

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

COLONEL THORNDYKE'S
SECRET

George Henty

Colonel Thorndyke's Secret

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G. A. Henty

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PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

“Colonel Thorndyke’s Secret” is a story so far out of the ordinary that it will not be inappropriate to speak a few words regarding the tale and its unusually successful author, Mr. George Alfred Henty.

The plot of the story hinges upon the possession of a valuable bracelet, of diamonds, stolen from a Hindoo idol by a British soldier in India. This bracelet falls into the possession of Colonel Thorndyke, who, shortly afterward, is sent home to England because of his wounds. The secret concerning the bracelet is told to the Colonel’s brother, a country squire, and the treasure is left to younger members of the Thorndyke family.

As is well known today, the theft of anything from a Hindoo temple is considered an extraordinary crime in India, and when this occurs it becomes a religious duty for one or more persons to hunt down the thief and bring back the property taken from the heathen god.

The members of the Thorndyke family soon learn that they are being watched. But this is at a time when highwaymen are numerous in this part of England, and they cannot determine whether the work is that of the “knights of the roads” or that of the Lascars after the famous bracelet. A mysterious death follows, and the younger members of the family are almost stunned, not knowing what will happen next. They would give the bracelet up, but do not know where it is hidden, the secret having been in the sole possession of the member now dead. In this quandary the young hero of the tale rises to the occasion and determines to join the London police force and become a detective, with the hope of ultimately clearing up the mystery. Thrilling adventures of a most unusual kind follow, and at last something of the mystery is explained. The bracelet and other jewelry are unearthed, and it is decided to take the bracelet to Amsterdam and offer it to the diamond cutters at that place. But the carrying of the bracelet is both difficult and dangerous. How the mission is brought to a conclusion, and what part the Lascars played in the final adventure, will be found in the pages that follow.

It can truthfully be said that Mr. Henty is easily the most popular of all English story tellers, his books for boys enjoying a circulation of from a hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand per year. His tales are all clean, and although some are full of exciting situations and thrilling to the last degree, they are of a high moral tone, while the English employed is of the best.

The present story is of peculiar value as giving a good insight into country and town life in England over a hundred years ago, when railways and telegraph lines were unknown and when the “knights of the road” were apt to hold up any stagecoach that happened to come along. It also gives a truthful picture of the dark and underhanded work accomplished at times by those of East Indian blood, especially when on what they consider a religious mission.

CHAPTER I

Squire Thorndyke, of the Manor House of Crawley, was, on the 1st of September; 1782, walking up and down the little terrace in front of the quaint old house in an unusually disturbed mood. He was a man of forty three or four, stoutly and strongly built, and inclined to be portly. Save the loss of his wife four years before, there had been but little to ruffle the easy tenor of his life. A younger son, he had, at his mother's death, when he was three and twenty, come in for the small estate at Crawley, which had been her jointure.

For ten years he had led a life resembling that of most of his neighbors; he had hunted and shot, been a regular attendant at any main of cocks that was fought within fifteen miles of Crawley, had occasionally been up to London for a week or two to see the gay doings there. Of an evening he had generally gone down to the inn, where he talked over, with two or three of his own condition and a few of the better class of farmers, the news of the day, the war with the French, the troubles in Scotland, the alarming march of the Young Pretender, and his defeat at Culloden—with no very keen interest in the result, for the Southern gentry and yeomen, unlike those in the North, had no strong leanings either way. They had a dull dislike for Hanoverian George, but no great love for the exiled Stuarts, whose patron, the King of France, was an enemy of England.

More often, however, their thoughts turned upon local topics—the holding up of the coach of Sir James Harris or Squire Hamilton by highwaymen; the affray between the French smugglers and the Revenue men near Selsea Bill or Shoreham; the delinquencies of the poaching gangs; the heaviness of the taxes, and the price of corn.

At the age of thirty-three Squire Thorndyke married the daughter of a neighboring landowner; a son was born and three years later Mrs. Thorndyke died. Since then the Squire had led a more retired life; he still went down to smoke his pipe at the inn parlor, but he gave up his visits to town; and cock fights, and even bull baiting, were no longer attractions to him. He was known as a good landlord to the three or four farmers who held land under him; was respected and liked in the village, where he was always ready to assist in cases of real distress; was of an easygoing disposition and on good terms with all his neighbors.

But today he was unusually disturbed in his mind. A messenger had ridden up two hours before with a letter from London. It was as follows:

“MY DEAR BROTHER JOHN:

“You will be surprised indeed at this letter from me, who, doubtless, you suppose to be fighting in India. I have done with fighting, and am nearly done with life. I was shot in the battle of Buxar, eighteen months ago. For a time the surgeons thought that it was going to be fatal; then I rallied, and for some months it seemed that, in spite of the ball that they were never able to find, I was going to get over it, and should be fit for service again. Then I got worse; first it was a cough, then the blood used to come up, and they said that the only chance for me was to come home. I did not believe it would be of any use, but I thought that I would rather die at home than in India, so home I came, and have now been a week in London.

“I thought at first of going down to my place at Reigate, and having you and your boy there with me; but as I have certainly not many weeks, perhaps not many days, to live, I thought I would come down to you; so the day after you receive this letter I shall be with you. I shall not bring my little girl down; I have left her in good hands, and I shall only bring with me my Hindoo servant. He will give you no trouble—a mat to sleep on, and a little rice to eat, will satisfy his wants; and he will take the trouble of me a good deal off your hands. He was a Sepoy in my regiment, and has always evinced the greatest devotion for me. More than once in battle he has saved my life, and has, for the last three years, been my servant, and has nursed me since I have been ill as tenderly as a woman could have done. As I shall have time to tell you everything when I arrive, I will say no more now.”

The news had much affected John Thorndyke. His brother George was five years his senior, and had gone out as a cadet in the company's service when John was but thirteen, and this was his first home coming. Had it not been for a portrait that had been taken of him in his uniform just before he sailed, John would have had but little remembrance of him. In that he was represented as a thin, spare youth, with an expression of quiet determination in his face. From his father John had, of course, heard much about him.

"Nothing would satisfy him but to go out to India, John. There was, of course, no occasion for it, as he would have this place after me—a fine estate and a good position: what could he want more? But he was a curious fellow. Once he formed an opinion there was no persuading him to change it. He was always getting ideas such as no one else would think of; he did not care for anything that other people cared for; never hunted nor shot. He used to puzzle me altogether with his ways, and, 'pon my word, I was not sorry when he said he would go to India, for there was no saying how he might have turned out if he had stopped here. He never could do anything like anybody else: nothing that he could have done would have surprised me.

"If he had told me that he intended to be a play actor, or a Jockey, or a private, or a book writer, I should not have been surprised. Upon my word, it was rather a relief to me when he said, 'I have made up my mind to go into the East India Service, father. I suppose you can get me a cadetship?' At least that was an honorable profession; and I knew, anyhow, that when he once said 'I have made up my mind, father,' no arguments would move him, and that if I did not get him a cadetship he was perfectly capable of running away, going up to London, and enlisting in one of their white regiments."

John Thorndyke's own remembrances were that his brother had always been good natured to him, that he had often told him long stories about Indian adventures, and that a short time before he went away, having heard that he had been unmercifully beaten by the schoolmaster at Reigate for some trifling fault, he had gone down to the town, and had so battered the man that the school had to be closed for a fortnight. They had always kept up a correspondence. When he received the news of his father's death George had written to him, begging him to go down to Reigate, and to manage the estate for him.

"Of course," he said, "you will draw its income as long as you are there. I mayn't be back for another twenty years; one gets rich out here fast, what with plunder and presents and one thing and another, and it is no use to have money accumulating at home, so just live on the place as if it were your own, until I come home to turn you out."

John had declined the offer.

"I am very well where I am," he wrote, "and the care of the estate would be a horrible worry to me; besides, I have just married, and if I ever have any children they would be brought up beyond their station. I have done what I can for you. I have seen the family lawyers, who have engaged a man who has been steward to Sir John Hieover, and looked after the estate during his son's minority. But the young blade, on coming of age, set to work to make ducks and drakes of the property, and Newman could not bear to see the estate going to the Jews, so, as luck would have it, he resigned a month ago, and has been appointed steward at Reigate. Of course, if you don't like the arrangement you must write and say so. It will be a year before I get your answer, and he has only been engaged for certain for that time; it must lie with you as to permanent arrangement."

So Newman had taken charge of the Reigate estate, and had continued to manage it ever since, although George had written home in great displeasure at his offer being refused.

Inside the Manor the bustle of preparations was going on; the spare room, which had not been used for many years, was being turned out, and a great fire lighted to air it. John Thorndyke had sent a letter by the returning messenger to a friend in town, begging him to go at once to Leadenhall Street and send down a supply of Indian condiments for his brother's use, and had then betaken himself to the garden to think the matter over. The next day a post chaise arrived, bringing the invalid and his colored servant, whose complexion and Indian garb struck the maids with an awe not unmingled

with alarm. John Thorndyke could hardly believe that the bent and emaciated figure was that of his brother, but he remembered the voice when the latter said, holding out his hand to him:

“Well, brother John, here I am, what is left of me. Gracious, man, who would have thought that you were going to grow up such a fine tall fellow? You are more fitted to be a soldier than I am. No, don't try to help me out; Ramoo will do that—he is accustomed to my ways, and I would as soon trust myself to a rogue elephant as to you.”

“I am sorry to see you looking so bad, brother George.”

“What must be must. I have had my fling; and after thirty years of marching and fighting, I have no right to grumble if I am laid upon my back at last.”

Leaning on Ramoo's arm, Colonel Thorndyke made his way into the house, and when the Hindoo had arranged the cushions of the sofa, took his place there in a half reclining position.

“I am not always as bad as this, John,” he said; “the jolting of your confounded roads has been too much for me. If I were the King I would hang every fellow who had anything to do with them—contractors, boards of county magistrates, and the whole lot. If I had known what it was going to be like I would have hired a sedan chair, and had myself carried down. That is what I have been doing in London; but I would rather have had an Indian palkee, that one could have lain down comfortably in.”

“What shall I get you first, George? I have got some lemons.”

“I want something better than lemons, John. Have you any Burgundy handy?”

“Yes, plenty.”

“If you give a bottle to Ramoo he will know how much water I want.”

Here the servants entered with a tray with a chicken and a dish of kidneys.

“I sent up yesterday for some of the Indian things that you are accustomed to, George, but they have not come down yet.”

“I brought a store down with me. This will do capitally for the present. Ramoo will do the cooking for me in future. He need not go into the kitchen to scare the maids. I could see they looked at him as if he had been his infernal majesty, as he came in. He can do it anywhere; all he wants is an iron pot with some holes in it, and some charcoal. He can squat out there on the veranda, or, if it is bad weather, any shed will do for him.

“Well, it is nice to be home again, John,” he went on, after he had eaten a few mouthfuls of chicken and drunk a tumbler of Burgundy and water. “I am glad to be back, now I am here, though I dare say I should not have come home for another ten years if it had not been for this rascally bullet. Where is your boy?”

“He is away at school.”

“Well, I think I will go up to bed at once, if you don't mind, John. I shall be fitter to talk in the morning.”

The next day, indeed, Colonel Thorndyke was materially better. His voice was stronger and more cheery, and when he came down after breakfast he took his seat in an easy chair instead of on the sofa.

“Now, brother,” he said, “we will have a cozy chat. There are several things I want done, but the chief of these is that when I am gone you should go down to Reigate, as I wanted you to do ten years ago. I want you to seem to be its master, as well as be its master, until Millicent comes of age, if not longer. Her name is Millicent Conyers Thorndyke. I wish her to be called Millicent Conyers, and to appear as your ward, and not as your niece and heiress of the property. If there is one thing in the world I have a greater horror of than another, it is of a girl being married for her money. I don't suppose that anyone knows that I have a daughter—at any rate, none beyond a few Indian chums. She was sent home with an ayah under the charge of the widow of a comrade of mine. I had been away for months, and only went back to Calcutta in time to see her mother die. So that is all right.”

“I could not do such a thing as that, George. I should be living under false colors. It is not that I mind so much leaving here and looking after the child's interest at Reigate, but I could not possibly

take possession of the place as its owner when I should not be so. Besides, there are other objections. Mark would grow up supposing himself to be the heir.”

“Mark will be all right. I have, since I have been in London, signed a will, leaving the rest of my fortune between them. I had it drawn up by our father’s solicitors, relying upon your consent to do what I asked you. I have explained the matter to them, and given them the assignment, or whatever they call it, of the Reigate estate to you, until my daughter comes of age, appointing them her guardians should you die before that. Thus, you will be placed in a proper position; and should it be known by any means that the child is my daughter, that deed will still be a proof that you are carrying out my wishes, and are absolute master of the estate until she comes of age.”

“I must think it all over, George. It is a singular proposal, and I own I would rather things went on in their regular course.”

“Yes, yes, I understand that, John; but you see I have altogether set my mind on this matter. I want to know that my girl is not going to be married for her money; and, at any rate, that deed makes you master of the Reigate estates for the next thirteen years; so the only thing that I really want of you is to let the girl be called your ward instead of your niece, and that she and everyone else shall be in ignorance that she is an heiress. So far from doing the girl a wrong, you will be doing her a benefit; and as I have explained the whole matter to our lawyers, no one can possibly think that the thing has been done from any motive whatever except that of affording me satisfaction.”

“I will think the matter over,” John repeated. “Of course, brother, it has been in your mind for some time, but it comes altogether fresh to me, and I must look at it in every light. For myself, I have no wish at all to become master of our father’s estate. I have been going in one groove for the last twenty years, and don’t care about changing it. You wished me to do so ten years ago, and I declined then, and the ten years have not made me more desirous of change than I was before.”

“All right; think it over. Please send Ramoo in to me; I have tired myself in talking.”

John Thorndyke smoked many churchwarden pipes in the little arbor in his garden that day. In the afternoon his brother was so weak and tired that the subject of the conversation was not reverted to. At eight o’clock the Colonel went off to bed. The next morning, after breakfast, he was brighter again.

“Well, John, what has come of your thinking?” he asked.

“I don’t like it, George.”

“You mayn’t like it, John, but you will do it. I am not going to have my girl run after by ruined spendthrifts who want her money to repair their fortunes; and I tell you frankly, if you refuse I shall go up to town tomorrow, and I shall make a new will, leaving all my property to your son, subject to a life annuity of 200 pounds a year to the child, and ordering that, in the event of his dying before he comes of age, or of refusing to accept the provisions of the will, or handing any of the property or money over to my daughter, the whole estate, money, jewels, and all, shall go to the London hospitals, subject, as before, to the annuity.

