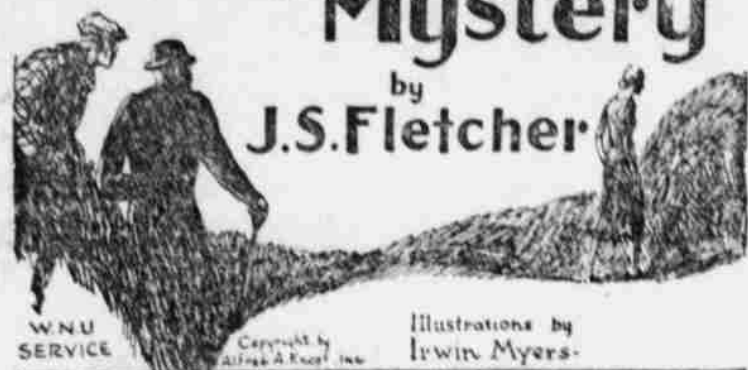


The Mazaroff Mystery

by J.S. Fletcher



Illustrations by Irwin Myers

THE STORY

Mervyn Holt is engaged by a man calling himself Mazaroff as a traveling companion. After a short tour they put up at the Woodcock Inn on Marrasdale moor. They meet, casually, Mrs. Elphinstone and Sheila Merchison. Mazaroff tells Holt they are his wife and daughter and that his real name is Merchison. That night Mazaroff falls to return to the inn and his disappearance is unexplained. Holt meets Sheila and tells her of Mazaroff's disappearance. They go to her cousin's (Verner Courthouse) shooting box hoping to find some word of Mazaroff. There they meet Mr. Armistead and Doctor Eccleshare. Holt is questioned by Police Sergeant Manners and a reporter, Bownas. Mazaroff's murdered body is found. Crole, Mazaroff's lawyer, and Maythorne, private detective, arrive. Valuable diamonds that Mazaroff usually carried are missing. Mrs. Elphinstone scoffs at the idea that Mazaroff is Merchison and produces apparent proofs of his death. A gun, stolen from Musgrave, is found at the scene of the murder.

CHAPTER III—Continued

The scrap of paper was a receipt for a registered letter, dispatched from Cape Town, and addressed to the Imperial Banking Corporation of South Africa, 635 Lombard street, London. Maythorne pointed to the date—January 17—on the postmark.

"Nine months since," he remarked. "How long had Mazaroff been in England when you met him at the Cecil?" "A few weeks," I replied. "As far as I know."

"I know," said Crole. "He came to England in July—about the end of the month."

"Then the letter, or packet, or whatever it was, to which this receipt refers, was sent off from Cape Town to the London branch of this bank some months before Mazaroff came here," observed Maythorne. He turned the receipt over. "There's an indorsement on the back—letters and a figure," he continued. "See? H. D. L. What's that mean, I wonder?"

He carefully put away the receipt. "We'll just keep the knowledge of that to ourselves, for the present," he said. "If the police come here this afternoon, as they're pretty sure to, after that gun business, and want to examine his effects, let 'em. But I'll keep this scrap of paper to myself—I want to work things up from it."

The police came to the Woodcock a little later. They asked a lot of questions of Musgrave about his gun, and of me and Webster about our movements on the night of the murder, of Crole about the dead man's identity and position; of me again about the money and valuables he was likely to have on him. And in the course of their investigations a fact came out of which I, until then, had been unaware. It turned out that after dinner on the night of the murder, while I was busied in writing some private letters, Mazaroff, who was naturally a sociable man, had strolled into the bar-parlor of the Woodcock, where a highly diversified assemblage had gathered—farmers, cattle dealers, drovers, idlers, all homeward bound from Cloghthwaite fair. There he had made himself very agreeable, and had treated the entire company to drinks and cigars, which he paid for with a five-pound note, taken, said the barmaid, from a notecase that seemed to be pretty full, and in open view of anybody and everybody.

This bit of news appeared to give considerable satisfaction and even relief to the police officials, and Manners, who lingered behind when his superiors went away, found it impossible to refrain from communicating to me his belief that they were on the right line of pursuit.

I communicated the police sergeant's notions to Crole and Maythorne. Maythorne seemed to understand Manners' standpoint.

