philip Le Cheminant, their son. Yet there were all those simple, honest folk swearing that the deceased had been born in Clapham, and the mother, surely, could not have been mistaken.

"That is where the difference with the other noteworthy case came in, for in this instance, as far as the general public is concerned, the actual identity of the murdered man will always remain a matter of doubt—Philip Le Cheminant or William Collins took that part of his secret, at any rate, with him to his grave."

*(At this point you should attempt to solve the mystery for yourselves.—ED.)*

## V.

"But the murder?" I asked eagerly, for the man in the corner had paused, intent upon the manufacture of innumerable knots in a long piece of string.

"Ah, yes, the murder, of course," he replied with a chuckle, "the second mystery in this extraordinary case. Well, of course, whatever the identity of the deceased really was, there was no doubt in the minds of the police that Harold Le Cheminant had murdered him. To him, at any rate, the Collins family were unknown; he only knew the man who had supplanted him in his uncle's affections, and snatched a rich inheritance away from him. The charge brought against him at the Westminster Court was also one of the greatest sensations of this truly remarkable case.

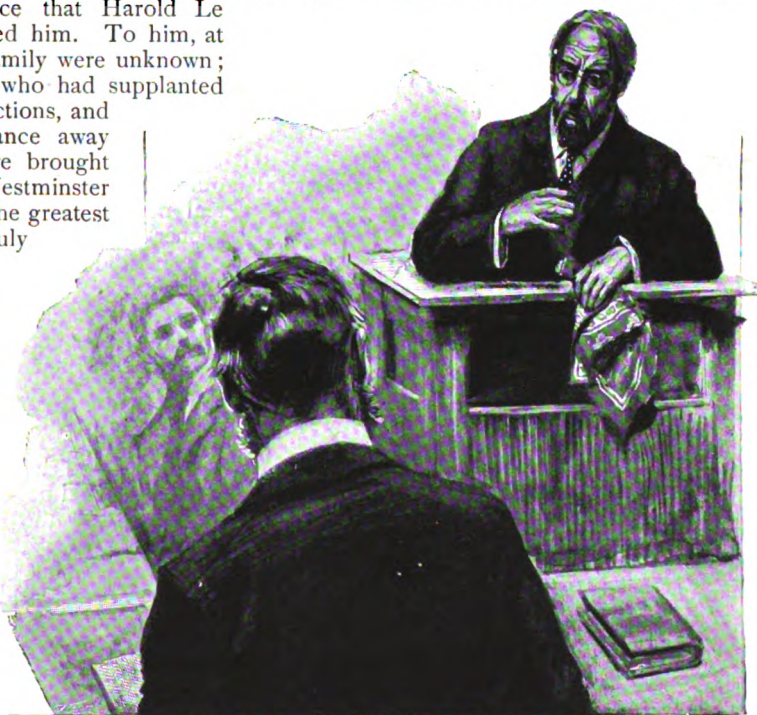
"It looked, indeed, as if the unfortunate young man had committed a crime which was as appalling as it was useless. Instead of murdering the impostor—if impostor he was—how much more simple it would have been to have tried to unmask him. But, strange to say, this he never seems to have done, at any rate, as far as the public knew.

"But" here again mystery stepped in. When brought before the magistrate Harold Le Cheminant was able to refute the terrible charge brought against him by the simple means of a complete *alibi*. After the stormy episode at the Junior Grosvenor Club he had gone to his own club in Pall Mall, and fortunately for him did not leave it until twenty minutes past eleven, some few minutes *after* the two men in evening dress got into the hansom in Shaftesbury Avenue.

"But for this lucky fact, for which he had one or two witnesses, it might have fared ill with him, for feeling unduly excited he walked all the way home afterwards; and had he left his club earlier, he might have found it difficult to account for his time. As it was, he was of course discharged.

"But one more strange fact came out during the course of the magisterial investigation, and that was that Harold Le Cheminant, on the very day preceding the murder, had booked a passage for St. Vincent. He admitted in court that he meant to conduct certain investigations there with regard to the identity of the supposed heir to the Tremarn peerage.

"And thus the curtain came down on the last act of that extraordinary drama, leaving two great mysteries unsolved: the real



"No more heir to a peerage than your worship."



identity of the murdered man, and that of the man who killed him. Some people still persist in thinking it was Harold Le Cheminant. Well, we may easily dismiss *that* supposition. Harold had decided to investigate the matter for himself; he was on his way to St. Vincent.

"Surely common-sense would assert that, having gone so far, he would assure himself first whether the man was an impostor or not, before he resorted to crime in order to rid himself of him. Moreover, the witnesses who saw him leave his own club at twenty minutes past eleven were quite independent and very emphatic.

"Another theory is that the Collins' gang tried to blackmail Philip Le Cheminant—or William Collins, whichever we like to call him—and that it was one of them who murdered him out of spite when he refused to submit to the blackmailing process.

