

THE SIGN

OF...

THE

FOUR

—BY—

CONAN DOYLE...

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

It was well that we had so clear a view of him. Even as we looked he picked out from under his covering a short, round piece of wood, like a school ruler, and clapped it to his lips. Our pistols rang out together. He whirled round, threw up his arms, and with a kind of choking cough fell sideways into the stream. I caught one glimpse of his venomous, menacing eyes amid the white swirl of the waters. At the same moment the wooden-legged man threw himself upon the rudder and put it hard down, so that his boat made straight in for the southern bank, while we shot past her stern, only clearing her by a few feet. We were round after her in an instant, but she was already nearly at the bank. It was a wild and desolate place, where the moon glimmered upon a wide expanse of marsh land, with pools of stagnant water and beds of decaying vegetation. The launch, with a dull thud, ran up on the mud bank, with her bow in the air and her stern flush with the water. The fugitive sprang out, but his stump instantly sank its whole length into the sodden soil. In vain he struggled and writhed. Not one step could he possibly take either forwards or backwards. He yelled in impotent rage, and kicked frantically into the mud with his other foot, but his struggles only bored his wooden pin the deeper into the sticky bank. When we brought our launch alongside he was so firmly anchored that it was only by throwing the end of a rope over his shoulders that we were able to haul him out, and to drag him, like some evil fish, over our side. The two Smiths, father and son, sat sullenly in their launch, but came aboard meekly enough when commanded. The Aurora herself we hauled off and made fast to our stern. A solid iron chest of Indian workmanship stood upon the deck. This, there could be no question, was the same that had contained the ill-omened treasure of the Sholto's. There was no key, but it was of considerable weight, so we transferred it carefully to our own little cabin. As we steamed slowly upstream again, we flashed our search-light in every direction, but there was no sign of the islander. Somewhere in the dark ooze at the bottom of the Thames lie the bones of that strange visitor to our shores.

"See here," said Holmes, pointing to the wooden hatchway. "We were hardly quick enough with our pistols. There, sure enough, just behind where we had been standing, stuck one of those murderous darts which we knew so well. It must have whizzed between us at the instant that we fired. Holmes smiled at it, and shrugged his shoulders in his easy fashion, but I confess that it turned me sick to think of the horrible death which had passed so close to us that night.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT AGRA TREASURE.

Our captive sat in the cabin opposite to the iron box which he had done so much and waited so long to gain. He was a sunburned, reckless-eyed fellow, with a network of lines and wrinkles all over his mahogany features, which told of a hard, open-air life. There was a singular prominence about his bearded chin which marked a man who was not to be easily turned from his purpose. His age may have been fifty or thereabouts, for his black, curly hair was thickly shot with gray. His face in repose was not an unpleasing one, though his heavy brows and aggressive chin gave him, as I had lately seen, a terrible expression when moved to anger. He sat now with his handcuffed hands upon his lap and his head sunk upon his breast, while he looked with his keen, twinkling eyes at the box which had been the cause of his ill-doings. It seemed to me that there was more sorrow than anger in his rigid and contained countenance. Once he looked up at me with a gleam of something like humor in his eyes.

"Well, Jonathan Small," said Holmes, lighting a cigar. "I am sorry that it has come to this."

"And so am I," he answered, frankly. "I don't believe that I can swing over the job. I give you my word on the book that I never raised my hand against Mr. Sholto. It was that little hell-hound Tonga who shot one of his cursed darts into him. I had no part in it, sir. I was as grieved as if it had been my blood-relation. I wretched the little devil with the slack end of the rope for it, but it was done, and I could not undo it again."

"Have a cigar," said Holmes, "and you had best take a pull out of my flask, for you are very wet. How could you expect so small and weak a man as this black fellow to overpower Mr. Sholto and hold him while you were climbing the rope?"