“Don’t be an ass, brother John. Do you think that I don’t know what I am doing? I have seen enough of the evils of marrying for money out in India. Every ship that comes out brings so many girls sent out to some relation to be put on the marriage market, and marrying men old enough to be pretty nearly their grandfathers, with the natural consequence that there is the devil to pay before they have been married a year or two. Come, you know you will do it; why not give in at once, and have done with it? It is not a bad thing for you, it will be a good thing for your boy, it will save my girl from fortune hunters, and enable me to die quietly and comfortably.”

“All right, George, I will do it. Mind, I don’t do it willingly, but I do it for your sake.”

“That is right,” Colonel Thorndyke said, holding out his thin bronzed hand to his brother; “that is off my mind. Now, there is only one other thing—those confounded jewels. But I won’t talk about them now.”

It was not indeed till three or four days later that the Colonel again spoke to his brother on any than ordinary matters. He had indeed been very weak and ailing. After breakfast, when, as usual, he was a little stronger and brighter than later in the day, he said to his brother suddenly:—

“I suppose there are no hiding places in this room?”

“Hiding places! What do you mean, George?”

“Places where a fellow could hide up and hear what we are talking about.”

“No, I don’t think so,” the Squire replied, looking round vaguely. “Such an idea never occurred to me. Why do you ask?”

“Because, John, if there is such a thing as a hiding place, someone will be sure to be hiding there. Where does that door lead to?”

“It doesn’t lead anywhere; it used to lead into the next room, but it was closed up before my time, and turned into a cupboard, and this door is permanently closed.”

“Do you mind stepping round into the next room and seeing if anyone is in the cupboard?”

Thinking that his brother was a little light headed, John Thorndyke went into the next room, and returned, saying gravely that no one was there.

“Will you look behind the curtains, John, and under this sofa, and everywhere else where even a cat could be hidden? That seems all right,” the Colonel went on, as his brother continued the search. “You know there is a saying that walls have ears, and I am not sure that it is not so. I have been haunted with the feeling that everything I did was watched, and that everything I said was listened to for years; and I can tell you it is a devilishly unpleasant thought. Draw your chair quite close to me. It is about my jewels, John. I always had a fancy for jewels—not to wear them, but to own them. In my time I have had good opportunities in that way, both in the Madras Presidency and in the Carnatic. In the first place, I have never cared for taking presents in money, but I have never refused jewels; and what with Rajahs and Nabobs and Ministers that one had helped or done a good turn to somehow, a good deal came to me that way.

“Then I always made a point of carrying money with me, and after a defeat of the enemy or a successful siege, there was always lots of loot, and the soldiers were glad enough to sell anything in the way of jewels for a tithe of their value in gold. I should say if I put the value of the jewels at 50,000 pounds I am not much wide of the mark. That is all right, there is no bother about them; the trouble came from a diamond bracelet that I got from a soldier. We were in camp near Tanjore. I was officer of the day. I had made my rounds, and was coming back to my quarters, when I saw a soldier coming out of a tent thirty or forty yards away. It was a moonlight night, and the tent was one belonging to a white Madras regiment. Suddenly, I saw another figure, that had been lying down outside the tent, rise. I saw the flash of the moonlight on steel; then there was a blow, and the soldier fell. I drew my sword and rushed forward.

“The native—for I could see that it was a native—was bending over the man he had stabbed. His back was towards me, and on the sandy soil he did not hear my footsteps until I was close to him; then he sprang up with a cry of fury, and leaped on me like a tiger. I was so taken by surprise that before I could use my sword the fellow had given me a nasty stab on the shoulder; but before he could strike again I had run him through. By this time several other, men ran out of the tent, uttering exclamations of rage at seeing their fallen comrade.

“‘What is it, sir?’ they asked me.

“‘This scoundrel, here, has stabbed your comrade,’ I said. ‘He did not see me coming, and I ran up just as he was, I think, rifling him for booty. He came at me like a wild cat, and has given me a nasty stab. However, I have put an end to his game. Is your comrade dead?’

“‘No, sir, he is breathing still; but I fancy there is little chance for him.’

“‘You had better carry him to the hospital tent at once; I will send a surgeon there.’

"I called the regimental surgeon up, and went with him to the hospital tent, telling him what had happened. He shook his head after examining the man's wound, which was fairly between the shoulders.

"He may live a few hours, but there is no chance of his getting better."

"Now," I said, "you may as well have a look at my wound, for the villain stabbed me too."

"You have had a pretty narrow escape of it," he said, as he examined it. "If he had struck an inch or two nearer the shoulder the knife would have gone right into you; but you see I expect he was springing as he struck, and the blow fell nearly perpendicularly, and it glanced down over your ribs, and made a gash six inches long. There is no danger. I will bandage it now, and tomorrow morning I will sew the edges together, and make a proper job of it."

"In the morning one of the hospital attendants came to me and said the soldier who had been wounded wanted to speak to me. The doctor said he would not live long. I went across to him. He was on a bed some little distance from any of the others, for it was the healthy season, and there were only three or four others in the tent.

"I hear, Major Thorndyke," he said in a low voice, "that you killed that fellow who gave me this wound, and that you yourself were stabbed."

"Mine is not a serious business, my man," I said. "I wish you had got off as easily."

"I have been expecting it, sir," he said; "and how I came to be fool enough to go outside the tent by myself I cannot think. I was uneasy, and could not sleep; I felt hot and feverish, and came out for a breath of fresh air. I will tell you what caused it, sir. About two years ago a cousin of mine, in one of the King's regiments, who was dying, they said, of fever (but I know the doctors thought he had been poisoned), said to me, "Here are some things that will make your fortune if ever you get to England; but I tell you beforehand, they are dangerous things to keep about you. I fancy that they have something to do with my being like this now. A year ago I went with some others into one of their great temples on a feast day. Well, the god had got on all his trinkets, and among them was a bracelet with the biggest diamonds I ever saw. I did not think so much of it at the time, but I kept on thinking of them afterwards, and it happened that some months after our visit we took the place by storm. I made straight for the temple, and I got the jewels. It don't matter how I got them—I got them. Well, since that I have never had any peace; pretty near every night one or other of our tents was turned topsy turvy, all the kits turned out, and even the ground dug up with knives. You know how silently Indian thieves can work. However, nothing was ever stolen, and as for the diamonds, at the end of every day's march I always went out as soon as it was quite dark, and buried the bracelet between the tent pegs; it did not take a minute to do. When we moved, of course, I took it up again. At last I gave that up, for however early I turned out in the morning there was sure to be a native about. I took then to dropping it down the barrel of my gun; that way I beat them. Still, I have always somehow felt myself watched, and my tent has been disturbed a great deal oftener than any of the others. I have had half a mind to throw the things away many a time, but I could not bring myself to do it."

"Well, sir, I have carried the bracelet ever since. I have done as he did, and always had it in my musket barrel—When we had fighting to do I would drop it out into my hand and slip it into my ammunition pouch; but I know that I have always been followed, just as Bill was. I suppose they found out that I went to see him before he died. Anyhow, my tent has been rummaged again and again. I have no doubt that fellow whom you killed last night had been watching me all the time, and thought that I had come out to hide the things. However, there they are, sir. One of my mates brought my musket here a quarter of an hour ago, and emptied the barrel out for me. Now, sir, you did your best to save my life last night, and you killed that fellow who did for me, and you pretty nearly got killed yourself. I have got no one else I could give the things to, and if I were to give them to one of my mates in the regiment they would probably cost him his life, as they have cost me mine. But you will know what to do with the things; they are worth a lot of money if you can get them home. Mind,

sir, you have got to be careful. I have heard tales of how those priests will follow up a temple jewel that has been lost for years, and never give it up until they get it back again.'

"I ought to give it up,' I said.

"You don't know where it came from, sir,' he replied. 'I was one of a party of convalescents who were sent up just before that fight, and my own regiment was not there: it might have been here, and it might have been in the Carnatic. Bill never told me, and I have no more idea than a babe unborn.'

"The gems were certainly magnificent; and though I knew well enough that these untiring Brahmins would not be long in guessing that the things had come into my possession, I took the bracelet. I thought, anyhow, that I might have a few hours' start; the fellow I had killed might, of course, have one or two others with him, but I had to risk that. I got leave an hour later, and went down to Madras, and got them put into a place of safety. That I was watched all the time I was in India afterwards I have no doubt, but no attempts were made to assassinate me. They would have known that I went straight away, but whether I had buried them somewhere on the road, or had given them to someone's care at Madras they could not know, and there was, therefore, nothing for them to do but to wait till I made a move.

"I have no doubt whatever that they came over in the same ship with me. Two or three times during the week I was in London I saw colored men in the street outside the hotel. Once it was a Lascar seaman, another time a dark looking sailor in European clothes: he might pass for a Spaniard. Several times as I was going about in a sedan chair I looked out suddenly, and each time there was a dark face somewhere in the street behind. I had a letter this morning from the lawyer, and he mentioned that two days ago his offices had been broken into, and every strong box and drawer forced open, but that, curiously enough, they could not find that anything had been stolen, though in the cashier's box there were 30 pounds in gold. Of course it was my friends. I have no doubt that one or two of them have followed me down here; and for anything I know they may be lurking somewhere in your garden at the present moment—that is, if they are not standing beside us in this room."

John Thorndyke looked round with an uncomfortable feeling.

"How do you mean, George?"

"I mean some of those Indian fellows can do all sorts of wonderful conjuring tricks. I have seen them go up into the air on a rope and never come down again, and for aught I know they may be able to render themselves invisible. Seriously, I think that it is likely as not."

"Well, and where are the things to be found now, George?"

"That I won't tell you, John. Before I go I will whisper it in your ear, and give you the means of finding them, but not till then. No, I will write it down on a piece of paper, and slip it into your hand. As soon as you get out of the room you glance at it, and then put the piece of paper into your mouth, chew it up and swallow it. I tell you I dare not even whisper it; but whatever you do, take no steps in the matter until your son comes of age."

"There can surely be no danger in another twelve years, George; they will have given up the search long before that."

"Not they," the Colonel said emphatically. "If they die others will take their places: it is a sacred business with them. My advice to you is, either sell them directly you get them into your hands, or go straight to Amsterdam and sell them there to one of the diamond cutters, who will turn them out so that they will be altered beyond all recognition. Don't sell more than two stones at most to any one man; then they will never come out as a bracelet again, and the hunt will be over."

"I would almost rather leave them alone altogether, George."

"Well, they are worth 50,000 pounds if they are worth a penny, and a great deal more I should say; but you cannot leave them alone without leaving everything alone, for all my gems are with them, and 52,000 pounds in gold. Of course, if you like you can, when you get the box, pick those diamonds out and chuck them away, but if you do you must do it openly, so that anyone watching you may see you do it, otherwise the search will go on."

Two days later, as Ramoo was helping the Colonel to the sofa, the latter was seized with a violent fit of coughing, then a rush of blood poured from his lips. His brother and Ramoo laid him on the sofa almost insensible.

“Run and get some water, Ramoo,” John Thorndyke said.

As Ramoo left the room the Colonel feebly placed his snuffbox in his brother's hand with a significant glance; then he made several desperate efforts to speak, and tried to struggle up into a sitting position; another gush of blood poured from him, and as it ceased he fell back dead.

John Thorndyke was bitterly grieved at the death of his brother, and it was not until he went up to his room that night that he thought of the snuffbox that he had dropped into his pocket as his brother handed it to him. He had no doubt that it contained the instructions as to the treasure. It was of Indian manufacture. He emptied the snuff from it, but it contained nothing else. He was convinced that the secret must be hidden there, and after in vain endeavoring to find a spring, he took a poker and hammered it, and as it bent a spring gave way, and showed a very shallow false bottom.

In this was a thin gold coin, evidently of considerable antiquity, and a small piece of paper, on which was written the word “Masulipatam.” John Thorndyke looked at it in bewilderment; that it was connected with the secret he felt certain, but alone it was absolutely useless. Doubtless his brother had intended to give him the key of the riddle, when he had so desperately striven to speak. After in vain thinking the matter over he said:

“Well, thank goodness; there is nothing to be done about the matter for another thirteen or fourteen years; it is of no use worrying about it now.” He went to an old fashioned cabinet, and placed the coin and piece of paper in a very cunningly devised secret drawer. The next morning he went out into the garden and dropped the battered snuffbox into the well, and then dismissed the subject from his mind.

CHAPTER II

Standing some two miles out of Reigate is the village of Crowswood, a quiet place and fairly well to do, thanks in no small degree to Squire Thorndyke, who owned the whole of the parish, and by whom and his tenants the greater portion of the village were employed. Greatly had the closing of the Manor House, after the death of old Squire Thorndyke, been felt. There were no more jellies, soups, and other comforts to be looked for in time of sickness, no abatement of rent when the breadwinner was sick or disabled, no check to the drunkards, whom the knowledge that they would be turned out of their cottage at a week's notice kept in some sort of order. When, therefore, after ten years of absence of all government, John Thorndyke, after the death of his brother, the Colonel, came down and took possession, he found the place sadly changed from what it had been when he had left it twenty years before. His first act was to dismiss Newman; who, completely unchecked, had, he found, been sadly mismanaging affairs. It was not long, however, before his hand made itself felt. Two out of the three public houses were shut up in six months, a score of their habitual frequenters had, weeks before, been turned out of their houses, an order had been issued that unless a cottage was kept in good order and the garden bright and blooming with flowers in the summer a fresh tenant would be found for it. Every child must be sent to the village school; the Squire was ready to do what there was to be done in the way of thatching and whitewashing, repairing palings and painting doors and windows, but, as he told the people, the village had to be kept clean and decent, and anyone who would not conform to the rules was at liberty to leave without a day's notice.

Many of the villagers grumbled under their breath, but public opinion was, on the whole, favorable. There was someone to look after them now, someone who would see that the greater portion of the wages was not spent at the alehouse, who would take an interest in the people, and would lend a helping hand in bad times. There was a feeling of regret that the Squire was a widower, but the post of visitor and almoner was well supplied by the lady who acted as companion and governess to the Squire's little ward and regulated the affairs of his household.

John Thorndyke had never had much occasion for the display of energy before, but he had an abundance of it, although hitherto latent. He had come into this business against his will, but he took it up with a determination to do well in it. The income was legally his until his niece came of age, but he was determined he would take nothing out of the estate beyond the necessary expenses of the position, and that all surplus should be expended in improving it in every way possible, so that he could hand it over to her in the most perfect condition. Therefore, when he came into possession he made a close inspection of the farms, with their houses, barns, and other tenements. Where he saw that the men were doing their best, that the hedges and fields were in good order, he did everything that was necessary without a word; but where there were slovenly farming and signs of neglect and carelessness, he spoke out his mind sharply.