"Following the most probable line," he remarked. "A sensible one, too. Here's an evidently wealthy man, traveling in a luxurious car of his own, puts up at a roadside inn, goes into a public bar-parlor, lets it be seen that he's lots of money on him, and strolls out on a lonely moor after night has fallen. What more likely than that one of the men before whom he's just pulled out his purse should slip after him, murder him, and rob him?"

"With Musgrave's gun?" I asked. "Nothing out of the way about that little detail!" said Maythorne. "What was easier than for the murderer to take down the gun from those books, and slip out after Mazaroff?"

"That would presuppose a knowledge that the gun was there," remarked Crole.

"Precisely," agreed Maythorne. "There were no doubt little characters about who know quite well what was in this room and what hung on that wall. I think Manners has got hold

of a good theory—murder for the sake of robbery. But—whether it's the right one or not—um!"

"You doubt it?" I asked. He gave us a candid, confidential smile.

"If you really want to know," he replied, "I neither doubt it nor agree with it. At present I don't know where we are. I'd like to know a lot of things yet. In particular—who was the man that Mazaroff said he wanted to see, hereabouts? Did he see him? If so, when—and where? If he hadn't seen him, was he on his way to see him at the time of the murder? Again—does this man, whoever he is, know Mazaroff as Mazaroff or as Merchison? Was Mazaroff murdered as Mazaroff, an unknown man here, or as Merchison, a man who had been known here?"

"Ah!" muttered Crole. "My question!"

CHAPTER IV

The York Solicitor

The inquest was duly opened next morning. Crole, as a solicitor whom he had employed in London, and I, as his traveling companion, identified the dead man as Salim Mazaroff, and told what we knew about him: Eccleshare and the local doctor testified as to the cause of his death; the men who had found the body at Relver's den gave evidence as to the circumstances under which they came across it. At this stage an interruption came through the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone and Sheila, with whom appeared an elderly man of professional bearing; Manners, by whom I was sitting, whispered to me that this was Mr. Wetherby, Mrs. Elphinstone's lawyer.

Wetherby lost no time in letting the authorities know why he and his party were there.

He said, addressing the coroner, "I wish to make an application to you on behalf of my client, Mrs. Elphinstone, of Marrasdale tower. To support it, I shall have—very briefly—to refer to some past history. Mrs. Elphinstone, as Miss Jean Linton, was married, some twenty-three or four years ago, to a Mr. Andrew Merchison, who formerly had some connection with this neighborhood. The marriage was not a success, and to put matters plainly, Merchison, within a comparatively short time and after making due provision for his wife, deserted her, and, it was believed, went off to the East. Eight months after he had gone, Mrs. Merchison had a daughter—the young lady whom you now see here, Miss Sheila Merchison. Merchison was never heard of again until some years later, when Mrs. Merchison received news that he had been drowned off Mombasa, on the East African coast, while on a voyage from Bombay to Durban. From that time forward Mrs. Merchison believed herself a widow, and in due course she married again, and became Mrs. Elphinstone. Now I come to the cause and reason of my application. Yesterday, Mrs. Elphinstone was visited by two gentlemen now present, who have, I understand, just given evidence—Mr. Holt and Mr. Crole. On the invitation of Mr. Crole, Mr. Holt informed Mrs. Elphinstone that on the second evening after he and Mr. Mazaroff arrived here at the Woodcock, Mr. Mazaroff told him that though he had a perfect right to the name he was now known by, having legally adopted it some years ago, he was in reality the Andrew Merchison who had married Miss Jean Linton, and had left her. I need hardly say, sir, that this is a very serious matter for my client, and I think it will be well for all parties if Mrs. Elphinstone is allowed to view the body of this dead man, in order that she may see if she can recognize it as that of Andrew Merchison."

"That seems, obviously, the very thing to do," agreed the coroner. "Perhaps you'll accompany your client, Mr. Wetherby?"

There was considerable hushed excitement in that room during the absence of Mrs. Elphinstone and her solicitor. Some of the older folk amongst the spectators whispered—the name Merchison had evidently roused sleeping memories.

When Mrs. Elphinstone, followed by Wetherby, reappeared, at the coroner's suggestion, she went into the witness box and gave evidence. It compressed itself into this—she could not identify the dead man as Andrew Merchison. Had the features remained unaltered, she said calmly, she might have done so, but as things were—impossible!

