

The Halsey Enterprise

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CHAS. BALLARD, Editor.

Our Sermonette

The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 Tim 3:15.

The Lord's church, the only one to which the name ecclesia, body or church, is properly applicable, is so insignificant, so unostentatious, and comparatively so poor in the world's riches, that it is not recognized nor recognizable from the worldly standpoint. It is neither man-made nor man-ruled; nor are its members enrolled on earth, but in heaven. (Heb 12: 23.) Its head and bishop is the Lord, its law is the word; it has but one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and it is built upon the testimonies of the holy apostles and prophets—Jesus Christ himself being its chief cornerstone.

Mr and Mrs Joe Danley from Portland visited over Sunday with Mrs Danley's mother Mrs Houston.

The Harmonica Mystery.

She fell into none of the groups into which he divided his fellow men and women. There was something about her which had seemed to him unique.

He welcomed his second chance of studying her at close range. She puzzled Mr. Snyder, and when any one or anything puzzled him, he liked to keep him, her, or it under observation. She came in and sat down stiffly, balancing herself on the extreme edge of the chair in which a short while before young Mr. Oakes had lounged so luxuriously.

Her hands were folded on her lap, and her eyes had the penetrating stare which in the early periods of the investigation had disconcerted Elliott Oakes. She gave Mr. Snyder, an expert in the difficult art of weighing people up, an extraordinary impression of reserved force.

"Sit down, Mrs. Pickett," said Mr. Snyder lenially. "Very glad you looked in. Well, so it wasn't murder, after all."

"Sir?"
"I've just been seeing Mr. Oakes," explained the detective. "He has told me all about it."
"He told me all about it," said Mrs. Pickett, dryly.

Mr. Snyder looked at her inquiringly. Her manner seemed more suggestive than her words.

"A conceited, headstrong young fool," said Mrs. Pickett.

It was no new picture of his assistant that she had drawn. Mr. Snyder had often drawn it himself, but at the present juncture it surprised him. Oakes, in his hour of triumph, surely did not deserve this sweeping condemnation.

"Did not Mr. Oakes' solution of the mystery satisfy you, Mrs. Pickett?"
"No."

"It struck me as logical and convincing."

"You may call it all the fancy names you please, Mr. Snyder; but it was not the right one."

"Have you an alternative to offer?"

"Yes."

"I should like to hear it."

"At the proper time you shall."

"What makes you so certain that Mr. Oakes is wrong?"

"He takes for granted what isn't possible, and makes his whole case stand on it. There couldn't have been a snake in that room, because it couldn't have got out. The window was too high."

"But surely the evidence of the dead dog?"

Mrs. Pickett looked at him as if he had disappointed her.

"I had always heard you spoken of as a man with common sense, Mr. Snyder."

"I have always tried to use common sense."

"Then why are you trying now to make yourself believe that something happened which could not possibly have happened just because it fits in with something which isn't easy to explain?"

"You mean that there is another explanation of the dead dog?"

"Not another, Mr. Oakes' is not an explanation. But there is an explanation, and if he had not been so headstrong and conceited he might have found it."

"You speak as if you had found it."

"I have."

Mr. Snyder stared.

"You have?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"You shall hear when I am ready to tell you. In the meantime try and think it out for yourself. A great detective agency like yours, Mr. Snyder, would not be so easily deceived."

It was not Mr. Snyder's habit to

trust overmuch to appearances, but he could not help admitting that there was something about this man's aspect which brought Mrs. Pickett's charges out of the realm of the fantastic into that of the possible.

Here, to a student of men like Mr. Snyder, was obviously a man with something on his mind. That that something need not necessarily be murder, or any crime whatsoever, the detective was not sure.

But under the circumstances the fact that Captain Muller was in a highly nervous condition was worthy of notice if nothing more.

There was something odd—an unnatural gloom—about the man. He bore himself like one carrying a heavy burden. His eyes were dull, his face haggard.

The next moment the detective was reproaching himself with allowing his imagination to run away with his calmer judgment. It mortified him to think that he was permitting himself to be carried away by a train of thought precisely as Oakes would have been.

Nevertheless, whether it was a real address or whether Mrs. Pickett's words had overstimulated his fancy, there certainly did seem something odd about the German.

Mr. Snyder disposed himself to watch events.

At this moment Oakes gave evidence that he, too, had been struck by the expression of the other's face.

"You're not looking well, captain," he said.

The German raised his heavy eyes. "I do not sleep good."

The door opened and Mrs. Pickett came in.

To Mr. Snyder one of the most remarkable points about the meal, which for the rest of his life had a place of its own in his memory, was the peculiar metamorphosis of Mrs. Pickett from the brooding, silent woman he had known to the polished hostess.

Oakes, who had dealt with her in her official capacity of owner and manager of the boarding house, was patently struck by the change. Mr. Snyder found himself speculating as to the early history of this curious old woman who was so very much at ease at the head of her own table.

Oakes, that buoyant soul, was unable to keep his surprise to himself. He had come prepared to steel his stomach against home-made wine, absorbed in grim silence, and he found himself opposite a bottle of champagne of a brand and year which commanded his utmost respect, and a pleasant old lady whose only aim seemed to be to make him feel at home.

