

Exploits of a physician in unmasking mysterious crime

by GEORGE F. BAKER M.D.



THE Chief of the Centerville police raised his head in astonishment. Just at the moment when he had settled down in his chair for a morning nap the door of the little office swung open with a crash and a great hulk of a man staggered in, collapsing on the settee.

The intruder's hands were pressed to his sides, the breath whistled in his throat, his face burned a violent red through a heavy dark beard, and leaning with one shoulder hunched against the back of the settee, head hanging, mouth drooping, he presented alarming signs of physical exhaustion.

"Hi—hi there, Bill!" cried the chief, recognizing him at once. "What's the matter?"

"Ma-matter! Ma-matter enough! It's murder!" gasped Bill.

"What?"

"The dreadful word scared the officer into activity as if it had been a bodily danger. He darted around the settee which inclined his desk, shook the big man, raising his chin roughly and staring into his face.

"It's old woman Snowman, and Ed, too. Both on 'em," the man gasped, recovering a little breath. "I run all the way."

The officer blinked his eyes rapidly, as if trying his best to concentrate his faculties. It plainly showed that he was not out of the chaos in his mind only one thought, as being related to familiar things, evolved itself, and he asked peremptorily:

"Why didn't ye harness up and ride, Bill?"

"Harness up?" exclaimed Bill. "Why, goodness! Harness! I didn't have no time. I had 't git here!"

If Bill's notions of time-saving on a two-mile journey struck the chief as peculiar, he gave no signs of the fact. The word harness had suggested the first step in his mode of procedure, and in great excitement he rushed to the stable and hitched up his own rig. All of the members of his staff were away on their beats, so that a legitimate substitute to leave in charge of the police station was lacking, but that was no obstacle to the chief. He cried out to his only prisoner, a vagrant, who could be seen behind the bars in an inner room:

"What's the matter with you, you old woman's man?"

between it and the wall, but there seemed to be a considerable vacant area at one end, beyond the high headboard. Cautiously, the chief advanced and found another cot bed on the floor, and in a corner a small bureau.

He stood a moment regarding the scene speculatively. Then he looked toward the intruder, who was peering timidly through the doorway.

"Whereabouts Susan say she wuz when she see 'im clubb'n her?"

"Where?"

"No, th' ain't!" interrupted the old man, eagerly. "Everything's here just 'twixt 'em, you know, but I never communicate to the old man the elucidation of the mystery which, to judge by his expression, was so plain to himself. He merely began to tie up the various valuable articles in his handkerchief. In this occupation he was interrupted by a timid knock at the door.

"Come in," he called sharply, looking up.

A woman, one of the neighbors, advanced timidly holding a small tin box in her outstretched hand.

"What, what is it?" he asked, glancing at the box impatiently.

"This is what she wanted to keep her will in," said the woman, offering it. "And I found it out by our house, in the path that leads to the woods. There were these pieces of burnt paper there, too, and I thought—"

"How do you know she kept her will in it?" he asked, taking it and turning over the bits of paper.

"She told me so," said the woman, and it used to stand right there on the bureau behind her bed. See, her name is scratched on it with a pin or something. The chief stood in profound thought, his chin in one hand and the box in the other, the handkerchief bundle on the floor between his feet.

"It wasn't done for robbery, not to get money that way. They left all the money behind in the will and then burnt it up. Now the question is, who is her heir? Who gets her property now that the will is gone? Them is the ones that done youself, since we are going into a matter of such intimate interest."

at his office door, and a young man appeared on the threshold. "I have not come to consult you, doctor," he said, advancing with hesitating step. "The truth is, I hardly know—"

He stood nervously eyeing the doctor. Perhaps 25 years of age, he was of good appearance, with large black eyes and thick dark hair, tall and slim of build, and well balanced on his feet. His clothes were fashionable and immaculate. He took the chair to which Dr. Furnival mentioned him, and continued with somewhat more confidence:

"One of my chums who is studying medicine has told me of your remarkable hypnotic powers, which, I am given to understand, have more than once been employed in the detection of criminals who were about to escape, leaving the innocent to suffer. Now, a very old and highly valued friend of mine is suffering unjustly, accused of a crime which she was unable morally to commit as I am physically to carry this house away on my shoulders. And if money—I shall have a great deal by and by, though now—"

"Wouldn't it be well for you to introduce yourself, since we are going into a matter of such intimate interest?"