Crole, in his professional capacity, rose to ask Mrs. Elphinstone a question.

"Mrs. Elphinstone," he said, "had Andrew Merchison a cast in his left eye?"

"Certainly, he had," she replied. "A decided one!"

"Where did you see him?" asked Crole.

"I saw him the night on which he evidently met his death," replied the old gentleman. "It was in Biraside village street, near my house."

"And you are quite positive on this matter of identity?"

"I am absolutely positive! The man was Andrew Merchison, whatever

Crole turned to the coroner. "Numerous witnesses can prove that the unfortunate gentleman into whose death you are inquiring had such a cast—a squint—in his left eye, sir," he remarked. "He also had a birthmark, in the form of a brown mole, or blemish, on his right forearm. That, however, is not an uncommon mark, I believe, and I don't attach great importance to it. But I am strongly convinced that further proof of the identity of the deceased as Andrew Merchison will be found, and I should suggest—"

"There need be no doubt about it!" exclaimed a sudden voice from the spectators. "The man was Andrew Merchison!"

I knew whose voice that was before I looked round. Old Mr. Hassendeane, whom I had noticed when Crole and I entered the room, had risen from his seat, and was smiling informally at the coroner.

"Mrs. Elphinstone can't be positive, I may as well say that I am! I knew Andrew Merchison well enough in the old days, when he used to come here, and afterward when he was a young man—I knew him, too, after he'd married Miss Linton, now Mrs. Elphinstone. And my memory for faces is remarkably keen, and I recognized him easily enough when I saw him the other night. Andrew Merchison, without doubt!"

"Where did you see this man, Mr. Hassendeane?" interrupted the coroner.

"I saw him the night on which he evidently met his death," replied the old gentleman. "It was in Biraside village street, near my house."

"And you are quite positive on this matter of identity?"

"I am absolutely positive! The man was Andrew Merchison, whatever



Weatherby Lost No Time in Letting the Authorities Know Why He and His Party Were There.

he may have called himself of recent years."

The coroner glanced at the solicitors gathered about the table at the head of which he sat.

"I think we had better adjourn for a fortnight!" he said. "During that time—"

Just then a postman opened the door of the room, ushering in a young, spectacled man. The coroner paused and glanced inquiringly at him.

The newcomer pulled out a card-case and, advancing to the head of the table, whispered a few words in the coroner's ear. I saw a look of something between surprise and perplexity cross the coroner's face.

"We seem to be dealing with a strangely mysterious matter, quite apart from the death," he remarked. "This gentleman"—he glanced at the card—"Mr. Stephen Postlethwaite, solicitor, from York—tells me that he saw accounts of this case in the papers yesterday, and has hurried here to give some information. I suppose we'd better have it now?"

Mr. Postlethwaite formally described himself as a solicitor. He produced a diary, and exhibited an entry which recorded a call from Mr. Salim Mazaroff.

"Mr. Mazaroff," he continued, "who was a total stranger to me, intro-

duced himself as staying in York for a few days at the North Eastern hotel. He then informed me that he was a very wealthy man; that he had made his money in various trading concerns in the East, and lately in extensive diamond dealings in South Africa; that he had now retired from all this, had realized his various properties, and lodged all the proceeds in cash at his London bank, the Imperial Banking Corporation of South Africa, pending investment in this country. Then in a rather jocular fashion he remarked that up to then, as he had no children, and no relations, he had never made a will, but he now desired to do so. He produced a sheet of paper on which he had written out his wishes, handed it to me, and asked if I could put it into shorthand form. I told him I would have the will prepared for him, and he was to call and execute it at any time after three o'clock that afternoon. He returned to my office at half past three, when the will was ready for his signature. He duly appended that and carried the will off with him. It was not until some days later that I found that I had omitted to give him his own original draft, which I found lying amongst some papers on my desk. I went round to the North Eastern hotel with it, myself, but learned then that Mr. Mazaroff and his friend Mr. Holt had left for Durham and the north, leaving no address. I therefore looked up the draft. Yesterday I read in the newspapers the various accounts of what had happened here, and as I particularly noticed that Mr. Mazaroff had been robbed of his papers as well as his money and valuables, I thought it my duty to come here at once and tell what I knew."