"You seem to know as much about it as if you were there, sir. The truth is that I hoped to find the room clear. I knew the habits of the house pretty well, and it was the time when Mr. Sholto usually went down to his supper. I shall make no secret of the business. The best defense that I can make is just the simple truth. Now, if it had been the old major I would have

swung for him with a light hand, and would have thought no more of hanging him than of smoking this pipe. But he cursed hard that I should lagged over this young Sholto, to whom I had no quarrel whatever."

"You are under the charge of Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard. He is going to bring you up to my rooms, and I shall ask you for a true account of the matter. You must make a clean breast of it, for if you do I hope that I may be of use to you. I think I can prove that the poison acts so quickly that the man was dead before ever you reached the room."

"That he was, sir. I never got such a turn in my life as when I saw him grinning at me with his head on his shoulder as I climbed through the window. It fairly snook me, sir. I'd have half-killed Tonga for it if he had not scrambled off. That was how he came to leave his club, and some of his darts, too, as he tells me, which I dare say helped to put you on our track; though how you kept on it is more than I can tell. I don't feel no malice against you for it. But it does seem a queer thing," he added, with a bitter smile, "that I who have a fair claim to high upon half a million of money should spend the first half of my life building a breakwater in the Andamans, and am like to spend the other half digging drains at Dartmoor. It was an evil day for me when first I clapped eyes upon the merchant Achmet and had to do with the Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse yet upon the man who owned it. To him it brought murder, to Maj. Sholto it brought fear and guilt, to me it has meant slavery for life."

At this moment Athelney Jones thrust his broad face and heavy shoulders into the tiny cabin. "Quite a family party," he remarked.



"Quite a family party," he remarked. "I think I shall have a pull at that flask, Holmes. Well, I think we may all congratulate each other. Pity we didn't take the other alive; but there was no choice. I say, Holmes, you must confess that you cut it rather fine. It was all that you could do to overhaul her."

"All is well that ends well," said Holmes. "But I certainly did not know that the Aurora was such a clipper."

"Smith says that she is one of the fastest launches on the river, and that if he had had another man to help him with the engines we should never have caught her. He swears he knows nothing of this Norwood business."

"Neither he did," cried our prisoner. "Not a word. I chose his launch because I heard that she was a flyer. We told him nothing, but we paid him well, and he was to get something handsome if we reached our vessel, the Esmeralda, at Gravesend, outward bound for the Brazils."

"Well, if he has done no wrong we shall see that no wrong comes to him. If we are pretty quick in catching our men, we are not so quick in condemning them."

It was amusing to notice how the consequential Jones was already beginning to give himself airs on the strength of the capture. From the slight smile which played over Sherlock Holmes' face, I could see that the speech had not been lost upon him.

"We will be at Vauxhall bridge presently," said Jones, "and shall land you, Dr. Watson, with the treasure-box. I need hardly tell you that I am taking a very grave responsibility upon myself in doing this. It is most irregular; but of course an agreement is an agreement. I must, however, as a matter of duty, send an inspector with you, since you have so valuable a charge. You will drive, no doubt?"

"Yes, I shall drive."

"It is a pity there is no key, that we may make an inventory first. You will have to break it open. Where is the key, my man?"

"At the bottom of the river," said Small, shortly.

"Hum! There was no use you giving this unnecessary trouble. We have had work enough already through you. However, doctor, I need not warn you to be careful. Bring the box back with you to the Baker street rooms. You will find us there on our way to the station."

They landed me at Vauxhall with my heavy iron box and with a bluff, genial inspector as my companion. A quarter of an hour's drive brought us to Mrs. Cecil Forrester's. The servant seemed surprised at so late a visitor. Mrs. Cecil Forrester was out for the evening, she explained, and likely to be very late. Miss Morstan, however, was in the drawing-room; so to the drawing-room I went, box in hand, leaving the obliging inspector in the cab.

