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THE PUBLIC HOUSE.

"A fine public house," said Blanco Watson, the humorist.

"Yes," I replied, looking at the building we were approaching, "but a strange position—away from the high-road, and surrounded by villas."

"A very strange position. We will meet in the public house, and I will tell you how it came to be built in such a very strange position."

I smiled and followed him into the saloon bar. We sat at one of the tables and were silent for a time, he thinking and I watching him.

"The story begins," he said presently, "with a burglary committed by a certain Bill Jones one night long ago."

"Bill was a young member of his profession. Hitherto he had not attempted anything very big, but continued success in small things had made him bold. On this night he broke into the country house of a well known actress, in the hope of carrying off her jewels."

"He succeeded in getting the jewels and was leaving with them when he found that the slight noise he had made had attracted attention. A servant girl met him at a turn of the stairway and began to shriek. He rushed by her and to the window through which he had entered. As he passed through it again he heard doors being opened and knew that the house was fully aroused."

"I understand," I said. "Bill escaped. The actress employed a detective. The detective built this public house in an out of the way place, hoping that Bill, as an out of the way young man, would call in one day for a drink. Curiously enough, Bill did."

Blanco Watson frowned. "This is an intellectual story," he said. "It does not depend on coincidences."

"I will continue. Bill avoided the first pursuit by a long run across country, and then walked toward his home, not daring to use the railway. He kept to the byroads as much as possible, and at the close of the next day had reached the neighborhood of London."

"A spade lying inside a field gate suggested to him the advisability of hiding the jewels until he had arranged for their sale. After making sure that he was not observed he entered the field and picked up the spade. A tree of peculiar growth stood just beyond him. In the manner of fiction, he counted 20 steps due north from the tree and then dug a deep hole, placed the jewels in it and filled it up again."

"He arrived home safely that night, but was arrested in the morning. The servant girl had given an accurate description of him to the police, and they had recognized it."

"In due course he was tried. The evidence against him was very strong. The servant girl swore that he was the man she met on the stairs. Some of the villagers swore that they had seen him near the house previous to the burglary. He was found guilty and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude."

"Bill behaved very well in prison and at the end of five years was released on a ticket of leave. He decided to wait until the ticket had expired and then to get the jewels and leave the country. But a day or two after his release he walked out to look at the field."

"There was no field. During the five years he had been in prison the estate of which the field was part had been built upon. He wandered about the houses in despair. But as he turned a corner he saw something which suggested hope. Behind some railings was a tree of curious growth."

"It was the tree 20 steps due north of which he had buried the jewels. He recognized it immediately and ran toward it. Again he was in despair. A yard or two north of the tree was a chapel, and the jewels were under the chapel. He leaned against the railings, covering his face with his hands."

"It happened presently that the head deacon of the chapel, a kindly old man, came down the road. He saw Bill standing like one in trouble and stopped and asked what was the matter and whether he could help."

"For a few moments Bill did not know what to reply, but then he spoke well. He said that once he had been a burglar, but that he had learned in prison that burglary is wrong; that now he was trying to live an honest life, but that as he had no friends it was not easy."

"The old man was touched. He had found Bill leaning against the chapel railings, and Bill had said that he had no friends. Was it not his duty as head deacon of the chapel to be a friend to Bill? Clearly it was."

"He took Bill home with him. He was a bachelor, and there was no one to restrain his benevolence. They had supper and talked together. The deacon found Bill intelligent and fairly well educated and offered him employment."

Great occasions do not make heroes or cowards, they simply unveil them to the eyes of men. Silently and imperceptibly, as we wake or sleep, we grow and wax strong, we grow and wax weak, and at last some crisis shows us what we have become.—Canon Westcott.

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