Beside each of the guests' plates was a neat paper parcel. He picked his up.

"Why, ma'am, this is princely! Souvenirs! I call this very handsome of you, Mrs. Pickett!"

"Yes, that is a souvenir, Mr. Burton. I am glad you are pleased."

"Pleased? I am overwhelmed, ma'am!"

"You must not think of me simply as the keeper of a boarding house, Mr. Burton. I am an ambitious hostess. I do not often give these little parties, but when I do I like to do my best to make them a success. I want each of you to remember this dinner of mine."

"I'm sure I shall."

Mrs. Pickett smiled.

"I think you all will, you, Mr. Snyder." She paused. "And you, Captain Muller."

To Mr. Snyder there was so much meaning in her voice as she said this that he was amazed that it conveyed no warning to the German.

Captain Muller, however, was already drinking heavily. He looked up when addressed and uttered a sound which might have been taken for an expression of polite acquiescence. Then he filled his glass again.

Mr. Snyder, eyeing his hostess with a tense watchfulness which told him that his nerves were strung to their utmost, fancied that her eyes gleamed for an instant with sinister light.

It faded next moment, as she turned to speak to Oakes, who was still fingering his parcel with the restless curiosity of a boy.

"Do we open these, ma'am?"

"Not yet, Mr. Burton."

"I'm wondering what mine is."

"I hope it will not be a disappointment to you."

A sense of the strangeness of the situation came over Mr. Snyder with renewed force as the meal progressed. He looked round the table and wondered if an odder quartet had ever been assembled.

Oakes, his fears that the dullness of this dinner-party would eclipse the dullness of all other dinner parties in his experience, miraculously relieved, was at peace with all men. He was in high spirits and waxed garrulous over his wine.

Mr. Snyder could read his mind easily enough. It was when he attempted to guess at the thoughts of his hostess and the German that he was baffled.

What was that heavy man with the dull eyes thinking of as he drained and refilled his glass? And the old woman? She had slipped back, once the party had begun to progress smoothly into

CHAPTER VII.

The Solution.

When Mr. Snyder arrived at the Excelsior, and was shown into the little private sitting-room where the proprietress held her court on the rare occasions when she entertained, he found Oakes already there. Oakes was surprised.

"What—are you invited, too? Say I guess this is her idea of winding up the case formally. A sort of old-home-week celebration for the concerned."

Oakes laughed.

"Well, all I can say is that I hope there won't be another case of poisoning at the Excelsior in the papers tomorrow. A woman like our hostess is certain to provide some special home-made wine for an occasion. We ought to have had the doctor wait outside with antidotes."

Mr. Snyder did not reply.

It struck Oakes that his employer was preoccupied and nervous. He would have inquired into this unusual frame of mind, but at that moment the third guest of the evening entered.

Mr. Snyder looked curiously at the newcomer. The big German had a morbid interest for him. Many years in the exercise of a profession which tends to rob its votaries of sentiment had toughened Mr. Snyder, but there was something unusual about the present circumstances which struck home to his imagination.

He was not used to this furtive work. Till now he had met his man in the open as an enemy, and it struck him as an unpleasantly gruesome touch that he must presently sit at meat with one whom it might be his task to send to the electric chair.

He wished Mrs. Pickett could have arranged things otherwise; but she was his employer, and when on duty in the service of an employer Mr. Snyder was wont to sink his personal feelings.

Captain Muller, the German, was an interesting study to one in the detective's peculiar position.

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| 25c Plain Postum | 22c | Fisher's Blend Flour | 3.80 |
| 1 lb Folger's Tea | 45c | 2 Cream of Wheat | 55c |
| 1-2 lb Folger's Tea | 24c | 2 Kellogg's | 25c |
| 1 pound Bulk Tea | 45c | 2 Post Toasties | 25c |
| 1-2 pound Lipton's Tea | 42c | 3 Noodles | 25c |
| 1 pound Lipton's Tea | 80c | 10 bars White Wonder Soap | 65c |
| 1 pound Cocoa | 45c | 10 Bleaching Soap | 65c |
| 1-2 pound Cocoa | 25c | 10 Royal White Soap | 65c |
| 1 pound Chocolate | 40c | Hill's Red Can Coffee | 57c |
| 2 Liberty Jello | 25c | M J B Coffee | 55c |
| 2 D W Jelly Powder | 25c | D W Coffee | 50c |
| Lipton's Jelly Powder | 10c | 3 pounds D W Coffee | 1.45 |
| 2 packages Instant Tapioca | 35c | 3 pounds M J B Coffee | 1.60 |
| 6 cans Clams | 90c | 3 pounds Royal Club Coffee | 1.45 |
| 6 cans Corn | 90c | 3 pounds Powers Pure Coffee | 1.25 |
| 6 cans Peas | 90c | 3 pounds bulk Coffee | 95c |
| 6 cans Tomatoes | 85c | 1 pound Wadco Coffee | 48c |
| 6 cans String Beans | 90c | | |

J L BUSICK & SONS

something of her former grim manner, and conversation at table had practically developed into a monologue on the part of the unconscious Oakes.