She was seated by the open window, dressed in some sort of white diaphanous material, with a little touch of scarlet at the neck and waist. The soft light of a shaded lamp fell upon her as she leaned back in the basket chair, playing over her sweet, grave face, and tinting with a dull metallic sparkle the rich coils of her luxuriant hair. One white arm and hand drooped over the side of the chair, and her whole pose and figure spoke of an absorbing melancholy. At the sound of my footfall she sprang to her feet, however, and a bright flush of surprise and



"THE TREASURE IS LOST," SAID MISS MORSTAN.

these riches, sealed my lips. Now that they are gone I can tell you how I love you. That is why I said: "Thank God!"

"Then I say 'Thank God,' too," she whispered, as I drew her to my side. Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.)

—Cholera Morbus is a dangerous complaint, and often is fatal in its results. To avoid this you should use DeWitt's Colic and Cholera Cure, as soon as the first symptoms appear. Geo. H. Haskins, druggist.

—House and lot for sale. Inquire at this office.

BEBE, COURT DWARF.

Queer Character of the Court Dwarf of the King.

The Diminutive Courtier Owned by King Stanislaus of Poland—Numerous Perils to Which the Little Fellow Was Exposed—His Last Days.

The story of Bebe is a quaint bit of last century's history, which has just been rescued from oblivion by a Continental Dryadust. Bebe is supposed to have been the littlest man who ever lived, says the New York Sun. He was borne by a peasant woman in Lorraine just 150 years ago, and was called Bebe because the first few years of his life he could articulate only "b-b." The day of his birth Bebe was smaller than his mother's hand. Ten days afterward he was taken to the village church to be baptized in his mother's wooden shoe, because he was too tiny to be carried safely in her arms. During the next six months the same wooden shoe served as Bebe's crib.

Bebe's early childhood was uneventful. He did not grow and he did not talk. He was famous throughout Lorraine, however, as the cunningest and tiniest bit of humanity ever seen. He was perfectly proportioned, had wonderfully large and beautiful brown eyes, and was remarkably active upon his diminutive legs. When Bebe was about seven years old King Stanislaus Leszczyński of Poland, who was then living in Lorraine, heard what a wonderful little fellow he was, and ordered the child's father to bring him to court. Bebe, Sr., carried his son to the royal palace in a small basket.

At the time of his introduction to court life Bebe was just twenty inches tall and weighed eight pounds. He never grew larger. At first the King tried to teach him jokes and fairy stories and bits of questionable poetry. Bebe's intelligence, however, was not equal to the demands thus made upon it. His memory was so weak that he forgot one hour what he had learned the hour before. Reading and writing were for him quite impossible. With all these failings, however, he was by no means a failure as a court dwarf. He had a sweet little voice, a good ear for music, and nimble legs. He could dance and kick and sing with the best of the King's courtiers. He was very useful as a table ornament at all the King's great banquets. His most famous appearance in this rather curious role took place at a dinner which Stanislaus gave to the ambassador of a great power in 1755. In the middle of the table was an immense sugar castle. Shortly before the guests rose to leave, the door of the castle opened, and a knight in full armor stepped out with a drawn sword in his right hand. All the guests thought the knight must be some wonderful automaton which the King had obtained from the skilled mechanics across the Rhine. He wasn't, however. He was none other than little Bebe. He walked around the table, shook his sword in the face of every guest, saluted the King, and then turned back to the castle entrance, where no assumed the position of sentry. At a signal from the King every one at the table began to bombard him with small sugar balls. Bebe hurried at once into the castle, locked the door, mounted the tower, and pretended to return the fire by setting off a lot of perfumed explosives.

Within ten or twelve years after Bebe's appearance at court he was one of the most celebrated persons in royal society on the continent. With fame, however, came to him numerous perils. All the sovereigns of Europe were coveting him, and many of them tried hard to steal him. In 1758 the Empress Catherine, of Russia, sent an emissary after him to the court of the Polish King. Late one evening, when the royal palace was almost deserted, Catherine's emissary snapped Bebe up and stuffed him into the pocket of his great coat. Bebe screamed so lustily that he revealed the plot to the guard at the door. The emissary was arrested and Bebe was rescued. Not long afterward Bebe accompanied Stanislaus to the court of Louis XV, in Versailles, where he again narrowly escaped abduction. A lady of the French court had been holding him in her lap between the courses of a court dinner. Suddenly she rose to leave the room. Her first step was accompanied by a shrill cry from the folds of her gown: "Your Majesty, your Majesty, this lady has stuck me in her pocket, and is running away with me." The voice was Bebe's. He was immediately dragged from the court lady's pocket and placed under the guard of two pages, who were instructed by King Stanislaus to watch him day and night.