"Oh, pardon! I forgot—I me give you my card."

He produced a modest bit of engraved pasteboard, which the doctor examined.

"Now, tell me the story Mr. Sewell," he said. He reclined in his chair and disposed himself to listen comfortably behind the thick colored glasses.

"It is very good of you, Dr. Furnival, to accept the case so generously. I wish to speak of the crime yesterday in Centerville. Please you have read the newspaper stories regarding it?"

"Yes."

"Then I have little to add to you, except that the woman is entirely guiltless, and the two nephews, for whom they are searching, as well. But the police in that little town are hopeless imbeciles, and as somebody must be caught, and they've caught somebody, they will listen to no other view of the matter."

"Are these nephews the young toughs they are described as being?"

"The visitor smiled deprecatingly.

"No, they are not. Never did I hire out to a number of different hypnotists at 22 an evening. That doesn't like to wish to pry into your private reasons. All these things we will talk over later. In the meantime I shall hasten to Centerville. The case interests me extremely, on one point at least, and I am sure it will interest you and all psychologists who have a point in made clear. Will you go along with me?"

the life she was obliged to live with those shuttles on account of it. And there never was a word of complaint from her, not anything but gladness for doing it."

"How do you account for that passage-way between the bed and the wall? Is it so narrow?"

"Ah!" cried the young woman, shaking his head. "There's where the rub comes. She stoutly maintains that her story is true. She tied past the murdered, and he, in order to give her exit, bent over on the bed. It seems impossible. But she doesn't know how to lie, and if she is in her right mind and didn't imagine that part, I must believe her."

"The visitor threw out his hands. "It is the mystery of mysteries!" he almost groaned. "I don't pretend to explain it in the least. One thing only I am sure of, and it is that the deed was—"

"Because I trusted your detective ability and benevolence."

"Why did you say that you believed in my hypnotic powers?"

"The youth shook his head slightly, but not surely.

"I did not say that."

"What did you say?"

"I can't seem to think."

"Perhaps it was only that you had heard of my remarkable powers?"

"Yes, doctor, that was it."

"Why did you mention hypnotism at all?"

"Because I thought I should gain your interest that way. Every scientist is an enthusiast on his specialty, and is easily led by it almost anywhere."

"You do not think I could hypnotize you?"

"No, sir, you could not."

"You don't think there may be a phase of psychology entirely outside and different from the lines with which you are familiar, and which may be true hypnotism?"

"Oh, I would not say as to that. I only maintain that there is no such thing as thought transference in the

ing, "will you accompany me to Centerville?" We may dip into psychology some other time."

"You have a theory?" cried the young man, eagerly.

"Put that on when we arrive in the vicinity, and don't leave the automobile unless I call you."

Five minutes later they were rushing toward Centerville as fast as the law permitted.

"Wal," said the Centerville Chief of Police, when Dr. Furnival had introduced himself and made known his business. "I got the criminal all right, that's sure. An' I guess you can see her if you want to, but I wouldn't advise it. She ticks as the toughest story aple of all I can do. I've showed her plain enough that 'twas unreasonab' an' only made it worse for her a-stickin' to it. For everybody knows 'twas a nothin' but a lie, an' if she that was present 'll lie about the facts, then she must be guilty some way. But here ye be!"

"He walked before a cell, through the grated door of which, on a cot in a corner, a woman could be seen seated."

"Susan," he called, "there's a big doctor from the city come to see ye. Mind what ye say to him, now, fer everything ye tell 'll be used agin ye. All ye got to do is ap'ly the truth, so that her no right to gin ye no others, an' I won't, neither, but all I say is, you drop that 'fool yarn, an' if ye must lie, why, do it reasonable. Nobody's ever goner take any stock in that one."

