

THE MYSTERY WITH THE MASTERMIND

Being the Chronicles of Carlton Clarke, Telepatho-Deductive Solver of Criminal Mysteries.

BY FRANK LOVELL NELSON.

No. 1—The Mystery of the Aurovia Lodge Case

This is the first of a series of highly interesting detective stories by Frank Lovell Nelson. They deal with newspaper mysteries, thrilling incidents and mysterious affairs, the climax of which is due to Mr. Carlton Clarke and his extraordinary powers of deduction and telepathic suggestions. He cooperates with the newspaper editors in the solution of the problems that make up the daily work of a "star" editor's reporter. Of course, the latter gets a number of first-class "scops." Each is a complete story. The series will be continued with a mystery growing out of an initiation ceremony in a secret society lodge.

EVERY man who has been a newspaper reporter and survived has one case which he gives the post of honor in memory. This is the story of the Aurovia lodge case. I like best to remember, not only because it resulted in the solution of one of the most mysterious cases that ever arose in Illinois, but rather for the reason that it marked my first meeting with Carlton Clarke, a meeting destined to develop into our joint excursions into hidden and untrodden pathways of the study of crime which have since made Clarke's name famous in two continents.

It was in the summer of 1896 that the word came to the office of the Chicago morning paper with which I was then connected, that the police of the little city of Aurovia were struggling with a case which seemed destined to prove one of the greatest mysteries of the day. It is a case which has since made considerable success in criminal cases, the managing editor lost no time in hustling me off by the first train to the scene of action.

The brief account in the first paper I picked up, stripped of its glaring headlines, was as follows:

Early this morning a very mysterious tragedy occurred in the hall of the Ancient Order of Persian Knights, a local secret society which has been in existence since the death of Dr. Arthur W. Williams, a prominent physician and the founder of the lodge. Dr. Williams was in progress at the time in one portion of the ceremony of the candidates, having consented to do so for invading the sacred domain of the lodge, which had been reserved for the candidates. He was in the act of kneeling and lighting a candle when he was suddenly seized by a man who had been hidden in the shadows of the lodge. The man seized the doctor by the neck of his coat and held him fast. The doctor, in a moment of confusion, drew a pistol from his pocket and fired a shot which struck the man in the chest. The man fell to the floor and the doctor fled. The police were called and the man was taken to the hospital. The doctor was arrested and taken to the police station.

"Oh, those country correspondents!" I fairly groaned. There was so much I wanted to know. Who had handled the supposed contents of the package? What was the customary source from which the lodge procured it? What were the relations of the two physicians toward each other? I turned to the other papers. One or two gave further details of the character of the lodge, the name of which was strange to me, and something of the personality of the principals.

The two physicians were prominent in the professional and social life of the city. Dr. Williams had been in Aurovia two years before. Dr. Smith had been born and reared there. Dr. Williams left a widow, but no children. Dr. Smith was a bachelor and had made his home with a maiden aunt.

"It all depends upon the history of the powder," said to myself as I stuffed papers into my bag. "You are right, sir. It all depends upon the history of the powder." I turned around half an hour at this unbidden interruption. I thought of thought. Whatever emotion I may have felt was instantly lost in interest in the face before me. It was a face I could have sworn I had never seen before. Clean shaven, the firmly-molded chin showed by its slight tinge of blue that the beard, had it been allowed to grow, would have been black. The nose was aquiline and of perfect proportions. The intelligent eyes were dark almost to blackness. The complexion was swarthy, but tinged with a glow of health. The hair was of that distinctive combination of colors, black shading almost to white on the temples and receding at the crown. An American, evidently, but inheriting through several generations of New World ancestors the markings of Southern Europe. His height I should have estimated at six feet. Carlton Clarke really lacks three-quarters of an inch of the mark.

but unless I am greatly mistaken he is now behind the bars and with a pretty big one. I certainly have information on the case which the newspapers have not been able to obtain." I replied, rather nettled.

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Further conversation was interrupted by our arrival before the little artificial stone building which serves for a railway station at Aurovia. The evident topic of conversation on all sides was the tragedy of the night before. I scorned unobtrusive information until I had exhausted the official version. However, I could not resist turning to one of the groups on the platform and asking:

"What is the latest in the Williams case?" "Doc Smith gave himself up about two hours ago," was the answer. "So my theory was correct," murmured my companion. "Yes, and the mystery knocked out of another good story. But let's see what the police have to say."