"This has all got to be amended," he said. "What must be done I will do, but unless I see things well kept up, the fences in good order, the hedges cut, the cattle in good condition, and everything going on as it ought to be, out you go next Christmas. The estate at present is a disgrace to the county, but it shall not be so any longer if I can help it. I shall do my share, and anyone who is not prepared to do the same had better look out for another holding at once."

No one rejoiced more at the coming home of the Squire than Mr. Bastow, the Rector. He had had a pleasant time of it during the life of the old Squire. He was always a welcome guest at the house; Mr. Thorndyke had been ever ready to put his hand into his pocket for any repairs needed for the church, and bore on his shoulders almost the entire expense of the village school. In the latter respect there had been no falling off, he having given explicit instructions to his solicitors to pay his usual annual subscriptions to the school until his son's return from India. But with the death of the Squire the Rector had gradually lost all authority in the village.

For a time force of habit had had its effect, but as this wore out and the people recognized that he had no real authority things went from bad to worse. Drunken men would shout jeeringly as they passed the Rectory on their way home from the alehouse; women no longer feared reproof for the untidiness of their houses and children; the school was half emptied and the church almost wholly so.

For seven or eight years Mr. Bastow had a hard time of it. It was, then, both with pleasure as an old friend, and with renewed hopefulness for the village, that he visited John Thorndyke on his return. The change in the state of affairs was almost instantaneous. As soon as it became known that the Rector was backed, heart and soul, by the Squire's authority, and that a complaint from him was followed the next day by a notice to quit at the end of a week, his own authority was established as firmly as it had been in the old Squire's time, and in a couple of years Crowswood became quite a model village. Every garden blossomed with flowers; roses and eglantine clustered over the cottages, neatness and order prevailed everywhere.

The children were tidily dressed and respectful in manner, the women bright and cheerful, and the solitary alehouse remaining had but few customers, and those few were never allowed to transgress the bounds of moderation. The Squire had a talk with the landlord a fortnight after his arrival.

"I am not going to turn you out, Peters," he said. "I hear that you make some efforts to keep your house decently; the other two I shall send packing directly their terms are up. Whether you remain permanently must depend upon yourself. I will do up your house for you, and build a bar parlor alongside, where quiet men can sit and smoke their pipes and talk and take their beer in comfort, and have liberty to enjoy themselves as long as their enjoyment does not cause annoyance to other people or keep their wives and children in rags. I will do anything for you if I find the place well conducted; but I warn you that I will have no drunkenness. A man who, to my knowledge, gets drunk twice, will not get drunk a third time in this parish, and if you let men get drunk here it is your fault as much as theirs. Now we understand each other."

Things once placed on a satisfactory footing, the Squire had but little more trouble, and it soon came to be understood that he was not to be trifled with, and that Crowswood was no longer a place for the idle or shiftless. Two or three of the farmers left at the termination of their year, but better men took their places, and John Thorndyke, having settled matters to his satisfaction, now began to attend more to other affairs. He had been, when he first came back, welcomed with great heartiness by all the gentry of the neighborhood; his father had been a popular man, and young Thorndyke had been regarded as a pleasant young fellow, and would in any case have been welcomed, if only because Crowswood had become a nuisance to the whole district. It was, indeed, a sort of rendezvous for poachers and bad characters, it was more than suspected that gangs of thieves and burglars made it their headquarters, and that even highwaymen found it a convenient and quiet resort.

Thus, then, the transformation effected within a few months of Mr. Thorndyke's return caused general and lively satisfaction, and a year later he was put on the Commission of the Peace, and became one of the most regular attendants at the Bench of Magistrates. Reluctantly as he had taken up his present position, he found it, as time went on, a pleasant one. He had not been conscious before that time hung somewhat heavily on his hands, but here he had duties to perform and ample employment. His nature was naturally somewhat a masterful one, and both as a magistrate and a landlord he had scope and power of action. Occasionally he went up to London, always driving his gig, with a pair of fast trotting horses, and was known to the frequenters of the coffee houses chiefly patronized by country gentlemen. Altogether, John Thorndyke became quite a notable person in the district, and men were inclined to congratulate themselves upon the fact that he, and not the Indian officer, his brother, had come into the estate.

The idea of an old Indian officer in those days was that he was almost of necessity an invalid, and an irritable one, with a liver hopelessly deranged, a yellow complexion, and a hatred of the English climate. The fact that, instead of leaving the army and coming home at his father's death, George Thorndyke had chosen to remain abroad and leave the estate to the management of agents,

had specially prejudiced him in the eyes of the people of that part, and had heightened the warmth with which they had received his brother. John Thorndyke had upon the occasion, of his first visit to the family solicitors spoken his mind with much freedom as to the manner in which Newman had been allowed a free hand.

"Another ten years," he said, "and there would not have been a cottage habitable on the estate, nor a farm worth cultivating. He did absolutely nothing beyond collecting the rents. He let the whole place go to rack and ruin. The first day I arrived I sent him out of the house, with a talking to that he won't forget as long as he lives."

"We never heard any complaints about him, Mr. Thorndyke, except that I think we did once hear from the Rector of the place that his conduct was not satisfactory. I remember that we wrote to him about it, and he said that the Rector was a malignant fellow, on bad terms with all his parishioners."

"If I had the scoundrel here," John Thorndyke said with indignation, "I would let him have a taste of the lash of my dog whip. You should not have taken the fellow's word; you should have sent down someone to find out the true state of things. Why, the place has been an eyesore to the whole neighborhood, the resort of poaching, thieving rascals; by gad, if my brother George had gone down there I don't know what would have happened! It will cost a couple of years' rent to get things put straight."

When the Squire was at home there was scarce an evening when the Rector did not come up to smoke a pipe and take his glass of old Jamaica or Hollands with him.

"Look here, Bastow," the latter said, some three years after his return, "what are you going to do with that boy of yours? I hear bad reports of him from everyone; he gets into broils at the alehouse, and I hear that he consorts with a bad lot of fellows down at Reigate. One of my tenants—I won't mention names—complained to me that he had persecuted his daughter with his attentions. They say, he was recognized among that poaching gang that had an affray with Sir James Hartrop's keepers. The thing is becoming a gross scandal."

"I don't know what to do about him, Squire; the boy has always been a trouble to me. You see, before you came home, he got into bad hands in the village here. Of course they have all gone, but several of them only moved as far as Reigate, and he kept up their acquaintance. I thrashed him again and again, but he has got beyond that now, you see; he is nearly eighteen, and openly scoffs at my authority. Upon my word, I don't know what to do in the matter."

"He is growing up a thorough young ruffian," the Squire said indignantly, "and one of these mornings I expect to see him brought up before us charged with some serious offense. We had to fine him last week for being drunk and making a disturbance down at Reigate. Why do you let him have money? You may have no authority over him; but at least you should refuse to open your purse to him. Don't you see that this sort of thing is not only a disgrace to him, but very prejudicial to the village? What authority can you have for speaking against vice and drunkenness, when your son is constantly intoxicated?"

"I see that, Squire—none better; and I have thought of resigning my cure."

"Stuff and nonsense, Parson! If the young fellow persists in his present course he must leave the village, that is clear enough; but that is no reason why you should. The question is what is to be done with him? The best thing he could do would be to enlist. He might be of some service to his country, in India or the American Colonies, but so far as I can see he is only qualifying himself for a jail here."

"I have told him as much, Squire," Mr. Bastow said, in a depressed voice, "and he has simply laughed in my face, and said that he was very comfortable where he was, and had no idea whatever of moving."

"What time does he go out in the morning?" John Thorndyke asked abruptly.

"He never gets up till twelve o'clock, and has his breakfast when I take my dinner."

"Well, I will come in tomorrow morning and have a talk with him myself."

The next day the Squire rode up to the door of the Rectory soon after one o'clock. Mr. Bastow had just finished his meal; his son, a young fellow of between seventeen and eighteen, was lolling in an easy chair.

"I have come in principally to speak to you, young sir," John Thorndyke said quietly. "I have been asking your father what you intend to do with yourself. He says he does not know."

The young fellow looked up with an air of insolent effrontery.

"I don't know that it is any business of yours, Mr. Thorndyke, what I do with myself."

"Oh, yes, it is," the Squire replied. "This village and the people in it are mine. You are disturbing the village with your blackguard conduct; you are annoying some of the girls on the estate, and altogether you are making yourself a nuisance. I stopped at the alehouse as I came here, and have ordered the landlord to draw no more liquor for you, and unless you amend your conduct, and that quickly, I will have you out of the village altogether."

"I fancy, Mr. Thorndyke, that, even as a justice of the peace, you have not the power to dictate to my father who shall be the occupant of this house."

"What you say is perfectly true; but as you make your father's life a burden to him, and he is desirous of your absence, I can and will order the village constable to remove you from his house by force, if necessary."

The young fellow cast an evil glance at his father. "He has not been complaining, has he?" he said, with a sneer.

"He has not, sir," John Thorndyke said indignantly. "It is I who have been complaining to him, and he admits that you are altogether beyond his authority. I have pointed out to him that he is in no way obliged to support you at your age in idleness and dissipation, and that it were best for him and all concerned that he should close his doors to you. I don't want to have to send the son of my old friend to prison, but I can see well enough that that is what it will come to if you don't give up your evil courses. I should think you know by this time that I am a man of my word. I have taken some pains to purge this village of all bad characters, and I do not intend to have an exception made of the son of the clergyman, who, in his family as well as in his own person, is bound to set an example."

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, I utterly decline to obey your orders or to be guided by your advice."

"Very well, sir," the magistrate said sternly. "Mr. Bastow, do I understand that you desire that your son shall no longer remain an inmate of your house?"

"I do," the clergyman said firmly; "and if he does so I have no other course before me but to resign my living; my position here has become absolutely unbearable."

"Very well, sir, then you will please lock your doors tonight, and if he attempts to enter, I, as a magistrate, should know how to deal with him. Now, young sir, you understand your position; you may not take my advice, nevertheless, I shall give it you. The best thing you can do is to take your place for town on the outside of the coach that comes through Reigate this afternoon, and tomorrow morning proceed either to the recruiting officer for His Majesty's service, or to that for the East India Company's. You have health and strength, you will get rid at once of your bad associates, and will start afresh in a life in which you may redeem your past and be useful to your king and country."

Young Bastow smiled.

"Thanks," he said sarcastically. "I have my own plans, and shall follow them."

"I would think, Mr. Bastow," the Squire said quietly, "it would just be as well for you to come home with me. I don't think that the leave taking is likely to be an affectionate one."

The Rector rose at once.

"I will come with you, Squire. I may tell you now, what I have not told you before, that my son has more than once raised his hand against me, and that I do not care to be left alone with him."

"I judged him capable even of that, Mr. Bastow."

"Goodby, Arthur," his father said. "My heart is ready to break that it has come to this; but for both our sakes it is better so. Goodby, my son, and may Heaven lead you to better ways! If ever you

come to me and say, 'Father, I have turned over a new leaf, and heartily repent the trouble I have caused you,' you will receive a hearty welcome from me, and no words of reproach for the past."

The young man paid no attention to the offered hand, but laughed scornfully.

"You have not got rid of me yet," he said. "As for you, Squire Thorndyke, I shall not forget your meddlesome interference, and some day, maybe, you will be sorry for it."

"I think not," John Thorndyke said gravely. "I am doing my duty to the village, and still more I am doing my duty to an old friend, and I am not likely ever to feel any regret that I have so acted. Now, Parson, let's be off."

After leaving the house with the clergyman, the Squire stopped at the house of Knapp, the village constable; and said a few words to him, then, leading his horse, walked home with Mr. Bastow.

"Don't be cast down, old friend," he said. "It is a terrible trial to you; but it is one sharp wrench, and then it will be over. Anything is better than what you must have been suffering for some time."

"I quite feel that, Squire; my life has indeed been intolerable of late. I had a painful time before, but always looked forward with hope to your brother coming home. Since you returned, and matters in the parish have been put straight, this trouble has come in to take the place of the other, and I have felt that I would rather resign and beg for charity than see my son going from bad to worse, a scandal to the parish, and a hindrance to all good work."

"It is a bad business, Bastow, and it seems to me that two or three years in prison would be the best thing for him, as he will not take up the only trade open to him. At any rate, it would separate him from his evil associates, and give you peace while he is behind the bars. Where does he get his money?"

"That I know not, Squire. He takes some from me—it used to be done secretly, now it is done with threats, and, as I told you, with violence—but that would not account for his always having money. He must get it somewhere else, for when I have paid my bills, as I always do the hour that I receive money, there is but little over for him to take. He is often away all night, sometimes for two or three days together, and I dare not think what he does with himself; but certainly he gets money somehow, and I am afraid that I cannot hope it is honestly obtained."

"I do not well see how it can be," the Squire agreed.

"If I had before known as much as you tell me now, I would have taken some steps to have him watched, and to nip the matter before it went too far. Do you think that he will take your notice, and come no more to the house?"

Mr. Bastow shook his head.

"I fear that the only effect will be to make him worse, even when he was quite a small boy punishment only had that effect with him. He will come back tonight probably half drunk, and certainly furious at my having ventured to lay the case before you."

"You must lock the doors and bar the windows."

"I did that when he first took to being out at night, but he always managed to get in somehow."

"Well, it must be all put a stop to, Bastow; and I will come back with you this evening, and if this young rascal breaks into the house I will have him down at Reigate tomorrow on the charge of house breaking; or, at any rate, I will threaten to do so if he does not give a promise that he will in future keep away from you altogether."

"I shall be glad, at any rate, if you will come down, Squire, for, to say the truth, I feel uneasy as to the steps he may take in his fury at our conversation just now."

John Thorndyke took down from a wall a heavy hunting whip, as he went out with the parson at nine o'clock. He had in vain endeavored to cheer his old friend as they sat over their steaming glasses of Jamaica. The parson had never been a strong man; he was of a kindly disposition, and an unwearied worker when there was an opportunity for work, but he had always shrunk from unpleasantness, and was ready to yield rather than bring about trouble. He had for a long time suffered in silence, and had not the Squire himself approached the subject of his son's delinquencies, he would have never

opened his mouth about it. Now, however, that he had done so, and the Squire had taken the matter in hand, and had laid down what was to be done, though he trembled at the prospect, he did not even think of opposing his plan, and indeed could think of no alternative for it.