"Against that theory, however, there are two unanswerable arguments—firstly, the weapon used, which certainly was not one that would commend itself to the average British middle-class man on murder intent—a razor or knife would be more in his line; secondly, there is no doubt whatever that the murderer wore evening dress and an opera hat, a costume not likely to have been worn by any member of the Collins' family, or their friends. We may, therefore, dismiss that theory also with equal certainty."

And he surveyed placidly the row of fine knots in his bit of string.

"But then, according to you, who was the man in evening dress, and who but Harold Le Cheminant had any interest in getting rid of the claimant?" I asked at last.

"Who, indeed?" he replied with a chuckle, "who but the man who was as wax in the hands of that impostor."

"Whom do you mean?" I gasped.

"Let us take things from the beginning," he said with ever growing excitement, "and take the one thing which is absolutely beyond dispute, and that is the authenticity of the *papers*—the marriage certificate of Lucie Legrand, etc.—as against the authenticity of the *man*. Let us admit that the real Philip Le Cheminant was a refugee at St. Vincent, that he found out about his parentage, and determined to go to England. He writes to his uncle, then sails for Europe, lands at Havre, and arrives in Paris."

"Why Paris?" I asked.

"Because you, like the police and like the public, have persistently shut your eyes to an event which, to my mind, has bearing upon

the whole of this mysterious case, and that is the original murder committed in Paris a year ago, also in a cab, also with a stiletto—which that time was *not* found—in fact, in the self-same manner as this murder a week ago."

"Well, that crime was never brought home to its perpetrator any more than this one will be. But my contention is, that the man who committed that murder a year ago, repeated this crime last week—that the man who was murdered in Paris was the real Philip Le Cheminant, whilst the man who was murdered in London was some friend to whom he had confided his story, and probably his papers, and who then hit upon the bold plan of assuming the personality of the Martinique creole, heir to an English peerage."

"But what in the world makes you imagine such a preposterous thing?" I gasped.

"One tiny, unanswerable fact," he replied quietly. "William Collins, the impostor, when he came to London, called upon a solicitor, and deposited with him the valuable papers, *after that* he obtained his interview with Lord Tremarn. Then mark what happens. Without any question, immediately after that interview, and, therefore, without even having seen the papers of identification, Lord Tremarn accepts the claimant as his newly-found nephew.

"And why?"

"Only because that claimant has a tremendous hold over the Earl, which makes the old man as wax in his hands, and it is only logical to conclude that that hold was none other than that Lord Tremarn had met his real nephew in Paris, and had killed him, sooner than to see him supplant his beloved heir, Harold.

"I followed up the subsequent history of that Paris crime, and found that the Paris police had never established the identity of the murdered man. Being a stranger and moneyless, he had apparently lodged in one of those innumerable ill-famed little hotels that abound in Paris, the proprietors of which have very good cause to shun the police, and therefore would not even venture so far as to go and identify the body when it lay in the Morgue.

"But William Collins knew who the murdered man was; no doubt he lodged at the same hotel, and could lay his hands on the all-important papers. I imagine that the two young men originally met in St. Vincent, or perhaps on board ship. He assumed the personality of the deceased, crossed over to

England, and confronted Lord Tremarn, with the threat to bring the murder home to him if he ventured to dispute his claim.

"Think of it all, and you will see that I am right. When Lord Tremarn first heard from his brother Arthur's son, he went to Paris in order to assure himself of the validity of his claim. Seeing that there was no doubt of that, he assumed a friendly attitude towards the young man, and one evening took him out for a drive in a cab and murdered him on the way.

"Then came Nemesis in the shape of William Collins, whom he dared not denounce, lest his crime be brought home to him. How could he come forward and say: 'I know that this man is an impostor, as I happened to have murdered my nephew myself'?"

"No; he preferred to temporise, and bide his time until, perhaps, chance would give him his opportunity. It took a year in coming. The yoke had become too heavy. 'It must be he or I!' he said to himself that very night. Apparently he was on the best of terms with his tormentor, but in his heart of hearts he had always meant to be even with him at the last.

"Everything favoured him; the foggy night, even the dispute between Harold and the impostor at the club. Can you not picture

him meeting William Collins outside the theatre, hearing from him the story of the quarrel, and then saying, 'Come with me to Harold's; I'll soon make the young jackanapes apologise to you'?"

"Mind you, a year had passed by since the original crime. William Collins, no doubt, never thought he had anything to fear from the old man. He got into the cab with him, and thus this remarkable story has closed, and Harold Le Cheminant is once more heir to the Earldom of Tremarn.

"Think it all over, and bear in mind that Lord Tremarn *never* made the slightest attempt to prove the rights or wrongs of the impostor's claim. On this base your own conclusions, and then see if they do not inevitably lead you to admit mine as the only possible solution of this double mystery."

He was gone, leaving me bewildered and amazed, staring at my *Daily Telegraph*, where, side by side with a long recapitulation of the mysterious claimant to the Earldom, there was the following brief announcement:

"We regret to say that the condition of Lord Tremarn is decidedly worse to-day, and that but little hope is entertained of his recovery. Mr. Harold Le Cheminant has been his uncle's constant and devoted companion during the noble Earl's illness."