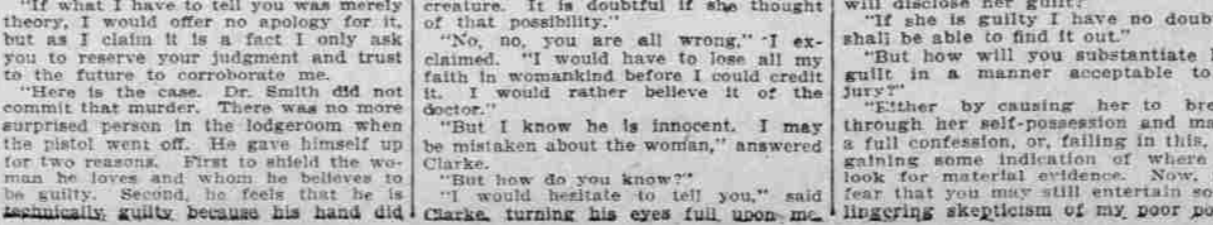
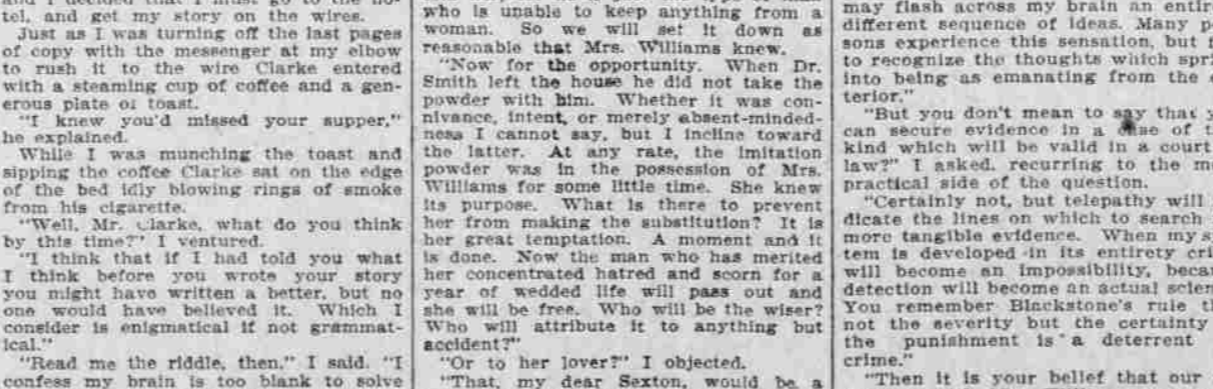
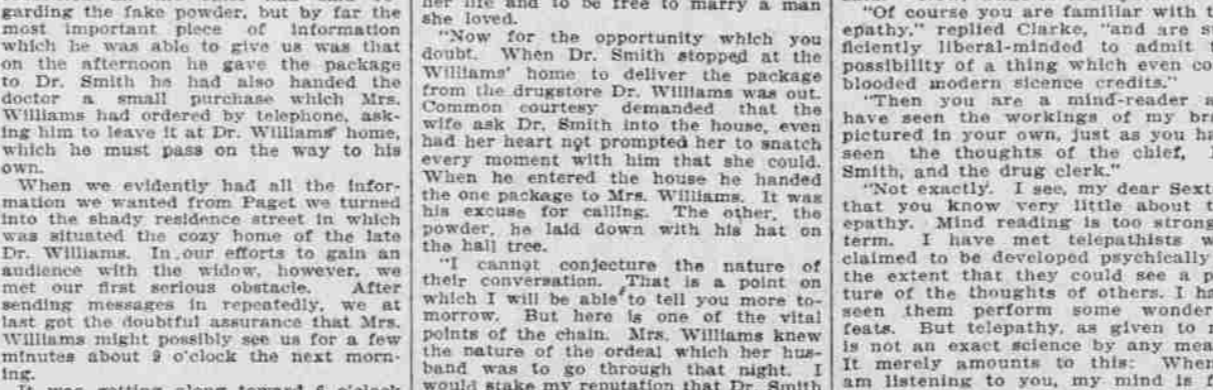
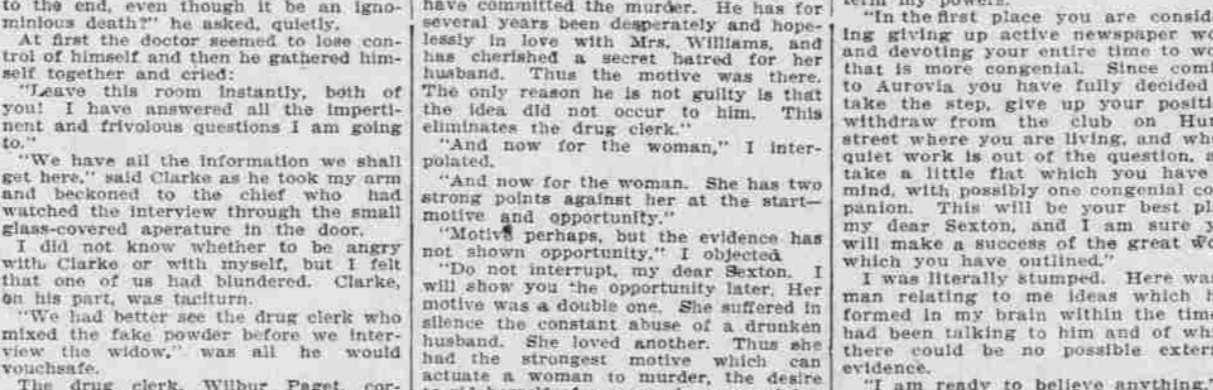
When we reached police headquarters I found Chief Darling sitting at his desk and at leisure. As we entered my companion slipped me his card with an apology for having omitted the formality of the main. The name I read was "Mr. Carlton Clarke."