"I have told John Knapp to be here," the Squire said, as they reached the house. "It is just as well that he should be present if your son comes back again. He is a quiet, trustworthy fellow, and will keep his mouth shut if I tell him."

Mr. Bastow made no reply. It was terrible to him that there should be another witness to his son's conduct, but he saw that the Squire was right. An old woman opened the door.

"Are all the shutters closed and barred?" John Thorndyke asked her.

"Yes, sir; I always sees to that as soon as it gets dark."

"Very well; you can go to bed now, Elisa," her master said. "Is John Knapp here?"

"Yes, he came an hour ago, and is sitting in the kitchen."

"I will call him in myself when I want to speak to him."

As soon as the old servant had gone upstairs the Squire went into the kitchen, Mr. Bastow having gone to the cellar to fetch up a bottle of old brandy that was part of a two dozen case given to him by the old Squire fifteen years before.

"Do you go round the house, John, and see that everything is properly fastened up. I see that you have got a jug of beer there. You had better get a couple of hours' sleep on that settle. I shall keep watch, till I am sleepy, and then I will call you. Let me know if you find any of the doors or windows unbarred."

Five minutes later the constable knocked at the door of the parlor. "The door opening into the stable yard was unbarred, Squire."

"I thought it likely that it would be so, Knapp. You have made it fast now, I suppose? That is right. Now lie down and get an hour or two of sleep; it is scarce likely that he will be back until late.

"That was the old woman, of course," he went on to his companion, when the door closed behind the constable. "I thought it likely enough that he might tell her to leave a way for him to come in. You told me that she had been with you a good many years. I dare say she has left that door unbarred for him many a time. I should advise you to get a man to sleep in the house regularly; there are plenty of fellows who will be glad to do it for a shilling or two a week, and I do not think that it is safe for you to be here alone."

An hour later he said to the Rector: "Now, Bastow, you had best go to bed. I have taken the matter into my own hands, and will carry it through. However, I won't have him taken away without your being present, and will call you when we want you. Of course, if he will give a solemn promise not to molest you, and, even if he won't enlist, to leave this part of the country altogether, I shall let him off."

"There is one thing, Mr. Thorndyke, that I have not told you," the Rector said hesitatingly. "Sometimes, when he comes home late, he brings someone with him; I have heard voices downstairs. I have never seen who it was—for what could I have done if I went down?—but I have heard horses brought round to the stable yard, and heard them ride away:"

"It is just as well you told me," the Squire said dryly. "If you had told me this evening at the house, I would have dropped a brace of pistols into my pocket. However, this hunting crop is a good weapon; but I don't suppose they will show fight, even if anyone is with him. Besides, Knapp has a stout oaken cudgel with him—I noticed it standing against his chair as I went in—and as he is a strong active fellow, and we shall have the advantage of a surprise, I fancy we should be a match even for three or four of them."

At one o'clock the Squire roused John Knapp. "It is one o'clock, John; now take off your boots. I don't want him to know that there is anyone in the house till we get hold of him. I am going to lie down on the sofa in the parlor. The moment you hear footsteps you come and wake me."

The clock in the kitchen had just struck two when the constable shook John Thorndyke. "There are two horses just coming into the yard."

"All right. I opened a window in the room looking down into the yard before I lay down. I will go up and see what they are going to do. If they try to break in anywhere down here, do you come at once quietly up to me."

The Squire had taken off his boots before he lay down, and, holding his heavy hunting crop in his hand, he went quietly upstairs. As he went to the window he heard Arthur Bastow say angrily:

"Confound the old woman! she has locked the door; she has never played me that trick before. There is a ladder in the stable, and I will get in at that window up there and open it for you. Or you may as well come up that way, too, and then you can stow the things away in my room at once, and have done with it."

The Squire went hastily down.

"Come upstairs, Knapp," he whispered to the constable. "There are three of them, and I fancy the two mounted men are highwaymen. Let them all get in, keeping yourself well back from the window. The moon is round on the other side of the house, but it will be light enough for us to see them as they get in. I will take the last fellow, and I will warrant that he will give no trouble; then I will fall upon the second, and do you spring on young Bastow. The two highwaymen are sure to have pistols, and he may have some also. Give him a clip with that cudgel of yours first, then spring on him, and hold his arms tightly by his side. If I call you give him a back heel and throw him smartly, and then come to my aid. I don't think I shall want it, but it is as well to prepare for everything."

They went upstairs and took their places, one on each side of the window, standing three or four feet back. Just as they took up their positions the top of the stable ladder appeared above the sill of the window. Half a minute later young Bastow's head appeared, and he threw up the sash still higher, and stepped into the room; then he turned and helped two men in, one after the other.

"Follow me," he said, "then you won't tumble over the furniture."

As they turned, the heavy handle of John's Thorndyke's whip fell with tremendous force on the head of the last man.

"What the devil is that?" the other exclaimed, snatching out a pistol and turning round, as the falling body struck him, but he got no further. Again the heavy whip descended, this time on his right arm; it dropped useless by his side, and the pistol fell from his hand. Then John Thorndyke fell upon him and bore him to the ground, snatched the other pistol from his belt, and held it to his head.

"Now, my man," he said quietly, "if you don't surrender I will blow out your brains."

"I surrender," the man moaned. "I believe that you have broken my arm. Curse you, whoever you are."

The struggle between John Knapp and young Bastow was soon over. The young fellow was lithe and sinewy, but he was no match for the constable, who, indeed, had almost overpowered him before he was aware what had happened.

"Has he got pistols, Knapp?" the Squire asked.

"Yes, sir, a brace of them; I have got them both safely in my pocket. There," he went on, as a sharp click was heard, "I have got the darbys on him. Now shall I help you, sir?"

"You had better run downstairs first and light a couple of candles at the kitchen fire: you will find a pair standing on the parlor table. Don't be long about it; the first fellow I hit was stunned, and he may come round any moment."

"I will make sure of him before I go, Squire. I have got another pair of darbys in my pocket."

As soon as he had fastened these upon the wrists of the insensible man he ran downstairs, and in a minute returned with the candles.

"I am glad that you are back," the Squire said. "I was afraid that young rascal would try to escape."

“I took good care of that, Squire; you see I put one of his arms round the bedpost before I slipped the darbys on, and he cannot get away unless he takes the whole bed with him; and as I don't think he would get it out either by the window or the door, he is as safe here as he would be in Newgate. What is the next thing to do, Squire?”

“You had better tie this fellow's legs. I will leave you a candle here, and you can keep guard over them while I go and wake Mr. Bastow.”

The Rector needed no waking; he was walking up and down his room in great distress. He had not undressed, but had thrown himself upon his bed.

“What has happened, Thorndyke?” he asked as the Squire entered. “I heard two heavy falls, and I felt that something terrible had taken place.”

“Well, it has been a serious matter—very serious. That unfortunate son of yours is not hurt, but I don't know but that the best thing that could have happened would have been for him to have got a bullet through his head. He brought home with him two men who are, I have little doubt, highwaymen; anyhow, they each had a brace of pistols in their belt, and from what he said I think they have been stopping a coach. At any rate, they have something with them that they were going to hide here, and I fancy it is not the first time that it has been done. I don't expect your son had anything to do with the robbery, though he was carrying a brace of pistols, too; however, we have got them all three.

“Now, you see, Bastow, this takes the affair altogether out of our hands. I had hoped that when we caught your son in the act of breaking into your house after you had ordered him from it, we should be able to frighten him into enlisting, or, at any rate, into promising to disturb you no more, for even if we had taken him before the bench, nothing could have been done to him, for under such circumstances his re-entering the house could not be looked upon as an act of burglary. As it is, the affair is altogether changed. Even if I wished to do so, as a magistrate I could not release those two highwaymen; they must appear as prisoners in court. I shall hear down in the town tomorrow morning what coach has been stopped, and I have no doubt that they have on them the proceeds of the robbery. Your son was consorting with and aiding them, and acting as a receiver of stolen goods, and as you have heard horses here before it is probable that when his room is thoroughly searched we shall come upon a number of articles of the same sort. I am sorry that I ever meddled in the matter; but it is too late for that now. You had better come downstairs with me, and we will take a turn in the garden, and try to see what had best be done.”

CHAPTER III

John Thorndyke opened the shutters of the parlor window, and stepped out into the garden alone, for the Rector was too unnerved and shattered to go out with him, but threw himself on the sofa, completely prostrated. Half an hour later the Squire re-entered the room. The morning was just beginning to break. Mr. Bastow raised his head and looked sadly at him.

"I can see no way out of it, old friend. Were it not that he is in charge of the constable, I should have said that your only course was to aid your son to escape; but Knapp is a shrewd fellow as well as an honest one. You cannot possibly get your son away without his assistance, for he is handcuffed to the bed, and Knapp, in so serious a matter as this, would not, I am sure, lend himself to an escape. I have no doubt that with my influence with the other magistrates, and, indeed, on the circumstances of the case, they will commit him on a minor charge only, as the passengers of the coach will, I hope, give evidence that it was stopped by mounted men alone. I think, therefore, that he would only be charged with consorting with and aiding the highwaymen after the event, and of aiding them to conceal stolen goods—that is, if any are found in his room.

"That much stolen property has been hidden there, there is little reason to doubt, but it may have been removed shortly afterwards. It was, of course, very convenient for them to have some place where they could take things at once, and then ride on quietly to London the next day, for, if arrested; nothing would be found upon them, and it would be impossible to connect them with the robbery. Later on they might come back again and get them from him. Of course, if nothing is found in his room, we get rid of the charge of receiving altogether, and there would be nothing but harboring, aiding, and abetting—a much less serious business. Look here, old friend, I will strain a point. I will go out into the garden again and walk about for an hour, and while I am out, if you should take advantage of my absence to creep up to your son's room and to search it thoroughly, examining every board of the floor to see if it is loose, and should you find anything concealed, to take it and hide it, of course I cannot help it. The things, if there are any, might secretly be packed up by you in a box and sent up to Bow Street, with a line inside, saying that they are proceeds of robbery, and that you hope the owners will be traced and their property restored to them. Not, of course, in your own hand, and without a signature. There might be some little trouble in managing it, but it could, no doubt, be done."

John Thorndyke went out into the garden without another word. The hour was nearly up when Mr. Bastow came out; he looked ten years older than he had done on the previous day. He wrung his friend's hand.

"Thank God I have been up there," he said. "I do not think they will find anything."

"Say nothing about it, Bastow; I don't want to know whether you found anything. Now I am going to fetch two or three of the men from the village, to get them to aid the constable in keeping guard, and another to go up to the house at once and order a groom to saddle one of my horses and bring it here."

As it was now past five o'clock, and the Squire found most of the men getting up, he sent one off to the house with the message, and returned with two others to the Rectory. He told them briefly that two highwaymen had been arrested during the night, and that as young Mr. Bastow was in their company at the time, it had been necessary as a matter of form to arrest him also. He went upstairs with them.

"I have brought up two men to sit with you, Knapp, until the Reigate constables come up. You can take those handcuffs off Mr. Bastow, but see that he does not leave the room, and do you yourself sit in a chair against the door, and place one of these men at the window. How about others?"

"The man you hit first, Squire, did not move until a quarter of an hour ago; he has been muttering to himself since, but I don't think he is sensible. The other one has been quiet enough, but there is no doubt that his arm is broken."

"I am going to ride down to Reigate at once, and will bring back a surgeon with me."

"You will repent this night's business, Thorndyke!" Arthur Bastow said threateningly.

"I fancy that you will repent it more than I shall, Bastow; it is likely that you will have plenty of time to do so."

It was not long before the groom with the horse arrived. John Thorndyke rode at a gallop down to Reigate, and first called on the head constable.

"Dawney," he said, as the man came down, partially dressed, at his summons, "has anything taken place during the night?"

"Yes, Squire, the up coach was stopped a mile before it got here, and the passengers robbed. It was due here at one, and did not come in till half an hour later. Of course I was sent for. The guard was shot. There were two of the fellows. He let fly with his blunderbuss, but he does not seem to have hit either of them, and one rode up and shot him dead; then they robbed all the passengers. They got six gold watches, some rings, and, adding up the amounts taken from all the passengers, about a hundred and fifty pounds in money."

"Well, I fancy I have got your two highwaymen safe, *Dawney*."

"You have, sir?" the constable said in astonishment.

"Yes. I happened to be at the Rectory. Mr. Bastow had had a quarrel with his son, and had forbidden him the house."

The constable shook his head. "I am afraid he is a very bad one, that young chap."

"I am afraid he is, *Dawney*. However, his father was afraid that he might come in during the night and make a scene, so I said I would stop with him, and I took our village constable with me. At two o'clock this morning the young fellow came with two mounted men, who, I have no doubt, were highwaymen. We had locked up down below. Bastow took a ladder, and the three got in at a bedroom window on the first floor. Knapp and I were waiting for them there, and, taking them by surprise, succeeded in capturing them before the highwaymen could use their pistols. The constable and two men are looking after them, but as one has not got over a knock I gave him on the head, and the other has a broken arm, there is little fear of their making their escape. You had better go up with two of your men, and take a light cart with you with some straw in the bottom, and bring them all down here. I will ride round myself to Mr. Chetwynde, Sir Charles Harris, and Mr. Merchison, and we will sit at twelve o'clock. You can send round a constable with the usual letters to the others, but those three will be quite enough for the preliminary examination."

"Well, Squire, that is good news indeed. We have had the coach held up so often within five miles of this place during the past three months, that we have been getting quite a bad name. And to think that young Bastow was in it! I have heard some queer stories about him, and fancied before long I should have to put my hand upon his shoulder; but I didn't expect this."

"There is not a shadow of proof that he had anything to do with the robbery, *Dawney*, but he will have difficulty in proving that he did not afterwards abet them. It is serious enough as it is, and I am terribly grieved for his father's sake."

"Yes, sir; I have always heard him spoken of as a kind gentleman, and one who took a lot of trouble whenever anyone was sick. Well, sir, I will be off in twenty minutes. I will run round at once and send Dr. Hewett up to the Rectory, and a man shall start on horseback at seven o'clock with the summons to the other magistrates."

John Thorndyke rode round to his three fellow magistrates, who, living nearest to the town, were most regular in their attendance at the meetings. They all listened in surprise to his narrative, and expressed great pleasure at hearing that the men who had been such a pest to the neighborhood, and had caused them all personally a great deal of trouble, had been captured. All had heard tales, too, of Arthur Bastow's disadvantage, and expressed great commiseration for his father. They agreed to meet at the court half an hour before business began, to talk the matter over together.