The perils through which he had passed, and the strict surveillance to which he was now subjected, depressed Bebe's spirits and demoralized his nervous system. He became melancholy, morose, round-shouldered and haggard. The King thought he needed a companion to cheer him up, and therefore married him with great pomp and ceremony to Therese Souvary, a dwarf of about his age and slightly greater stature. That was the last drop in Bebe's cup. Two weeks after his marriage he lost his mind. He ceased to talk entirely, ate little, and passed most of his time in his crib.

His honeymoon was hardly up when he died. Shortly before his death his clouded mind was cleared in a most remarkable manner. His memory, which had always been weak and after his marriage had vanished, suddenly returned. He recollected all the incidents of his early childhood, his mother's face, which he had not seen for fifteen years, and all the songs which had been taught him since his advent to court. Bebe was just twenty-one years old when he died. His wife Therese survived him forty-two years.

Had Lost Her Quiver.

She wanted to take some lessons in archery, but she was very, very verdant. "Have you a bow and quiver?" asked the teacher. "Ye—ye—yes," she hesitated. "I have a bow, but I haven't a quiver any more. He's been coming for about two months now, and I've used to it."—Washington Critic.

NOT GENERALLY KNOWN.

ASAFETIDA is a vegetable, not an animal product. It is prepared from the roots of a plant extensively grown in Persia, Beloochistan and Afghanistan. PURE gold is said to be twenty-four carats. Thus eighteen-carat gold contains eighteen carats of the pure metal in twenty-four, or is three-fourths pure. THE most expensive drug is physostigmine, two ounces of which would cost nearly \$2,000,000. It is a preparation from the calabar bean, and is of use in eye diseases. TAKE in your hand a crystal of quartz, a stick of deal, a daisy and an acorn, and you will not find in them a single element of matter that is not also found in your physical frame. It is usually said that there are but seven nine-lettered monosyllable words in the English language, viz.: Scratched, stretched, crunched, serached, screeched, squelched and stanchied. —Diarrhoea should be stopped promptly. It soon becomes chronic. DeWitt's Colic and Cholera Cure is effective, safe and certain. Hundreds of testimonials bear witness to the virtue of the great medicine. It can always be depended upon, its use saves time and money. Geo. H. Haskins, druggist.

Wanderings of a Letter.

A letter with a history passed through Bath, Me., the other day. It was directed to Captain B. S. Rairden, Manila, Philippine Islands, and, as the handwriting showed, was written by Captain Rairden's sister, Mrs. Abbie Peterson, who, with her husband, was lost at sea, six years ago. Across the end of the letter was written a direction to return the letter to Bath in case Captain Rairden's vessel had sailed. The latter has thus been wandering over the world for six years, and though somewhat faded, the envelope has not been opened and is in excellent condition. Captain Rairden is now in business in Anjer, Java, and the letter has been sent on its way to that place. —In the quaint old Anglican church of Capel-le-Ferne, near Dover, there is no provision for lighting it at night, and at the evening service those who attend are in the habit of bringing candles and lamps along with them. ROYAL Baking Powder. Highest of all in leavening strength.—U. S. Government Report. —Legal Blanks for sale at this office.

CASTORIA

for Infants and Children.

MOTHERS, Do You Know

that Paregoric, Bateman's Drops, Godfrey's Cordial, many so-called Soothing Syrups, and most remedies for children are composed of opium or morphine?

Do You Know that opium and morphine are stupefying narcotic poisons?

Do You Know that in most countries druggists are not permitted to sell narcotics without labeling them poisons?

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