The Chronicles of Addington Peace

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THE VANISHED MILLIONAIRE

(Continued.)

You, sir, sitting peaceably at home, with a good light and an easy conscience, may think I was a timid fool; yet I was afraid—honestly and openly afraid. The little detective heard the news of it in my voice, for he gave me a reassuring pat upon the back.

"Have you ever heard of a 'priest's hole?" he whispered. "In the days when Meudon Hall was built, no country house was without its hiding-place. Protestants and priests, Royalists and Republicans, they all used the secret burrow at one time or another."

"How did he get in?"

"That is what we are here to discover; and as I have no wish to destroy Mr. Ford's old oak panels I think our simplest plan will be to wait until he comes back again."

The shadows leapt upon us as Peace extinguished the light he carried. The great window alone was luminous with the faint starlight that showed the tracery of its ancient stonework; for the rest, the darkness hedged us about in impenetrable barriers. Side by side, we stood by the wall in which we knew the secret entrance must exist.

It may have been ten minutes or more when from the distance—somewhere below our feet, or so it seemed to me—there came the faint echo of a closing door. It was only in such cold silence that we could have heard it. The time ticked on. Suddenly, upon the black of the floor, there shone a thin reflection like the slash of a sword—a reflection that grew into a broad gush of light as the sliding panel in the wall, six feet from where we stood, rose to the full opening. There followed another pause, during which I could see Peace draw himself together as if for some unusual exertion.

A shadow darkened the reflection on the floor, and a head came peering out. The light but half displayed the face, but I could see that the teeth were bare and glistening, like those of a man in some deadly expectation. The next moment he stepped across the threshold.

With a spring like the rush of a terrier, Addington Peace was upon him, driving him off his balance with the impact of the blow. One loud scream he gave that went echoing away into the distant corridors. But, before I could reach them, the little detective had him down, though he still kicked viciously until I lent a hand. The click of the handcuffs on his wrists ended the matter.

It was Ford's valet, the man Jackson.

We were not long by ourselves. I heard a quick patter of naked feet from behind us, and Harbord, the secretary, came running up, swinging a heavy stick in his hand. Ransom followed close at his heels. They both stopped at the edge of the patch of light in which we were, staring from us to the gaping hole in the wall.

"What in thunder are you about?" cried the manager.

"Finding a solution to your problem," said the little detective, getting to his feet. "Perhaps, gentlemen, you will be good enough to follow me."

He stepped through the opening in the wall, and lifted the candle which the valet had placed on the floor whilst he was raising the panel from within. By its light I could see the first steps of a flight which led down into darkness.

"We will take Jackson with us," he continued. "Keep an eye on him, Mr. Phillips, if you please."

It was a strange procession that we made. First Peace, with the candle, then Ransom, with the valet following, while I and Harbord brought up the rear. We descended some thirty steps, formed in the thickness of the wall, opened a heavy door, and so found ourselves in a narrow chamber, some twelve feet long by seven broad. Upon a mattress at the further end lay a man, gagged and bound. As the light fell upon his features Ransom sprang forward, shouting his name.

"Silas Ford, by thunder!"

With eager fingers we loosened the gag and cut the ropes that bound his wrists. He sat up, turning his long, thin face from one to the other of us as he stretched the cramp from his limbs.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said he. "Well, Ransom, how are things?"

"Bad, sir; but it's not too late."

He nodded his head, passing his hands through his hair with a quick, nervous movement.

"You've caught my clever friend, I see. Kindly go through his pockets, will you? He has something I must ask him to return to me."

We found it in Jackson's pocket-book—a cheque, antedated a week, for five thousand pounds, with a covering letter to the manager of the bank. Ford took the bit of stamped paper, twisting it to and fro in his supple fingers.

"It was smart of you, Jackson," he said, addressing the bowed figure before him. "I give you credit for the idea. To kidnap a man just as he was bringing off a big deal—well, you would have earned the money."

"But how did you get down here?" struck in the manager.

"He told me that he had discovered an old hiding-place—a 'priest's hole' he called it, and I walked into the trap as the best man may do sometimes. As we got to the bottom of that stairway he slipped a sack over my head, and had me fixed in thirty seconds. He fed me himself twice a day, standing by to see I didn't holloa. When I paid up he was to have twenty-four hours' start; then he would let you know where I was. I held out awhile, but I gave in tonight. The delay was getting too dangerous. Have you a cigarette, Harbord? Thank you. And who may you be?"

It was to the detective he spoke.

"My name is Peace, Inspector Addington Peace, from Scotland Yard."

"And I owe my rescue to you?"

The little man bowed.

"You will have no reason to regret it. And what did you think had become of me, Inspector?"

"It was the general opinion that you had taken to yourself wings, Mr. Ford."

It was as we traveled up to town next day that Peace told me his story. I will set it down as briefly as may be.

"I soon came to the conclusion that Ford, whether dead or alive, was inside the grounds of Meudon Hall. If he had bolted, for some reason, by-the-way, which was perfectly incomprehensible, a man of his ability would not have left a broad trail across the center of his lawn for all to see. There was, moreover, no trace of him that our men could ferret out at any station within reasonable distance. A motor was possible, but there were no marks of its presence next morning in the slush of the roads. That fact I learnt from a curious groom who had aided in the search, and who, with a similar idea upon him, had carefully examined the highway at daybreak.

"When I clambered to the top of the wall I found that the snow upon the coping had been dislodged. I traced the marks, as you saw, for about a dozen yards. Where they ended I, too, dropped to the ground outside. There I made a remarkable discovery. Upon a little drift of snow that lay in the shallow ditch beneath were more footprints. But they were not those of Ford. They were the marks of long and narrow boots, and led into the road, where they were lost in the track of a flock of sheep that had been driven over it the day before.