"It is out of the question that we can release him on bail," the gentleman who was chairman of the bench said. "Quite so," John Thorndyke agreed. "In the first place, the matter is too serious; and in the next, he certainly would not be able to find bail; and lastly, for his father's sake, it is inadvisable that he should be let out. At the same time, it appears to me that there is a broad distinction between his case and the others. I fear that there can be no question that he had prior acquaintance with these men, and that he was cognizant of the whole business; something I heard him say, and which, to my regret, I shall have to repeat in court, almost proves that he was so. Still, let us hope none of the stolen property will be found upon him; whether they had intended to pass it over to his care or not is immaterial. If they had not done so, I doubt whether he could be charged with receiving stolen goods, and we might make the charge simply one of aiding these two criminals, and of being so far an accessory after the crime.

"If we could soften it down still further I should, for his father's sake, be glad; but as far as he himself is concerned, I would do nothing to lighten his punishment. He is about as bad a specimen of human nature as I ever came across. His father is in bodily fear of him. I saw the young fellow yesterday, and urged him to enlist, in order to break himself loose from the bad companionship he had fallen into. His reply was insolent and defiant in the highest degree, and it was then that in his father's name I forbade him the house, and as his father was present he confirmed what I said, and told him that he would not have anything more to do with him. This affair may do him good, and save his neck from a noose. A few years at the hulks or a passage to Botany Bay will do him no harm; and, at any rate, his father will have rest and peace, which he never would have if he remained here."

A somewhat similar conversation took place at each house. John Thorndyke breakfasted at Sir Charles Harris', the last of the three upon whom he called, and then mounting rode back to Reigate.

"We have found the plunder on them," the head constable said, coming out of the lockup as he drew rein before it, "and, fortunately for young Bastow, nothing was found upon him."

"How are the two men?"

"The fellow you hit first is conscious now, sir, but very weak. The doctor says that if he hadn't had a thick hat on, your blow would have killed him to a certainty. The other man's arm is set and bandaged, and he is all right otherwise. We shall be able to have them both in court at twelve o'clock."

The Squire rode up to his house. He was met at the door by his son, in a state of great excitement.

"Is it all true, father? The news has come from the village that you have killed two men, and that they and Arthur Bastow have all been taken away in a cart, guarded by constables."

"As usual, Mark, rumor has exaggerated matters. There are no dead men; one certainly got a crack on the head that rendered him insensible for some time, and another's arm is broken."

"And are they highwaymen, father? They say that two horses were fastened behind the cart."

"That is what we are going to try, Mark. Until their guilt is proved, no one knows whether they are highwaymen or not."

"And why is Arthur Bastow taken, father?"

"Simply because he was in company with the others. Now, you need not ask any more questions, but if you like to get your pony saddled and ride down with me to Reigate at eleven o'clock, I will get you into the courthouse, and then you will hear all about it."

At greater length the Squire went into the matter with Mrs. Cunningham, his lady housekeeper, and his ward's governess.

"It is a bad business, Mr. Thorndyke," she said, "and must be terrible for poor Mr. Bastow."

"Yes, it is a bad business altogether, except that it will rid him of this young rascal. If I were in his place I should be ready to suffer a good deal to obtain such a riddance."

"I suppose that you won't sit upon the bench today?"

"No; at least I shall take no part in the deliberations. I shall, of course, give evidence. The affair is not likely to last very long; my story will take the longest to tell. Knapp's will be confirmatory of mine, and the Reigate constable will depose to finding the watches, rings, and money upon them; then,

of course, the case will be adjourned for the attendance of the coachman and some of the passengers. I don't suppose they will be able to swear to their identity, for no doubt they were masked. But that is immaterial; the discovery of the stolen property upon them will be sufficient to hang them. No doubt we shall have some Bow Streets runners down from town tomorrow or next day, and they will most likely be able to say who the fellows are."

"Will Mr. Bastow have to give evidence against his son?"

"Not before us, I think; but I imagine he will have to appear at the trial."

"It will be terrible for him."

"Yes, terrible. I sincerely hope that they will not summon him, but I am afraid that there is very little doubt about it; they are sure to want to know about his son's general conduct, though possibly the testimony on that point of the constable at Reigate will be sufficient. My own hope is that he will get a long sentence; at any rate, one long enough to insure his not coming back during his father's lifetime. If you had seen his manner when we were talking to him yesterday, you would believe that he is capable of anything. I have had a good many bad characters before me during the year and a half that I have sat upon the bench, but I am bound to say that I never saw one who was to my eyes so thoroughly evil as this young fellow. I don't think," he added with a smile, "that I should feel quite comfortable myself if he were acquitted; it will be a long time before I shall forget the expression of his face when he said to me this morning, 'You will repent this night's work, Thorndyke.'"

"You don't mean that you think he would do you any harm, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"Well, I should not care to meet him in a lonely place if he was armed and I was not. But you need not be nervous, Mrs. Cunningham, there is not the smallest chance of his being out for years; and by that time his blood will have had time to cool down, and he will have learnt, at any rate, that crimes cannot be committed in this country with impunity."

"It is all very shocking," the lady said. "What will poor Mr. Bastow do? I should think that he would not like to remain as clergyman here, where everyone knows about it."

"That must be for him to decide," the Squire said; "but if he wishes to resign I certainly shall not press him to continue to hold the living. He is a very old friend of mine. My father presented the living to him when I was nine or ten years old, and I may say I saw him daily up to the time when I went down into Sussex. If he resigns I should urge him to take up his residence here and to act as Mark's tutor; and he might also relieve you of some of Millicent's lessons. You have plenty to do in looking after the management of things in general. However, that is for the future."

At eleven o'clock the Squire drove down to Reigate, taking Mark with him, as it would save all trouble about putting up the horse and pony. On arriving he handed Mark over to the head constable, and asked him to pass him into a seat in the courthouse, before the public were let in.

Reigate was in a state of unusual excitement. That the coach should have been stopped and robbed was too common an event to excite much interest, but that two highwaymen should have been captured, and, as was rumored, a young gentleman brought in on a charge of being in connection with them, caused a thrill of excitement. Quite a small crowd was assembled before the courthouse, and the name of Squire Thorndyke passed from mouth to mouth.

"There is some talk of his being mixed up with it in some way or other," one said. "I saw him myself ride in here, about half past five, and I wondered he was about so early. Some do say as he caught the two highwaymen single handed; but that don't stand to reason. Besides, what could he have been doing out at such an hour as that? He is a good landlord, and they say that Crowswood has been quite a different place since he came to be master. He is a tight hand as a magistrate, and cleared out half the village the first two or three months he was there; but he spent a mint of money on the place, and the people there say that they could not have a better master. Ah, here is Squire Chetwynd. He was sure to be here. There is Sir Charles' gig turning the corner. I expect most of them will be on the bench; they don't get such a case as this every day."

"It may be there will be nothing for us to hear when the court opens," another said. "I hear both the fellows have been shot or knocked about so bad that they cannot be brought up. Of course the court cannot sit if they aint before it."

"That is not so, Master Jones. I spoke to one of the constables half an hour ago—he lives next door to me—and he said that they would be well enough to appear. Neither of them have been shot, though they have been hurt pretty bad."

All this added to the desire of those around to get into the court, and there was quite a rush when the doors were opened two minutes before twelve, and it was at once crammed, the constable having some difficulty in getting the doors shut, and in persuading those who could not get in that there was not standing room for another person. There was a buzz of talk in court until the door opened and six magistrates came in. It was observed that John Thorndyke did not seat himself with the others, but moved his chair a little apart from them, thus confirming the report that he was in some way connected with the matter, and did not intend to take any part in the decision. Then another door opened, and the three prisoners were brought in. The two first were pale and evidently weak; one had his head wrapped in bandages, the other had the right sleeve of his coat cut off, and his arm bandaged and supported by a sling. Both made a resolute effort to preserve a careless demeanor. The third, who was some years younger than the others, looked round with a smile on his lips, bowed to the magistrates with an air of insolent bravado when he was placed in the dock, and then leaned easily in the corner, as if indifferent to the whole business. A chair was placed between his comrades for the use of the man whose head was bandaged. Many among those present knew Arthur Bastow by sight, and his name passed from mouth to mouth; but the usher called loudly for silence, and then the magistrates' clerk rose.

"William Smith and John Brown—at least, these are the names given—are charged with stopping the South Coast coach last night, killing the guard, and robbing the passengers; and Arthur Bastow is charged with aiding and abetting the other two prisoners, and with guilty knowledge of their crime."

It was noticed by those who could see the prisoners' faces that, in spite of Bastow's air of indifference, there was an expression of anxiety on his face as the charge was read, and he undoubtedly felt relief as that against himself was mentioned. The first witness was John Knapp, and the constable stepped into the witness box.

"What do you know of this business, Knapp?" the chairman asked. "Just tell it your own way."

"I am constable of Crowswood, your honor, and yesterday Squire Thorndyke said to me—"

"No, you must not tell it like that, Knapp; you must not repeat what another person said to you. You can say that from information received you did so and so."

"Yes, your honor. From information received I went to the Rev. Mr. Bastow's house, at a quarter to nine last night. At nine o'clock Squire Thorndyke and the Parson came in together. They sent the servant up to bed, and then the Squire sent me round to examine the fastenings of the doors. I found that one back door had been left unfastened, and locked and bolted it. The Squire told me to lie down until one o'clock, and he would watch, and Mr. Bastow went up to bed."

"Do you know of your own knowledge why these precautions were taken?"

"Only from what I was told, your honor. At one o'clock the Squire woke me, and he lay down in the parlor, telling me to call him if I heard any movement outside. About two o'clock I heard two horses come into the Parson's yard. I called Squire Thorndyke, who went upstairs to an open window; presently someone came and tried the back door. I heard voices outside, but could not hear what was said. The Squire came down and called me upstairs. I went up and took my place at one side of the window, and the Squire took his on the other. I had this cudgel in my hand, and the Squire his riding whip. A ladder was put up against the window, and then someone came up, lifted the sash up high and got in. There was light enough for me to see it was young Mr. Bastow. Then the two other

prisoners came up. When the third had got into the room Mr. Bastow said, 'Follow me, and then you won't tumble over the furniture.'

"How was it that they did not see you and Mr. Thorndyke?" the chairman asked.

"We were standing well back, your honor. The moon was on the other side of the house. There was light enough for us to see them as they got in at the window, but where we were standing it was quite dark, especially to chaps who had just come in from the moonlight. As they moved, the Squire hit the last of them a clout on the head with his hunting crop, and down he went, as if shot. The man next to him turned, but I did not see what took place, for, as the Squire had ordered me, I made a rush at Mr. Bastow and got my arms round him pretty tight, so as to prevent him using his pistols, if he had any. He struggled hard, but without saying a word, till I got my heel behind his and threw him on his back. I came down on the top of him; then I got the pistols out of his belt and threw them on the bed, slipped the handcuffs onto one wrist, lifted him up a bit, and then shoved him up against the bedpost, and got the handcuff onto his other wrist, so that he could not shift away, having the post in between his arms.

"Then I went to see if the Squire wanted any help, but he didn't. I first handcuffed the man whose head he had broken, and tied the legs of the other, and then kept guard over them till morning. When the constables came up from town we searched the prisoners, and on two of them found the watches, money, and rings. We found nothing on Mr. Bastow. I went with the head constable to Mr. Bastow's room and searched it thoroughly, but found nothing whatever there."

The evidence created a great sensation in court. John Thorndyke had first intended to ask Knapp not to make any mention of the fact that Arthur Bastow was carrying pistols unless the question was directly put to him. But the more he had thought over the matter, the more convinced was he that the heavier the sentence the better it would be for the Rector; and when he had heard from the latter that there was nothing left in his son's room that could be brought against him, and that he could not be charged with the capital crime of being a receiver, he thought it best to let matters take their course.

The head constable was the next witness. He deposed to the finding of the articles produced upon the two elder prisoners and the unsuccessful search of the younger prisoner's room.

"You did not search the house further?" the chairman inquired.

"No, sir; I wanted to get the prisoners down here as fast as I could, seeing that two of them were seriously hurt."

The chairman nodded.

"You will, of course, make a careful search of the whole house, constable."

"Yes, sir; I left one of my men up there with instructions to allow no one to go upstairs until I returned."

"Quite right."

John Thorndyke was the next witness, and his evidence cleared up what had hitherto been a mystery to the general body of the public, as to how he and the constable happened to be in the house on watch when the highwaymen arrived. The most important part of his evidence was the repetition of the words young Bastow had used as he mounted the ladder, as they showed that it was arranged between the prisoners that the stolen goods should be hidden in the house. The Squire was only asked one or two questions.

"I suppose, Mr. Thorndyke, that you had no idea whatever that the younger prisoner would be accompanied by anyone else when he returned home?"

"Not the slightest," the Squire replied. "I was there simply to prevent this unfortunate lad from entering the house, when perhaps he might have used violence towards his father. My intention was to seize him if he did so, and to give him the choice of enlisting, as I had urged him to do, or of being brought before this bench for breaking into his father's house. I felt that anything was better than his continuing in the evil courses on which he seemed bent."

"Thank you, Mr. Thorndyke. I must compliment you in the name of my brother magistrates, and I may say of the public, for the manner in which you, at considerable risk to yourself, have effected the capture of the two elder prisoners."

After consulting with the others the head constable was recalled.

"Do you know anything about the character of the youngest prisoner?"

"Yes, sir. We have had our eye upon him for some time. He was brought before your honors a week ago charged with being drunk and disorderly in this town, and was fined 5 pounds. He is constantly drinking with some of the worst characters in the place, and is strongly suspected of having been concerned in the fray between the poachers and Sir Charles Harris' gamekeepers. Two of the latter said that they recognized him amongst the poachers, but as they both declined to swear to him we did not arrest him."

John Knapp was then recalled, and testified to Bastow's drinking habits, and that the landlord of the alehouse at Crowswood had been ordered by the Squire not to draw any liquor for him in future on pain of having the renewal of his license refused.

"Have you any more witnesses to call?" the chairman asked the head constable.

"Not at present, your honor. We have sent up to town, and on the next occasion the coachman will be called to testify to the shooting of the guard, and we hope to have some of the passengers there to identify the articles stolen from them."

"It will be necessary that the Rev. Mr. Bastow should be here. He need not be called to give evidence unless we think it to be of importance, but he had better be in attendance. The prisoners are remanded until this day week."