Chief Darling was willing to talk but protested that he had no knowledge which he had not already published in the city. He had arrested Dr. Smith upon his own request and after a conference with the state's attorney. The most damaging evidence against the doctor, which I had met with considerable success in criminal cases, the managing editor lost no time in hustling me off by the first train to the scene of action.

"That's just what puzzles me. He will make no confession. He tried to get to the bottom of the matter, but he wanted to be looked up. I said to him, 'Look here, Doc, you're not guilty of this thing, are you?' and he said, 'Technically, no, but I got out of him. But I shouldn't be surprised if he makes a full confession at the inquest tomorrow.'"

"Now, Mr. Darling," continued Clarke, "you have, of course, investigated fully the history of the powder." "That was the first move I made, and that's one thing that makes it look bad for Doc. The fake stuff never left his hands from the time it was ground until the shot was fired. The lodge was never getting its imitation made at Burpee's drugstore, where a clerk by the name of Wilbur Paget, who is a member of the lodge, grinds it up and sends it to the lodge. The afternoon of the initiation he had made up a quantity. Doc Smith dropped into the store about half-past 5, and Paget gave him the powder wrapped up in a package. As far as I can find out, no body but Paget and Doc handled it or saw it."

"You have inquired whether Dr. Smith has purchased any gunpowder lately?" "Oh, it wouldn't be necessary for him to do that. All the doctors here hunt for the powder. Of course it is plenty of ammunition in his house. If he wanted to make way with Doc Williams it would be the easiest thing in the world for him to do. He had the powder and then said it was accidental. But if that's the case, I can't understand what he wants to give himself up for."



"I WANT TO PUT THIS BOY IN EVIDENCE."

verting to those of Clarke as if he found there some irresistible fascination. Then Clarke suddenly broke in.

"Whom are you shielding?" he cried. "No one," fairly shouted the doctor. "Who are you that you should come here to catechise me?" Clarke ignored the question.

"We have all the information we shall get here," said Clarke as he took my arm and beckoned to the chief who had watched the interview through the small glass-covered aperture in the door.

"I have a better way to get the truth out of him than the way you have," said Clarke. "I will show you the opportunity later. Her motive was a double one. She suffered in silence the constant abuse of a drunken husband. She loved another. Thus she had the strongest motive which can actuate a woman to murder, the desire to rid herself of a man who was ruining her life and to be free to marry a man she loved."

the act, and his mind has exulted over it. This latter motive would not, however, have been sufficient to cause him to place his neck in jeopardy were it not coupled with the stronger one of love. This is Dr. Smith's entire connection with the case morally. Circumstantially, he is more closely connected, as I will show later.

"Wilbur Paget, the drug clerk, who has committed the murder. He has for several years been desperately and hopelessly in love with Mrs. Williams, and has cherished a secret hatred for her husband. Thus the motive was there. The only reason he is not guilty is that the idea did not occur to him. This eliminates the drug clerk as the murderer."

"And now for the woman," I interpolated. "And now for the woman. She has two strong points against her at the start—motive and opportunity."