As for Mr. Snyder himself, he felt mysteriously deprived of his usual healthy appetite and simultaneously of the easy geniality which distinguished him. He sat and crumbled bread, nervously watchful.

Oakes picked up his souvenir again. He had been fiddling with it at intervals for the past quarter of an hour.

"Surely now, ma'am?" he said plaintively.

"I did not want them opened till after dinner," said Mrs. Pickett. "But just as you please."

Oakes tore the wrapper eagerly. He produced a little silver match-box.

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," he said. "Just what I have always wanted."

Mr. Snyder's parcel revealed a watch-chain fashioned in the shape of a dark lantern.

"That," said Mrs. Pickett, "is a compliment to your profession." She leaned toward the German. "Mr. Snyder is a detective, Captain Muller."

The German looked up.

It seemed to Mr. Snyder that a look of fear lit up his heavy eyes for an instant. It came and went, if indeed it came at all, so swiftly that he could not be certain.

"So?" said Captain Muller.

He spoke quite evenly, with just the amount of interest which such an announcement would naturally produce; but Mr. Snyder was conscious of a return of his old feeling of distrust for the man.

He had been fighting against this all the evening, for he had a professional horror of approaching any case in a biased frame of mind. He was trying his hardest not to prejudge this suspect, but he found himself wavering.

"Now for yours, captain," said Oakes. "I guess it's something special. It's twice the size of mine, anyway."

It may have been something in the old woman's expression as she watched the German slowly tearing the paper that sent a thrill of excitement through Mr. Snyder.

Something seemed to warn him of the approach of the psychological moment. He bent forward eagerly. Under the table his hands were clutching his knees in a bruising grip.

There was a strangled gasp, a clatter, and onto the table from the German's hands there fell a little harmonica.

In the silence which followed all the suspicion which Mr. Snyder had been so sedulously keeping in check burst its bounds.

There was no mistaking the look on the German's face now. His cheeks were like wax, and his eyes, so dull till then, blazed with a panic and horror which he could not repress. The glasses on the table rocked as he clutched at the cloth.

Mrs. Pickett spoke.

"Why, Captain Muller, has it upset you? I thought that, as his best friend, the man who shared his room, you would value a memento of Captain Gunner. How fond you must have been of him for the sight of his harmonica to be such a shock."

The German did not speak. He was staring fascinated at the thing on the table.

Mrs. Pickett turned to Mr. Snyder. Her eyes, as they met his, were the

eyes of a fanatic. They held him.

"Mr. Snyder, as a detective, you will be interested in a curious affair which happened in this house a few days ago. One of my boarders, Captain Gunner, was found dead in his room—the room which he shared with Captain Muller."

"I am very proud of the reputation of my house, Mr. Snyder, and it was a blow to me that this should have happened."

"I applied to an agency for a detective, and they sent me a stupid boy, with nothing to recommend him except his belief in himself. He said that Captain Gunner had died by accident, killed by a snake which had come out of a crate of bananas. I knew better."

"I knew that Captain Gunner had been murdered."

"Are you listening, Captain Muller? This will interest you, as you were such a friend of his."

The German did not answer. He was staring straight before him, as if he saw something invisible to other eyes.

"Yesterday we found the body of a dog. It had been killed, as Captain Gunner had been, by the poison of a snake."

"The boy from the detective agency said that this was conclusive—that the snake had escaped from the room after killing Captain Gunner and killed the dog. I knew that was impossible, for, if there had been a snake in that room it could not have got out."

"It was not a snake that killed Captain Gunner; it was a cat."

"Captain Gunner had a friend. This man hated him. One day, in opening a crate of bananas, the friend found a snake and killed it. He took out the poison."

"He knew Captain Gunner's habits; he knew that he played a harmonica. This man had a cat. He knew that cats hated the sound of the harmonica. He had often seen this particular cat fly at Captain Gunner and scratch him when he played."

"He took the cat and covered its claws with the poison. And then he left it in the room with Captain Gunner. He knew what would happen."

Oakes and Mr. Snyder were on their feet. The German had not moved. He sat there, his fingers gripping the cloth.

Mrs. Pickett rose and went to a closet. She unlocked the door.

"Kitty!" she called. "Kitty! Kitty!" A black cat ran swiftly out into the room.

With a clatter of crockery and a ding of glass the table heaved, rocked, and overturned as the German staggered to his feet. He threw up his hands as if to ward something off. A choking cry came from his lips.

"Gott! Gott!"

Mrs. Pickett's voice rang through the room, cold and biting:

"Captain Muller, you murdered Captain Gunner!"

The German shuddered. Then mechanically he replied:

"Gott! Yes, I killed him."

"You heard, Mr. Snyder," said Mrs. Pickett. "He has confessed before witnesses. Take him away."

The German allowed himself to be moved toward the door. His arm in Mr. Snyder's grip felt limp and lifeless.

Mrs. Pickett stooped and took something from the debris on the floor. She rose, holding the harmonica.

"You are forgetting your souvenir, Captain Muller," she said.

(THE END.)