An hour later the three prisoners, handcuffed, were driven under an escort of three armed constables to Croydon Jail. When again brought up in court the passengers on the coach identified the articles taken from them; the coachman gave evidence of the stopping of the coach, and of the shooting of the guard. The head constable testified that he had searched the Rectory from top to bottom, and found nothing whatever of a suspicious nature. None of the passengers were able to testify to the two elder prisoners as the men who had robbed them, as these had been masked, but the height and dress corresponded to those of the prisoners; and the two Bow Street runners then came forward, and gave evidence that the two elder prisoners were well known to them. They had long been suspected of being highwaymen, and had several times been arrested when riding towards London on occasions when a coach had been stopped the night before, but no stolen goods had ever been found upon them, and in no case had the passengers been able to swear to their identity. One was known among his associates as "Gallop Bill," the other as the "Downy One." At the conclusion of the evidence the three prisoners were formally committed for trial, the magistrates having retired in consultation for some time upon the question of whether the charge of receiving stolen goods ought to be made against Arthur Bastow.

"I think, gentlemen," the chairman said, after a good deal had been urged on both sides of the question, "in this case we can afford to take a merciful view. In the first place, no stolen goods were discovered upon him or in the house. There is strong presumptive evidence of his intention, but intention is not a crime, and even were the evidence stronger than it is, I should be inclined to take a merciful view. There can be no doubt that the young fellow is thoroughly bad, and the bravado he has exhibited throughout the hearing is at once unbecoming and disgraceful; but we must remember that he is not yet eighteen, and that, in the second place, he is the son of a much respected clergyman, who is our neighbor. The matter is serious enough for him as it stands, and he is certain to have a very heavy sentence."

"Mr. Thorndyke, who takes no part in our deliberations, is most anxious that the prisoner's father should be spared the agony of his son being placed on trial on a capital charge, though I do not think that there would be the smallest chance of his being executed, for the judges would be certain to take his youth into consideration. Had there been prima facie evidence of concealment, we must

have done our duty and sent him to trial on that charge; but as there is no such evidence, I think that it will be in all respects better to send him on a charge on which the evidence is as clear as noonday. Moreover, I think that Mr. Thorndyke's wishes should have some weight with us, seeing that it is entirely due to him that the important capture of these highwaymen, who have long been a scourge to this neighborhood, has been effected."

Mr. Bastow had not been called as a witness. John Thorndyke had brought him down to Reigate in a closed carriage, and he had waited in the justices' room while the examination went on; but the magistrates agreed that the evidence given was amply sufficient for them to commit upon without given him the pain of appearing. John Thorndyke had taken him to another room while the magistrates were consulting together, and when he heard the result drove him back again.

"I have fully made up my mind to resign my living, Thorndyke. I could not stand up and preach to the villagers of their duties when I myself have failed so signally in training my own son; nor visit their houses and presume to lecture them on their shortcomings when my son is a convicted criminal."

"I quite see that, old friend," the Squire said. "And I had no doubt but that you would decide on this course. I will try not to persuade you to change your decision, for I feel that your power of usefulness is at an end as far as the village is concerned. May I ask what you propose to do? I can hardly suppose that your savings have been large."

"Two years ago I had some hundreds laid by, but they have dwindled away to nothing; you can understand how. For a time it was given freely, then reluctantly; then I declared I would give no more, but he took it all the same—he knew well enough that I could never prosecute him for forgery."

"As bad as that, eh?" Thorndyke said sternly. "Well, we won't talk further of him now; what I propose is that you should take up your abode at the Hall. I am not satisfied with the school where Mark has been for the last two years, and I have been hesitating whether to get a private tutor for him or to send him to one of the public schools. I know that that would be best, but I could not bring myself to do so. I have some troubles of my own that but two or three people know of, and now, that everything is going on smoothly on the estate and in the village, I often feel dull, and the boy's companionship does me much good; and as he knows many lads of his own age in the neighborhood now, I think that he would do just as well at home.

"He will be taking to shooting and hunting before long, and if he is to have a tutor, there is no one I should like to have better than yourself. You know all the people, and we could talk comfortably together of an evening when the house is quiet. Altogether, it will be an excellent arrangement for me. You would have your own room, and if I have company you need not join us unless you like. The house would not seem like itself without you, for you have been associated with it as long as I can remember. As to your going out into the world at the age of sixty, it would be little short of madness. There—you need not give me an answer now," he went on, seeing that the Rector was too broken down to speak; "but I am sure that when you think it over you will come to the same conclusion as I do, that it will be the best plan possible for us both."

CHAPTER IV

The trial of the two highwaymen and Arthur Bastow came off in due course. The evidence given was similar to that offered at Reigate, the only addition being that Mr. Bastow was himself put into the box. The counsel for the prosecution said: "I am sorry to have to call you, Mr. Bastow. We all feel most deeply for you, and I will ask you only two or three questions. Was your son frequently out at night?"

"He was."

"Did you often hear him return?"

"Yes; I seldom went to sleep until he came back."

"Had you any reason to suppose that others returned with him?"

"I never saw any others."

"But you might have heard them without seeing them. Please tell us if you ever heard voices."

"Yes, I have heard men's voices," the clergyman said reluctantly, in a low voice.

"One more question, and I have done. Have you on some occasions heard the sound of horses' hoofs in your yard at about the time that your son came in?"

Mr. Bastow said in a low voice: "I have."

"Had you any suspicion whatever of the character of your son's visitors?"

"None whatever. I supposed that those with him were companions with whom he had been spending the evening."

Mr. Bastow had to be assisted from the witness box, so overcome was he with the ordeal. He had not glanced at his son while giving his evidence. The latter and his two fellow prisoners maintained throughout the trial their expression of indifference. The two highwaymen nodded to acquaintances they saw in the body of the court, smiled at various points in the evidence, and so conducted themselves that there were murmured exclamations of approval of their gameness on the part of the lower class of the public. The jury, without a moment's hesitation, found them all guilty of the offenses with which they were charged. Bastow was first sentenced.

"Young man," the judge said, "young as you are, there can be no doubt whatever in the minds of anyone who has heard the evidence that you have been an associate with these men who have been found guilty of highway robbery accompanied by murder. I consider that a merciful view was taken of your case by the magistrates who committed you for trial, for the evidence of your heartbroken father, on whose gray hairs your conduct has brought trouble and disgrace, leaves no doubt that you have for some time been in league with highwaymen, although not actually participating in their crime. The words overheard by Mr. Thorndyke show that you were prepared to hide their booty for them, and it is well for you that you were captured before this was done, and that no proceeds of other robberies were found in the house. The evidence of the Bow Street officers show that it had for some time been suspected that these men had an accomplice somewhere in the neighborhood of Reigate, for although arrested several times under circumstances forming a strong assumption of their guilt, nothing was ever found upon them. There can now be little, doubt who their accomplice was. Had you been an older man I should have sentenced you to transportation for life, but in consideration of your youth, I shall take the milder course of sentencing you to fifteen years' transportation."

The capital sentence was then passed in much fewer words upon the two highwaymen. As they were leaving the dock Bastow turned, and in a clear voice said to John Thorndyke, who had been accommodated with a seat in the well of the court:

"I have to thank you, Thorndyke, for this. I will pay off my debt some day, you make take your oath."

"A sad case, Mr. Thorndyke—a sad case," the judge, who had greatly complimented the Squire on his conduct, said to him as he was disrobing afterwards. "I don't know that in all my experience I

ever saw such a hardened young villain. With highwaymen it is a point of honor to assume a gayety of demeanor on such occasions; but to see a boy of eighteen, never before convicted, exhibiting such coolness and effrontery is quite beyond my experience. I suppose his record is altogether bad?"

"Altogether," the Squire said. "His father has, during the last two years, been quite broken by it; he owed to me that he was in bodily fear of the lad, who had on several occasions assaulted him, had robbed him of his savings by means of forgery, and was so hopelessly bad that he himself thought with me that the only possible hope for him was to get him to enlist. I myself recommended the East India Company's service, thinking that he would have less opportunity for crime out there, and that there would be a strong chance that either fever or a bullet would carry him off, for I own that I have not the slightest hope of reformation in such a character."

"I would have given him transportation for life if I had known all this," the judge said. "However, it is not likely that he will ever come back again—very few of them do; the hulks are not the most healthy places in the world, and they have a pretty rough way with men who give them trouble, as this young fellow is likely to do."

Mr. Bastow, as soon as he had given his evidence, had taken a hackney coach to the inn where he and the Squire had put up on their arrival in town the evening before, and here, on his return, John Thorndyke found him. He was lying on his bed in a state of prostration.

"Cheer up, Bastow," he said, putting his hand upon the Rector's shoulder. "The sentence is fifteen years, which was the very amount I hoped that he would get. The more one sees of him the more hopeless it is to expect that any change will ever take place in him; and it is infinitely better that he should be across the sea where his conduct, when his term is over, can affect no one. The disgrace, such as it is, to his friends, is no greater in a long term than in a short one. Had he got off with four or five years' imprisonment, he would have been a perpetual trouble and a source of uneasiness, not to say alarm; and even had he left you alone we should always have been in a state of dread as to his next offense. Better that he should be out in the colonies than be hung at Tyburn."

"How did he take the sentence?"

"With the same bravado he had shown all through, and as he went out of the dock addressed a threat to me, that, under the circumstances, I can very well afford to despise. Now, if you will take my advice, you will drink a couple of glasses of good port, and then go to bed. I will see to your being awakened at seven o'clock, which will give us time to breakfast comfortably, and to make a start at nine."

"I would rather not have the wine," the Rector said feebly.

"Yes, but you must take what is good for you. I have ordered up a bottle of the landlord's best, and must insist upon your drinking a couple of glasses with me. I want it almost as much as you do, for the atmosphere of that court was enough to poison a dog. I have got the taste of it in my mouth still."

With much reluctance the Rector accompanied him to the private sitting room that the Squire had engaged. He sat down almost mechanically in an easy chair. The Squire poured out the wine, and handed him a glass. Mr. Bastow at first put it to his lips without glancing at it, but he was a connoisseur in wine, and the bouquet of the port appealing to his latent senses, he took a sip, and then another, appreciatingly.

"The landlord said it was first rate, and he is not far wrong," John Thorndyke remarked, as he set down his own glass.

"Yes, it is a fine vintage, and in perfect condition," Mr. Bastow agreed. "I have drunk nothing better for years, though you have some fine bins."

"I would take a biscuit, if I were you, before I took another glass," the Squire said, helping himself from a plate on the table. "You have had nothing to eat today, and you want something badly. I have a dish of kidneys coming up in half an hour; they cook them well here."

The Rector ate a biscuit, mechanically sipped another glass of wine, and was even able to eat a kidney when they were brought up. Although September was not yet out, the Squire had a fire lighted

in the room, and after the meal was over, and two steaming tumblers of punch were placed upon the table, he took a long pipe from the mantel, filled and lighted it, then filled another, and handed it to the Rector, at the same time holding out a light to him.

"Life has its consolations," he said. "You have had a lot of troubles one way and another, Bastow, but we may hope that they are all over now, and that life will go more smoothly and easily with you. We had better leave the past alone for the present. I call this snug: a good fire, a clean pipe, a comfortable chair, and a steaming bowl at one's elbow."

The Rector smiled faintly.

"It seems unnatural—" he began.

"Not at all, not at all," the Squire broke in. "You have had a tremendous load on your mind, and now it is lifted off; the thundercloud has burst, and though damage has been done, one is thankful that it is no worse. Now I can talk to you of a matter that has been on my mind for the last three weeks. What steps do you think that I ought to take to find a successor for you? It is most important to have a man who will be a real help in the parish, as you have been, would pull with one comfortably, and be a pleasant associate. I don't want too young a fellow, and I don't want too old a one. I have no more idea how to set about it than a child. Of course, I could ask the Bishop to appoint, but I don't know that he would appoint at all the sort of man I want. The living is only worth 200 pounds a year and the house—no very great catch; but there is many a man that would be glad to have it."

"I have been thinking it over, too, Thorndyke, when I could bring my mind to consider anything but my own affairs. How would Greg do? He has been taking duty for me since I could not do it myself. I know that he is a hard working fellow, and he has a wife and a couple of children; his curacy is only 70 pounds a year, and it would be a perfect godsend, for he has no interest in the Church, and he might be years without preferment."

"I should think he would do very well, Bastow. Yes, he reads well, which I own I care for that a good deal more than for the preaching; not that I have anything to say against that. He gives sound and practical sermons, and they have the advantage of being short, which is a great thing. In the first place, it is good in itself, and in the second, specially important in a village congregation, where you know very well every woman present is fidgeting to get home to see that the pot is not boiling over, and the meat in the oven is not burnt. Yes, I will go down tomorrow afternoon and ask him if he would like the living. You were talking of selling the furniture; how much do you suppose it is worth?"

"I don't suppose it will fetch above seventy or eighty pounds; it is solid and good, but as I have had it in use nearly forty years, it would not go for much."

"Well, let us say a hundred pounds," the Squire said. "I will give you a check for it. I dare say Greg will find it difficult to furnish, and he might have to borrow the money, and the debt would be a millstone round his neck, perhaps, for years, so I will hand it over with the Rectory to him."

So they talked for an hour or two on village matters, and the Squire was well pleased, when his old friend went up to bed, that he had succeeded in diverting his thoughts for a time from the painful subject that had engrossed them for weeks.

"You have slept well," he said, when they met at breakfast, "I can see by your face."

"Yes, I have not slept so soundly for months. I went to sleep as soon as my head touched the pillow, and did not awake until the chambermaid knocked at the door."

"That second glass of punch did it, Bastow. It is a fine morning; we shall have a brisk drive back. I am very glad that I changed my mind and brought the gig instead of the close carriage."

In the afternoon the Squire drove into Reigate. He found the curate at home, and astonished and delighted him by asking him if he would like the living of Crowswood. It came altogether as a surprise to him, for the Rector's intentions to resign had not been made public, and it was supposed in the village that he was only staying at the Squire's until this sad affair should be over. Greg was a man of seven or eight and twenty, had graduated with distinction at Cambridge, but, having no influence, had no prospects of promotion, and the offer almost bewildered him.

"I should be grateful indeed, Mr. Thorndyke," he said. "It would be a boon to us. Will you excuse me for a moment?"

And opening a door, he called for his wife, who was trying to keep the two children quiet there, having retired with them hastily when Mr. Thorndyke was announced.

"What do you think, Emma?" her husband said excitedly, as she came into the room. "Mr. Thorndyke has been good enough to offer me the living of Crowswood."

Then he recovered himself. "I beg your pardon, sir, for my unmannerliness in not first introducing my wife to you."