"Much obliged to you, I'm sure, Mr. Postlethwaite," the coroner said. "Now, according to you the deceased man carried off this will in his pocket. It appears from the evidence that everything he had on him—money, valuables, papers—was stolen, most likely by the murderer or murderers; presumably the will has gone with the rest. However, it's something to know that such a document was in existence. You say he told you he was a wealthy man. Did he say how wealthy?"

"Yes. He told me he was worth about eight hundred thousand pounds."

The coroner leaned back in his chair, put the tips of his fingers together, and looked round the court. Then he turned again to the witness.

"I think we'll trouble you to read that draft, Mr. Postlethwaite," he said, quietly.

Postlethwaite read—amidst a dead silence:

"This is the last will of me, Salim Mazaroff, of the Hotel Cecil, London, in the county of Middlesex and of 941 Darling street, Cape Town, South Africa. I devise and bequeath all my estate and effects, real and personal, which I may die possessed of or entitled to unto Mervyn Holt, of 350a Jernyn street, London, absolutely, and I hereby appoint the said Mervyn Holt sole executor of this my will and I revoke all former wills and codicils."

This was all. But I was suddenly conscious that all eyes had turned from the witness to me.

The first thing that I was accurately conscious of after the crushing shock of the York solicitor's announcement was Crole's voice, close to my ear.

"Keep quiet, Holt!" he was whispering intently. "Keep quiet—calm!"

I don't think I did more than bear him—I was watching the coroner, feeling, now, that he, somehow, crystallized in himself all that the various people in that room were thinking and wondering.

The coroner looked around—at nobody in particular.

"I understand that the will has not been found," he said. "The theory is that it was stolen by the supposed murderer, with other of the deceased's papers. Nobody knows anything about it, eh?"

Wetherby was suddenly on his legs, with a sidelong glance at me.

"As Mr. Holt, the beneficiary, is present, sir," he said, "I should like to ask him if he knows anything about it?"

"I know nothing about it!" I exclaimed. "I never heard of it!"

Wetherby gave me another look; there was something cynical in it which I strongly resented.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Scottish Abbey Holds Relics of Robert Bruce

Subject to the fulfillment of certain conditions, the trustees of Professor Noel Paton handed over the following articles to the kirk-session of Dunfermline abbey: 1. A portion of the skeleton of King Robert the Bruce, namely, the metatarsal or bone of the great toe. 2. A small portion of the outer leaden shroud of King Robert the Bruce. 3. A small portion of the toile d'or in which the body of King Robert the Bruce was wrapped. 4. The remains of one of the iron nails which were found among the remains of the coffin in which the body reposed. 5. The remains of one of the six iron rings, or rather handles, which had been filled in with lead into the largest of two stones protecting the vault of the Bruce when first discovered on February 17, 1818. 6. Twelve

fragments—white marble and calc stone—"believed to be portions of the magnificent monument of King Robert the Bruce at Dunfermline destroyed by the Lords of the Congregation." The relics are preserved in an oak glass-fronted cabinet placed alongside of the pulpit erected immediately above the vault of the Bruce—London Mail.

French Enjoy Fishing

No fewer than 10,000 fishermen took part in a competition and congress which was held at Vichy, writes the Paris correspondent of the London Sunday Observer. The number is not only sufficient to show what a placid person the Frenchman really is—at least when he reaches a certain age—but also that he has a natural passion for sport. I do not mean sport as he understands the word, for he does not really care about games, but sport in the sense of shooting and fishing. Game shooting is far more a pursuit of the whole people of France than in England, and there is hardly a middle-aged Frenchman who is not a fisherman.

Rainbow Colors

In the rainbow in the inner or primary bow the colors of the spectrum are arranged in their order, red on the outside and violet on the inside. In the outer or secondary bow the colors are in the reverse order.

Old and young can take this family laxative; free trial bottle!

The next time you or the children need a laxative, try this famous doctor's prescription which aids the bowels without doing any harm. Dr. Caldwell's Syrup Pepsin, containing pure senna and laxative herbs, is effective in a gentle and helpful way. Its action is thorough, but it never weakens the bowels. It stimulates muscular action and is thus actually good for the system. So remember Dr. Caldwell's Syrup Pepsin when coated tongue, fetid breath, headaches, nausea, jaded appetite or biliousness tells the need of a thorough cleansing. Druggists keep it in big bottles, or write Dr. Caldwell's Syrup Pepsin, Monticello, Ill., for a free trial bottle.