"The woman arose and came forward timidly. Her figure was very tall and gaunt, and perfectly straight, so that her exit as she walked would have given her a majestic air but for the mild helplessness and bewilderment of her face. That neutralized the effect and resulted in caricature. Her brown hair, turning gray, was parted in the middle, brushed tightly back and piled on the crown of her head, with an old-fashioned net over it, which did not prevent a stray lock from dangling into one of her dim, light-hued eyes. She was wringing her finger and trying to turn this into place as she approached the cell door. Dr. Furnival reached through the bars and grasped her hand, shaking it, encouragingly. The girl went back to the seat, and said:

"I wished to ask you," said the doctor, "if those men said anything that night? Did not either one of them utter a single word that you could hear?"

"Land's sake! I dunno," she answered, with the monotonous inflection of voice peculiar to the simple minded. "She's screaming so I couldn't hear 'em. An' I sorter didn't hear that till afterwards. I was so frightened an' halted up."

"There was a window over your bed which you open that and crawl through? Why did you run toward the man? You knew you couldn't pass him, could you?"

"Oh, I dunno, I dunno," she moaned, helplessly. "Then her eyes fixed on the doctor's, a shade of intelligence flickering in her face, she added, "My window's all screwed up tight, 'frail'd of thieves, an' I couldn't git out that way. I didn't know what I was doin' 't jist 'em, but I did it for the sake of my own life."

"The only light in the room shone from the candle in the kitchen, through the doorway that was all 't wuz. An' 'twuz no great. Jest en'ough 't make darkness visible."

"How were you able to see the man at all?"

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ye git none in the city?" He was grinding tobacco between his horny palms and looked up in some surprise at the question.

"I should like to find one here," returned Dr. Furnival in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I've know where it's a cown weather-washer, Jim?" asked the Chief obligingly of one of his men who was working about the room.

Jim spat, scratched his ear thoughtfully and came forward.

"I guess it's one over in Sol Weatherby's shanty," he answered. "I see a darky there this mornin', an' he looked like one—hed on white overalls an' his jumper was kinder dabb'd. Might 'a' been time, though. Paps he makes mortar fer 'is masons."

"You don't know him then—he's a stranger?" asked Dr. Furnival.

"No, I don't know him myself," the man returned.

"But th' Weatherbys could gin ye pints on him, I guess. He's in the shanty. Joe Weatherby wuz with him when I see him."

"Joe is Sol's nephy—used 't work in th' city," the doctor said, and he recommended the negro to him, could I take his word?"

"Wal," the chief knit his brows. "I don't watter say nothin' agin any of Sol Weatherby's folks. He's a good man and 's put property. An' Joe ain't never made us no trouble. He ain't lived round here much since he wuz a boy."

The doctor hastened out to the automobile in front of the door.

"I am going to drop you up here in the woods, but I don't want to see you for a little while," he said to its occupant. "In which direction is the one belonging to the Weatherbys?"

"An' wher's they were started he continued: "I accept the woman's story in toto, and must base my theory on it. What kind of a character must be a who, in the circumstances, would allow her to pass—what could be his reasons? I have settled on what seems so far, the only possible fact, and am looking for a man who is large, for she so described him; brutal, because of his methods; densely ignorant, for reasons that will appear in his confession, probably a foreigner or negro of the lowest stamp. I incline to the negro, because the woman noticed that he had an odd gait—so many of them have great feet and wear ungainly shoes run down at the heel, and walk with visible effort—"

and also in the fact that the word traces of whitewash on her nightgown. Many whitewashers are negroes. His companion doesn't matter now, for the big man was not a detective. An' wher's they were started he continued: "I accept the woman's story in toto, and must base my theory on it. What kind of a character must be a who, in the circumstances, would allow her to pass—what could be his reasons? I have settled on what seems so far, the only possible fact, and am looking for a man who is large, for she so described him; brutal, because of his methods; densely ignorant, for reasons that will appear in his confession, probably a foreigner or negro of the lowest stamp. I incline to the negro, because the woman noticed that he had an odd gait—so many of them have great feet and wear ungainly shoes run down at the heel, and walk with visible effort—"



The Woman Arose And Came Forward Timidly