"It was natural that you should think of telling her the news first of all," the Squire said courteously. "Madam, I am your obedient servant, and I hope that soon we shall get to know each other well. I consider it of great importance that the Squire of a parish and the Rector should work well together, and see a great deal of each other. I don't know whether you are aware, Mr. Greg, that the living is worth 200 pounds a year, besides which there is a paddock of about ten acres, which is sufficient for the keep of a horse and cow. The Rectory is a comfortable one, and I have arranged with Mr. Bastow that he shall leave his furniture for the benefit of his successor. It will include linen, so that you will be put to no expense whatever in moving in. I have known these first expenses to seriously cripple the usefulness of a clergyman when appointed to a living."

"That is good of you indeed, Mr. Thorndyke," the curate said. "We have been living in these lodgings since we first came here, and it will indeed make matters easy to have the question of furniture so kindly settled for us."

"Will your Rector be able to release you shortly?"

"I have no doubt that he will do that at once. His son has just left Oxford and taken deacon's orders; and the Rector told me the other day that he should be glad if I would look out for another curacy, as he wanted to have his son here with him. He spoke very kindly, and said that he should make no change until I could hear of a place to suit me. His son has been assisting him for the last month, since I took the services at Crowswood, and I am sure he would release me at once."

"Then I should be glad if you will move up as soon as possible to the Rectory. I know nothing about the necessary forms, but I suppose that Mr. Bastow will send in his resignation to the Bishop, and I shall write and tell him that I have appointed you, and you can continue to officiate as you have done lately until you can be formally inducted as the Rector. Perhaps you would not mind going round to your Rector at once and telling him of the offer you have had. I have one or two matters to do in the town, and will call again in three quarters of an hour. I shall be glad to tell Mr. Bastow that you will come into residence at once."

On returning at the appointed time he found that the curate had returned.

"Mr. Pilkington was very kind, and evidently very pleased; he congratulated me most warmly, and I can come up at once. We don't know how to thank you enough, Mr. Thorndyke."

"I don't want any thanks, I can assure you, Mr. Greg. Tomorrow I will send a couple of women in from the village to get the place in order, and no doubt Mr. Bastow will want to take away a few things. He is going to remain with me as tutor to my son. I am sure you and I will get on very well together, and I only hope that your sermons will be no longer when you are Rector than they have been while you have been assisting us. Long sermons may do for a town congregation, but in my opinion they are a very serious mistake in the case of a village one. By the way, I think it would be as well for you to get a servant here, and that before you go up. Mr. Bastow's servant was an old woman, and in a case like this I always think it is better not to take one's predecessor's servant. She generally resents any change, and is always quoting how her last master had things. I mention this before you go, because she is sure to ask to stay on, and it is much easier to say that you are bringing a servant with you than to have to tell her she is too old or too fat. Don't you think so, Mrs. Greg?"

"Yes, I think it will be much better, Mr. Thorndyke. Even if I cannot hear of one likely to suit us permanently, I will take someone as a stop gap. One can easily change afterwards."

"The old woman will do very well," the Squire said. "She has two married daughters in the village, and with a shilling or two from the parish she will manage comfortably. At any rate we shall look after her, and I have no doubt Mr. Bastow will make her an allowance."

Never were a pair more delighted than Parson Greg and his wife when two days later they took possession of their new home. Half a dozen women had been at work the day before, and everything was in perfect order. To Mrs. Greg's relief she found that the old servant had already gone, the Squire having himself informed her that Mrs. Greg would bring her own maid with her. Mr. Bastow said that he would allow her half a crown a week as long as she lived, and the Squire added as much more, and as the woman had saved a good deal during her twenty years' service with the Rector, she was perfectly satisfied.

"It is a good thing that she should be content," the Squire said to Mr. Bastow. "She has a lot of connections in the village, and if she had gone away with a sense of grievance she might have created a good deal of ill feeling against your successor, and I am very anxious that he should begin well. I like the young fellow, and I like his wife."

"We are fortunate, indeed, Ernest," Mrs. Greg said the following morning, as with the children, two and three years old, they went out into the garden; where the trees were laden with apples, pears, and plums. "What a change from our little rooms in Reigate. I should think that anyone ought to be happy indeed here."

"They ought to be, Emma, but you see Mr. Bastow had trouble enough; and it should be a lesson to us, dear, to look very closely after the boys now they are young, and see that they don't make bad acquaintances."

"From what we hear of the village, there is little fear of that; the mischief must have begun before Mr. Thorndyke came down, when by all accounts things had altogether gone to the bad here, and of course young Bastow must have had an exceptionally evil disposition, Ernest."

"Yes, no doubt; but his father could not have looked after him properly. I believe, from what I hear, that Bastow was so dispirited at his powerlessness to put a stop to the state of things here, that, except to perform service, he seldom left the house, and the boy no doubt grew up altogether wild. You know that I was in court on the second day of the examination, and the young fellow's insolence and bearing astonished and shocked me. Happily, we have the Squire here now to back us up, the village has been completely cleared of all bad characters, and is by all accounts quite a model place, and we must do our best to keep it so."

The news of the change at the Rectory naturally occasioned a great deal of talk. At first there was a general feeling of regret that Mr. Bastow had gone, and yet it was felt that he could not have been expected to stay; the month's experience that they had had of the new parson had cleared the way for him. He and his wife soon made themselves familiar with the villagers, and being bright young people, speedily made themselves liked. The Squire and Mrs. Cunningham called the first afternoon after their arrival.

"You must always send up if anything is wanted, Mr. Greg; whenever there is any illness in the village we always keep a stock of soups and jellies, and Mrs. Cunningham is almoner in general. Is there anything that we can do for you? If so, let me know without hesitation."

"Indeed, there is nothing, Mr. Thorndyke. It is marvelous to us coming in here and finding everything that we can possibly want."

"You will want a boy for your garden; and you cannot do better than take young Bill Summers. He was with me for a bit last year, when the boy I have now was laid up with mumps or something of that sort, and he was very favorably reported on as being handy in the garden, able to milk a cow, and so on. By the way, Mrs. Greg, I have taken the liberty of sending down a cow in milk. I expect she is in your meadow now. I have seven or eight of them, and if you will send her back when her milk fails I will send down another."

"You are too kind altogether, Mr. Thorndyke!" Mrs. Greg exclaimed.

“Not at all. I want to see things comfortable here, and you will find it difficult to get on without a cow. I keep two or three for the special use of the village. I make them pay for it, halfpenny a pint; it is better to do that than to give it. It is invaluable for the children; and I don't think in all England you see rosier and healthier youngsters than those in our schools. You will sometimes find milk useful for puddings and that sort of thing for the sick; and they will appreciate it all the more than if they had to look solely to us for their supply.”

“How is Mr. Bastow, sir?”

“He is better than could be expected. He himself proposed this morning that my boy Mark should begin his studies at once; and, indeed, now that the worst is over and he has got rid of the load of care on his shoulders, I hope that we shall have him bright and cheerful again before long.”

Such was indeed the case. For some little time Mr. Bastow avoided the village, but John Thorndyke got him to go down with him to call upon Mr. Greg, and afterwards to walk through it with him. At first he went timidly and shrinkingly, but the kindly greetings of the women he met, and the children stopping to pull a forelock or bob a courtesy as of old, gradually cheered him up, and he soon got accustomed to the change, and would of an afternoon go down to the village and chat with the women, after he had ascertained that his successor had no objection whatever, and was, indeed, pleased that he still took an interest in his former parishioners. Mark was at first disappointed at the arrangement, for he had looked forward to going to a public school. His father, however, had no great trouble in reconciling him to it.

“Of course, Mark,” he said, “there are advantages in a public school. I was never at one myself, but I believe that, though the discipline is pretty strict, there is a great deal of fun and sport, and you may make desirable acquaintances. Upon the other hand, there are drawbacks. In the first place, the majority of the boys are sons of richer men than I am. I don't know that that would matter much, but it would give you expensive habits, and perhaps make you fonder of London life than I should care about. In the next place, you see, you would be at school when the shooting begins, and you are looking forward to carrying a gun next year. The same with hunting. You know I promised that this year you should go to the meets on your pony, and see as much of them as you can, and of course when you were at school you would only be able to indulge in these matters during your holidays; and if a hard frost set in, as is the case three times out of four, just as you came home, you would be out of it altogether.

“I must say I should like you to have a real love of field sports and to be a good shot and a good rider. A man, however wide his acres may be, is thought but little of in the country if he is not a good sportsman; and, moreover, there is nothing better for developing health and muscles than riding, and tramping over the fields with a gun on your shoulder; and, lastly, you must not forget, Mark, that one of my objects in making this arrangement is to keep Mr. Bastow with us. I am sure that unless he thought that he was making himself useful he would not be content to remain here; and at his age, you know, it would be hard for him to obtain clerical employment.”

“All right, father. I see that the present plan is the best, and that I should have but little sport if I went away to school. Besides, I like Mr. Bastow very much, and I am quite sure that I shan't get so many whackings from him as I used to do from old Holbrook.”

“I fancy not, Mark,” his father said with a smile. “I am not against wholesome discipline, but I think it can be carried too far; at any rate, I hope you will be just as obedient to Mr. Bastow as if he always had a cane on the table beside him.”

Mark, therefore, went to work in a cheerful spirit, and soon found that he made more progress in a week under Mr. Bastow's gentle tuition than he had done in a month under the vigorous discipline of his former master. Mr. and Mrs. Greg dined regularly at the Squire's once a week.

“Have you had that Indian servant of yours long, Mr. Thorndyke?” Mrs. Greg asked one day. “He is a strange looking creature. Of course, in the daytime, when one sees him about in ordinary

clothes, one does not notice him so much; but of an evening, in that Eastern costume of his, he looks very strange.”

“He was the servant of the Colonel, my brother,” the Squire replied. “He brought him over from India with him. The man had been some years in his service, and was very attached to him, and had saved his life more than once, he told me. On one occasion he caught a cobra by the neck as it was about to strike my brother’s hand as he sat at table; he carried it out into the compound, as George called it, but which means, he told me, garden, and there let it escape. Another time he caught a Thug, which means a sort of robber who kills his victims by strangling before robbing them. They are a sort of sect who regard strangling as a religious action, greatly favored by the bloodthirsty goddess they worship. He was in the act of fastening the twisted handkerchief, used for the purpose, round my brother’s neck, when Ramoo cut him down. The closest shave, though, was when George, coming down the country, was pounced upon by a tiger and carried off. Ramoo seized a couple of muskets from the men, and rushed into the jungle after him, and coming up with the brute killed him at the first shot. George escaped with a broken arm and his back laid open by a scratch of the tiger’s claws as it first seized him.

“So at George’s death I took Ramoo on, and have found him a most useful fellow. Of course, I was some little time before I became accustomed to his noiseless way of going about, and it used to make me jump when I happened to look round, and saw him standing quietly behind me when I thought I was quite alone. However, as soon as I became accustomed to him, I got over all that, and now I would not lose him for anything; he seems to know instinctively what I want. He is excellent as a waiter and valet; I should feel almost lost without him now; and the clumping about of an English man servant would annoy me as much as his noiseless way of going about did at first. He has come to speak English very fairly. Of course, my brother always talked to him in his own tongue; still, he had picked up enough English for me to get on with; now he speaks it quite fluently. When I have nothing whatever for him to do he devotes himself to my little ward. She is very fond of him, and it is quite pretty to see them together in the garden. Altogether, I would not part with him for anything.”

For some years life passed uneventfully at Crowswood. It was seldom indeed that the Squire’s authority was needed to set matters right in the village. The substitution of good farmers for shiftless ones in some of the farms, and the better cultivation generally, had given more employment; and as John Thorndyke preferred keeping two or three cottages shut up rather than have them occupied by men for whom no work could be found, it was rare indeed that there were any complaints of scarcity of work, except, indeed, on the part of the Rector, who declared that, what with the healthiness of the village and the absence of want, his occupation, save for the Sunday duty, was a sinecure. Mr. Bastow was more happy and much brighter than he had been for many years. The occupation of teaching suited him, and he was able to make the work pleasant to his pupil as well as to himself; indeed, it occupied but a small portion of the day, the amount of learning considered necessary at the time not being extensive. A knowledge of Greek was thought quite superfluous for a country gentleman. Science was in its infancy, mathematics a subject only to be taken up by those who wanted to obtain a college fellowship. Latin, however, was considered an essential, and a knack of apt quotation from the Latin poets an accomplishment that every man who was a member of society or aspired to enter Parliament was expected to possess. Thus Mark Thorndyke’s lessons lasted but two or three hours a day, and the school term was a movable period, according to the season of the year and the engagements of the Squire and Mark. In winter the evening was the time, so that the boy shot with his father, or rode to the hounds, or, as he got older, joined in shooting parties at the houses of neighbors.

In summer the work was done in the morning, but was not unfrequently broken. Mark went off at a very early hour to drive perhaps some twenty miles with his great chum, Dick Chetwynd, for a long day’s fishing, or to see a main of cocks fought or a fight between the champions of two neighboring villages, or perhaps some more important battle.

When Millicent Conyers was ten years old she came regularly into the study, sitting curled up in a deep chair, getting up her lessons while Mark did his, and then changing seats with him while he learned his Horace or Ovid by heart. At this time she looked up greatly to him, and was his companion whenever he would allow her to be, fetched and carried for him, and stood almost on a level with his dogs in his estimation. Five years later, when Mark was eighteen, these relations changed somewhat. He now liked to have her with him, not only when about the house and garden, but when he took short rides she cantered along on her pony by his side. She was a bright faced girl, full of life and fun, and rejoicing in a far greater amount of freedom than most girls of her age and time.

"It is really time that she should learn to comport herself more staidly, instead of running about like a wild thing," Mrs. Cunningham said, one day, as she and the Squire stood after breakfast looking out of the open window at Mark and Millicent.

"Time enough, my dear lady, time enough. Let her enjoy life while she can. I am not in favor of making a young kitten behave like an old tabby; every creature in nature is joyful and frolicsome while it is young. She is as tall and as straight as any of her friends of the same age, and looks more healthy; she will tame down in time, and I dare say walk and look as prim and demure as they do. I was watching them the other day when there was a party of them up here, and I thought the difference was all to her advantage. She looked a natural, healthy girl; they looked like a set of overdressed dolls, afraid to move or to talk loud, or to stretch their mouths when they smile; very ladylike and nice, no doubt, but you will see Millicent will throw them into the shade when she is once past the tomboy age. Leave her alone, Mrs. Cunningham; a girl is not like a fruit tree, that wants pruning and training from its first year; it will be quite time to get her into shape when she has done growing."