Cuticura SOAP

Does much to keep a good clear complexion, no matter what the weather!

Lava Preserved Tree Through the Centuries

A tree with a trunk seven feet in diameter, buried by a lava flow centuries ago and preserved in the rock, crashed through the roof of the canal tunnel near the Yakima river at Ellensburg, Wash., a short time ago.

The section of tree which fell was 25 feet in length, the outer part partially petrified, but the core still in much the same condition as when some volcano eruption buried it ages before Columbus thought of his western voyage.

Several buried logs have been found 225 feet below the present surface, but this was the first upright tree uncovered and is regarded as evidence that a dense forest existed there in prehistoric times.

The roots of the old tree were in a shale formation that was once rich, fertile loam, but which under pressure of the lava bed became rock. Evidently the hot lava came quickly and covered the forest at once, for the huge tree did not catch fire, nor was it charred. Lava covered the earth at this point 250 feet deep.

In various places along the tunnel site drills have struck wood, some of the cores showing that old logs lie from 125 feet to 225 feet deep.

For Barbed Wire Cuts

Try HANFORD'S Balsam of Myrrh

All dealers are authorized to refund your money for the first bottle if not suited.

Kill Rats Without Poison

A New Exterminator that Won't Kill Livestock, Poultry, Dogs, Cats, or even Baby Chicks

K-R-O can be used about the home, barn or poultry yard with absolute safety as it contains no deadly poison. K-R-O is made of Squill, as recommended by U. S. Dept. of Agriculture and the Conable process which insures maximum strength. Two cans killed 75 rats at Arkansas State Farm. Hundreds of other testimonials. Sold on a Money Back Guarantee. Inset upon K-R-O, the original Squill exterminator. All poultry supply, drug, and seed stores—The Large size (four times as much) \$2.00. Direct (dealer cannot supply you) K-R-O Co., Springfield, O.

Retain Your Good Looks

How frequently a woman thinks, "Am I still attractive?" How much thought and study she devotes to her looks! That's natural! A woman hates to think she is growing day by day less charming and attractive. DR. PIERCE'S FAVORITE PRESCRIPTION helps to preserve in a woman the charm and health of youth. It contains no harmful ingredient. This splendid herbal tonic is sold by all druggists in both fluid and tablets.

Write to Dr. Pierce's Invalids Hotel, Buffalo, N. Y., if you desire free medical advice. For 10c Dr. Pierce will send you a trial package of tablets.

World's Largest Telescope

The observatory on Mount Wilson, in California, was built at a cost of \$2,000,000 and houses the world's largest telescope, the instrument having a reflector 100 inches in diameter.

FEEL GOOD?

Most ailments start from poor circulation (constipation or semi-constipation). Intellectual pollution and vitality, undermine your health and make life miserable. Tonight try NATURE'S REMEDY—all-vegetable corrective—not an ordinary laxative. See how NR will aid in restoring your appetite and rid you of that heavy, inert, peevish feeling.

Mild, safe, purely vegetable—at druggists, only 25c. FEEL LIKE A MILLION, TAKE

NR TO-NIGHT TOMORROW ALRIGHT

Rare Antiques

You must run over sometime and see the antiques we bought on our last motor trip. A couple of early American sandwiches we picked up in a tearoom.—Life.

When BABIES are upset

Baby ills and ailments seem twice as serious at night. A sudden cry may mean colic. Or a sudden attack of diarrhea—a condition it is always important to check quickly. How would you meet this emergency—tonight? Have you a bottle of Castoria ready? There is nothing that can take the place of this harmless but effective remedy for children; nothing that acts quite the same, or has quite the same comforting effect on them.

For the protection of your own peace of mind—keep this old, reliable preparation always on hand. But don't keep it just for emergencies; let it be an everyday aid. Its gentle influence will ease and soothe the infant who cannot sleep. Its mild regulation will help an older child whose tongue is coated because of sluggish bowels. All druggists have Castoria; the genuine bears Chas. H. Fletcher's signature on the wrapper.