"I took a careful measurement of those footprints. They might, of course, belong to some private investigator; but they gave me an idea. Could some man have walked across the lawn in Ford's boots, changed them to his own on the top of the wall, and so departed? Was it the desire of some one to let it be supposed that Ford had run away?

"When I examined Ford's private rooms I was even more fortunate. From the bootboy I discovered that the master had three pairs of shooting-boots. There were three pairs in the stand. Some one had made a very serious mistake. Instead of hiding the pair he had used on the lawn, he had returned them to their place. The trick was becoming evident. But where was Ford? In the house or grounds, dead or alive, but where?

"I was able, through my friend the bootboy, to examine the boots on the night of our arrival. My measurements corresponded with those that Jackson, the valet, wore. Was he acting for himself, or was Harbord, or even Ransom, in the secret? That, too, it was necessary to discover before I showed my hand.

"Your story of Harbord's midnight excursion supplied a clue. The secretary had evidently followed some man who had disappeared mysteriously. Could there be the entrance to a secret chamber in that corridor? That would explain the mystification of Harbord as well as the disappearance of Silas Ford. If so Harbord was not involved.

"If Ford were held a prisoner he must be fed. His gaoler must of necessity remain in the house. But the trap I set in the suggested journey to town was an experiment singularly unsuccessful, for all the three men I desired to test refused. However, if I were right about the secret chamber I could checkmate the blackmailer by keeping a watch on him from your room, which commanded the line of communications. But Jackson was clever enough to leave his victualling to the night-time. I scattered the flour to try the result of that ancient trick. It was successful. That is all. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," said I; "but how did Jackson come to know the secret hiding-place?"

"He has long been a servant of the house. You had better ask his old master."

(CHRONICLES TO BE CONTINUED.)

MADE AN UNEXPECTED HIT

Mark Sheridan, With an Act Not on the Bill, Convulsed an English Audience.

One often has amusing experiences, the humor of which only strikes one afterward. Such a one occurred to me a number of years ago, at a very small hall in the provinces, where the stage accommodation was so limited and of such a primitive kind that some of us had to use the back of the stage as a dressing room, our ablutions after the show being sometimes performed in a common or garden bucket placed on a chair. One night—it was winter, and the audience was almost as chilly as the weather—I had finished my turn, and stripped to the waist, was "ablutting" violently in the old tin basin, when somebody made a mistake, and instead of lowering the curtain, the back sheet was pulled up, disclosing me to view.

As I had my back in that direction, I did not at first realize what had happened, and hearing shrieks of laughter, I remarked, through the folds of the towel in which my face was buried:

"My word, somebody's making a hit!"

Getting no reply, I looked up, to discover that my erstwhile companions had vanished, and that, with dripping mane, I was standing in full view of the audience!

I was pressed very much, immediately afterward, to enter for the hundred yards in the following year's theatrical sports, as it was thought that I might establish a record.—Mark Sheridan, in Strand Magazine.

Mercy Plea.

"I've an idea."

"Be kind to the stranger."

"Who's Ahead"

The winner is always the person who possesses a keen appetite, and enjoys perfect digestion—whose liver is active and bowels regular. The sickly person lacks the stamina and strength necessary to win. They should try

HOSTETTER'S STOMACH BITTERS

It tones, strengthens and rebuilds the entire system.

Begin today. Avoid substitutes.

Out Of Date.

Major Bankstick (of the Indian army)—"Tell your scout-master that, now I'm home, I shall be pleased to help him, if he'd like it, with field-work and so on." Horace (of the Boy Scouts)—"Thanks, awfully, dad, but—er—are you quite up-to-date?—drill's altered a lot since you were home last."—Punch.

CONSTIPATION

may be either a transient or permanent affliction, arising from some error in diet or as a result of constantly weak digestion.

For temporary and obstinate cases the best relief is

WRIGHT'S INDIAN VEGETABLE PILLS

Right in a Sense.

The woman who boasts that she has the best of husbands is not wholly to be believed although she may have the best of one.

When Your Eyes Need Care

Try Murine Eye Remedy. No Smarting—Feels Fine—Acts Quickly. Try it for Red, Weak, Watery Eyes and Granulated Eyelids. Illustrated Book in each Package. Murine is compounded by our Oculists—not a "Patent Medicine"—but used in successful Physicians' Practice for many years. Now dedicated to the Public and sold by Druggists at 25c and 50c per Bottle. Murine Eye Salve in Aseptic Tubes, 25c and 50c.

Murine Eye Remedy Co., Chicago

Men—and Vaudeville.

All men may be divided into two classes—those who like vaudeville and those who can stand it when they are drunk.—Smart Set Magazine.

Has Temperament.

When a girl is intense that means her mother needn't expect much help with the housework.

EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD

Advice to Expectant Mothers

The experience of Motherhood is a trying one to most women and marks distinctly an epoch in their lives. Not one woman in a hundred is prepared or understands how to properly care for herself. Of course nearly every woman nowadays has medical treatment at such times, but many approach the experience with an organism unfitted for the trial of strength, and when it is over her system has received a shock from which it is hard to recover. Following right upon this comes the nervous strain of caring for the child, and a distinct change in the mother results.

There is nothing more charming than a happy and healthy mother of children, and indeed child-birth under the right conditions need be no hazard to health or beauty. The unexplainable thing is that, with all the evidence of shattered nerves and broken health resulting from an unprepared condition, and with ample time in which to prepare, women will persist in going blindly to the trial.

Every woman at this time should rely upon Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, a most valuable tonic and invigorator of the female organism.

In many homes once childless there are now children because of the fact that Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound makes women normal, healthy and strong.

If you want special advice write to Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Co. (confidential) Lynn, Mass. Your letter will be opened, read and answered by a woman and held in strict confidence.