"Motive perhaps, but the evidence has not shown opportunity," I objected. "I will show you the opportunity later. Her motive was a double one. She suffered in silence the constant abuse of a drunken husband. She loved another. Thus she had the strongest motive which can actuate a woman to murder, the desire to rid herself of a man who was ruining her life and to be free to marry a man she loved."

"were it not for the fact that I foresee that we are destined to work together in the future. It is only fair that you should know something of my methods. To insure against your skepticism I will take a little time to show you what those who know me are pleased to term my powers."

"In the first place you are considerably in my active newspaper work and devoting your entire time to work that is more congenial. Since coming to Aurovia you have fully decided to take the step, give up your position, withdraw from the club on Huron street where you are living, and where quiet work is out of the question, and take a little time to show me your mind, with possibly one congenial companion. This will be your best plan, my dear Sexton, and I am sure you will make a success of the great work which you have outlined."

"I was literally stunned. Here was a man relating to me ideas which had formed in his brain within the time I had been talking to him and of which there could be no possible external evidence."

"I am ready to believe anything," I said. "Now, what is the system?" "Of course you are familiar with telepathy," replied Clarke, "and are sufficiently liberal-minded to admit the possibility of a thing which even cold-blooded modern science credits."

ers. I want to tell you what you have been thinking within the last few minutes. You have been thinking: 'I believe this man would make a good working companion for me. I wonder if he is so anxious that he can share that little flat on Oak street. I wish I dared ask him.' I will spare you the embarrassment of acknowledging that I caught my dear Sexton, and will say that I am alone in the world, without ties of any kind, and doubtless when we return to Chicago we can arrange to join interests."

In the midst of my astonishment and the "good nights" Clarke slipped away to his room.

When we reached the next morning Clarke and I set out to fulfill our tentative appointment with Mrs. Williams. The streets were already crowded, and I marked several rivals from other papers. They gave me plying glances when they saw me leaving the square. The Coroner was expected momentarily, and they thought I was going to miss the inquest.

When we reached the Williams cottage we were ushered into the parlor and the maid assured us that Mrs. Williams would be down in a few minutes.

"You must come to my rescue if you see me getting into deep water," said Mrs. Williams. "I will spare you, as far as possible, all reference to the terrible tragedy, but I would like to ask you a few questions relating to the events of the afternoon previous to it. In the first place, I understand that Dr. Smith stopped here on his way home to supper."

"Dr. Smith stopped to leave a package which I had ordered by phone from the drugstore."

"And I understand that he came into the house and sat for a few minutes, leaving his hat and another package which he carried in the hall."

"I don't know what to think. They're both innocent already. I've noticed how I led her into it. She has a remarkable psychic mind, and I knew the storm was coming before it broke."

"She is more likely to be innocent than if he were guilty. He thought he was saving her from confessing to him. Each believes the other guilty. I'll be hanged if I believe either of them. See here, you go back to town and keep an eye on the inquest. Do all in your power to keep Mrs. Williams from making a confession. I have an intuition which leads me in the direction of Dr. Smith's barn."

When I reached the courthouse the proceedings already had commenced. I was in plenty of time, however, as much time was being wasted with the history of the lodge, and the evidence about 20 minutes was spent at the time of the tragedy, each of whom told exactly the same story. I slipped into a vacant seat inside the bar and directly behind Mrs. Williams, who was flanked by two police constables in the persons of elderly female friends. When I had the chance I whispered to her: "Do not make any confession until Mr. Clarke comes. He is on the trail of new evidence."

The first evidence of real importance was that of the drug clerk, who swore to the facts he had told Clarke and myself. Chief Darling's policeman swore to the early morning meeting and the effect seemed to be to turn the tide of sentiment decidedly against Dr. Smith, who was preserving his composure admirably during the trying ordeal.

Finally Mrs. Williams was called to the stand. There was a buzz of excitement and then a hush as the little woman took the oath. The Coroner in questioning her, showed an absolute lack of sympathy, although in no point did he exceed his legal rights.

"Now, Mrs. Williams," continued the Coroner, after a few formal questions, "I want you to tell the jury what passed between you and Dr. Smith when you met early yesterday morning."

Dr. Smith simply came to ask me if the witness assistance he could render in my trouble. I expected no less of one I have known since childhood. Doubtless she told the truth, but I trust the recording angel overlooked the fact that it was not the whole truth.

—Harper's Weekly.