John Thorndyke had occasionally made inquiries of Mr. Bastow as to the whereabouts of his son. At the time the sentence was passed transportation to the American colonies was being discontinued, and until other arrangements could be made hulks were established as places of confinement and punishment; but a few months later Arthur Bastow was one of the first batch of convicts sent out to the penal settlement formed on the east coast of Australia. This was intended to be fixed at Botany Bay, but it having been found that this bay was open and unsheltered, it was established at Sydney, although for many years the settlement retained in England the name of the original site. As the condition of the prisoners kept in the hulks was deplorable, the Squire had, through the influence of Sir Charles Harris, obtained the inclusion of Bastow's name among the first batch of those who were to sail for Australia. Mr. Bastow obtained permission to see his son before sailing, but returned home much depressed, for he had been assailed with such revolting and blasphemous language by him that he had been forced to retire in horror at the end of a few minutes.

"We have done well in getting him sent off," the Squire said, when he heard the result of the interview. "In the first place, the demoralizing effect of these hulks is quite evident, and it may be hoped that in a new country, where there can be no occasion for the convicts to be pent up together, things may be better; for although escapes from the hulks are not frequent, they occasionally take place, and had he gained his liberty we should have had an anxious time of it until he was re-arrested, whereas out there there is nowhere to go to, no possibility of committing a crime. It is not there as it was in the American colony. Settlements may grow up in time, but at present there are no white men whatever settled in the district; and the natives are, they say, hostile, and were a convict to escape he would almost certainly be killed, and possibly eaten. No doubt by the time your son has served his sentence colonies will be established out there, and he may then be disposed to settle there, either on a piece of land of which he could no doubt take up or in the service of one of the colonists."

CHAPTER V

The scene in the convict yard at Sydney, five years after its foundation as a penal settlement, was not a pleasant one to the lover of humanity. Warders armed to the teeth were arranging gangs that were to go out to labor on the roads. Many of the convicts had leg irons, but so fastened as to be but slight hindrance to their working powers, but the majority were unironed. These were the better behaved convicts; not that this would be judged from their faces, for the brutalizing nature of the system and the close association of criminals had placed its mark on all, and it would have been difficult for the most discriminating to have made any choice between the most hardened criminals and those who had been sent out for what would now be considered comparatively trivial offenses. The voyage on board ship had done much to efface distinctions, the convict life had done more, and the chief difference between the chained and unchained prisoners was that the latter were men of more timid disposition than many of their companions, and therefore less disposed to give trouble that would entail heavy punishment. But it was only the comparatively well conducted men who were placed upon road work; the rest were retained for work inside the jail, or were caged in solitary confinement. Each morning a number, varying from half a dozen to a dozen, were fastened up and flogged, in some cases with merciless severity, but it was seldom that a cry was uttered by these, the most brutal ruffians of the convict herd. This spectacle was just over: it was conducted in public for the edification of the rest, but, judging from the low laughs and brutal jests, uttered below the breath, it signally failed in producing the desired impression. Two of those who had suffered the severest punishment were now putting on their coarse woollen garments over their bloodstained shoulders; both were comparatively young men.

"I shall not stand this much longer," one muttered. "I will brain a warder, and get hung for it. One can but die once, while one can get flogged once a week."

"So would I," the other said bitterly; "but I have some scores to settle in England, and I am not going to put my head in a noose until I have wiped them out. The sooner we make arrangements to get back there the better."

"Yes, we have talked of this before," the other said, "and I quite agreed with you that if we all had the pluck of men we ought to be able to overpower the warders, in spite of their firearms. Of course some of us would get killed, but no one would mind that if there was but the remotest chance of getting away. The question is what we should do with ourselves when we were once outside the prison. Of course I know that there are two or three hundred settlers, but there would not be much to be got out of them, and life among those black fellows, even if they were civil to us, which I don't suppose they would be, would not be worth having."

"We might not have to stay there long; ships with stores or settlers arrive occasionally, and if a lot of us got away we might seize one by force, turn pirates for a bit, and when we are tired of that sail to some South American port, sell our capture, and make our way home to England. If we were not strong enough to take her, we could hide up on board her; we should be sure to find some fellow who for a pound or two would be willing to help us. The thing can be done if we make up our minds to do it, and I for one have made up my mind to try. I haven't chalked out a plan yet, but I am convinced that it is to be done."

"I am with you, whatever it is," the other said; "and I think there are twenty or thirty we could rely on. I don't say there are more than that, because there are a lot of white livered cusses among them who would inform against us at once, so as to get their own freedom as a reward for doing so. Well, we will both think it over, mate, and the sooner the better."

The two men who were thus talking together were both by birth above the common herd of convicts, and had gained a considerable ascendancy over the others because of their reckless indifference to punishment and their defiance of authority. Few of the men knew each other's real

names; by the officials they were simply known by numbers, while among themselves each had a slang name generally gained on board ship.

Separation there had, of course, been impossible, and when fastened down below each had told his story with such embellishments as he chose to give it, and being but little interfered with by their guards, save to insure the impossibility of a mutiny, there had been fights of a desperate kind. Four or five dead bodies had been found and thrown overboard, but as none would testify as to who had been the assailants none were punished for it; and so the strongest and most desperate had enforced their authority over the others, as wild beasts might do, and by the time they had reached their destination all were steeped much deeper in wickedness and brutality than when they set sail.

The two men who were speaking together had speedily become chums, and, though much younger than the majority of the prisoners, had by their recklessness and ferocity established an ascendancy among the others. This ascendancy had been maintained after their arrival by their constant acts of insubordination, and by their apparent indifference to the punishment awarded them. At night the convicts were lodged in wooden buildings, where, so long as they were not riotous, they were allowed to talk and converse freely, as indeed was the case when their work for the day was done.

As to any attempt at escape, the authorities had but small anxiety, for until the arrival of the first settlers, three years after that of the convicts, there was nowhere a fugitive could go to, no food to be obtained, no shelter save among the blacks, who were always ready for a reward of tobacco and spirits to hand them over at once to the authorities. The case had but slightly changed since the settlement began to grow. It was true that by stealing sheep or driving off a few head of cattle a fugitive might maintain himself for a time, but even if not shot down by the settlers or patrols, he would be sure before long to be brought in by the blacks.

The experiment had already been tried of farming our better conducted convicts to the settlers, and indeed it was the prospect of obtaining such cheap labor that had been the main inducement to many of the colonists to establish themselves so far from home, instead of going to America. As a whole the system worked satisfactorily; the men were as much prisoners as were the inmates of the jail, for they knew well enough that were they to leave the farmers and take to the bush they would remain free but a short time, being either killed or handed over by the blacks, and in the latter case they would be severely punished and set to prison work in irons, with labor very much more severe than that they were called upon to do on the farms.

Some little time after the conversation between the two convicts the prison authorities were congratulating themselves upon the fact that a distinct change had taken or was taking place in the demeanor of many of the men who had hitherto been the most troublesome, and they put it down to the unusually severe floggings that had been inflicted on the two most refractory prisoners in the establishment. When in the prison yard or at work they were more silent than before, and did their tasks doggedly and sullenly; there was no open defiance to the authorities, and, above all, a marked cessation of drunkenness from the spirits smuggled into the place.

Only the two originators were aware of the extent of the plot; for they had agreed that only by keeping every man in ignorance as to who had joined it could they hope to escape treachery. In the first place, they had taken into their confidence a dozen men on whom they could absolutely rely. Beyond this they had approached the others singly, beginning by hinting that there was a plot for escape, and that a good many were concerned, and telling them that these had bound themselves together by a solemn oath to kill any traitor, even if hanged for it.

"No one is to know who is in it and who is not," the leaders said to each recruit. "Every new man will be closely watched by the rest, and if he has any communication privately with a warder or any other official he will be found strangled the next morning; no one will know who did it. Even if he succeeded in eluding the vigilance of his comrades at the time, it would soon be known; for if indulgence of any kind was shown towards one man, or he was relieved from his ordinary work, or

even freed altogether and suddenly, he would be a dead man in twenty-four hours, for we have friends outside among the ticket of leave men who have bound themselves to kill at once any man set free.”

To the question, “What do you intend to do when we get off?” the answer was, “We shall go straight to the bush, so as to avoid a fight with the soldiers, in the first place; then we shall join that night, and drive off all the cattle and sheep from the settlements, take possession of every firearm found in the houses, then move off a couple of hundred miles or so into the bush, and establish a settlement of our own.

“Of course, we shall take horses and clothes and any spirits and food we may find. If the soldiers pursue us, we will fight them; but as there are only three or four companies of them, and we shall be eight hundred strong, we shall very soon show them that they had better leave us alone.

“Oh, yes, no doubt they will send more soldiers out from England, but it will be over a year before they can get here; and we propose after we have done with the fellows here to break up into parties of twenty and thirty, dividing the sheep and cattle among us, and each party going where it will. The place is of tremendous size, as big as a dozen Englands, they say, and each party will fix a place it fancies, where there is good water and a river with fish and so on, and we may live all our lives comfortably, with just enough work to raise potatoes and corn, and to watch our stock increasing. Anyhow, we might calculate on having some years of peace and freedom, and even if in the end they searched us all out, which would be very unlikely, they could but bring us back, hang a few, and set the rest to work again; but we think that they would most likely leave us alone altogether, quite satisfied with having got rid of us.”

“Those who liked it could, no doubt, take wives among the blacks. The convict women who are out on service with the settlers would, you may be sure, join us at once, and an enterprising chap who preferred a white woman to a black could always make his way down here and persuade one to go off with him to his farm. That is the general plan; if many get tired of the life they have only to come down to Sydney, hide up near the place on some dark night, and go down to the port, seize a ship, and make off in her, compelling the officers and sailors to take them and land them at any port they fancy, either in Chili, Peru, or Mexico, or, if they like, sail west and make for Rio or Buenos Ayres or one of the West Indian islands. As to when it is going to be done, or how it is going to be done, no one will be told till it is ready to be carried out. We have not settled that ourselves, and thus one who was fool enough to risk certain death could tell the Governor no more than that there was a plot on hand, and that the man who had sworn him in was concerned in it.”

So one by one every man in the prison was sworn by a terrible oath to secrecy, to watch his companions, and to report anything that looked suspicious. Many joined willingly, the prospect of relief, even should it only be temporary, being too fascinating to be resisted. Some joined against their will, fearing that a refusal to do so would be punished by death; and the fact that two or three men were found strangled in bed had a very great effect in inducing others to join in the plot.

These deaths caused some uneasiness to the authorities. Their utmost endeavors failed to discover who were the perpetrators of these murders; and even when everyone in the same hut was flogged to obtain information, not one opened his lips.

One night the word was passed round that the time had come. One only in each hut was familiar with the details, and he gave instructions to each man individually as to what he was to do. The date had been determined by the fact that the time which they had been sentenced to wear irons had terminated the day before, and their unusually subdued and quiet demeanor having carried them through the interval without, as usual, fresh punishments being awarded them before the termination of the former one.

In the morning the whole of the convicts were drawn up to witness the flogging of the inmates of one of the huts, where a man had been found strangled the morning before. The first prisoner was taken to the triangle, stripped to the waist, and tied up. There was a dead silence in the ranks of the convicts, but as the first blow fell upon his shoulders there was a loud yell, and simultaneously the

whole ranks broke up, and a number of men sprang upon each of the warders, wrested their muskets from them, and threw them to the ground. Then there was a rush towards the Governor and officers, who were assembled in front of the stone house that faced the open end of the square. Firing their pistols, these at once took refuge in the house, three or four falling under the scattered fire that was opened as soon as the muskets of the warders fell into the hands of the convicts.

Directly the doors were closed the officers appeared at the windows, and opened a rifle fire upon the convicts, as did the guards near the gate. As comparatively few of the convicts had muskets, they began to waver at once. But, headed by the two ringleaders, the armed party rushed at the guard, shot them down, and threw open the gate.

Then an unexpected thing occurred. The soldiers from the barracks happened to be marching down to do target practice on the shore, and were passing the convict prison when the firing broke out. They were at once halted, and ordered to load, and as the convicts, with exultant shouts, poured through the gate they saw a long line of soldiers, with leveled muskets, facing them.

"At them!" one of the leaders shouted. "It is too late to draw back now. We have got to break through them."

Many of the convicts ran back into the yard; but those armed with muskets, the more desperate of the party, followed their leaders. A moment later a heavy volley rang out, and numbers of the convicts fell. Their two leaders, however, and some twenty of their followers, keeping in a close body, rushed at the line of soldiers with clubbed muskets, and with the suddenness and fury of the rush burst their way through the line, and then scattering, fled across the country, pursued by a dropping fire of musketry.

The officers in command, seeing that but a fraction had escaped, ordered one company to pursue, and marched the rest into the prison yard. It was already deserted; the convicts had scattered to their huts, those who had arms throwing them away. Dotted here and there over the square were the bodies of eight or ten convicts and as many warders, whose skulls had been smashed in by their infuriated assailants as soon as they had obtained possession of their muskets. Close to the gate lay the six soldiers who had furnished the guard; these were all dead or mortally wounded.

The Governor and the officials issued from the house as soon as the soldiers entered the yard. The first step to do was to turn all the convicts out of the huts and to iron them. No resistance was attempted, the sight of the soldiers completely cowing the mutineers. When the bodies of the convicts that had fallen were counted and the roll of the prisoners called over, it was found that eighteen were missing, and of these six were during the course of the next hour or two brought in by the soldiers who had gone in pursuit of them. The rest had escaped.

The convicts were all questioned separately, and the tales they told agreed so closely that the Governor could not doubt that they were speaking the truth. All had been sworn in by one of two men, and knew nothing whatever of what was intended to be done that day, until after they were locked up on the evening previous. Each of those in the huts had received his instructions the night before from the one man.

There were eighteen huts, each containing fifteen convicts. Of the men who had given instructions six had fallen outside the gate, together with sixteen others; five had been overtaken and brought in; altogether, twelve were still at large. Among these were the two leaders. The next day six of the prisoners were tried and executed. The rest were punished only by a reduction in their rations; sentence of death was at the same time passed upon the twelve still at large, so as to save the trouble of a succession of trials as they were caught and brought in.

The two leaders had kept together after they had broken through the line of soldiers.

"Things have gone off well," one said as they ran through. "Those soldiers nearly spoilt it all."

"Yes, that was unlucky," the other agreed; "but so far as we are concerned, which is all we care about, I think things have turned out for the best."

Nothing more was said until they had far outstripped their pursuers, hampered as these were by their uniforms and belts.

"You mean that it is not such a bad thing that they have not all got away?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. It is all very well to tell them about driving off the sheep and cattle and horses, and going to start a colony on our own account, but the soldiers would have been up to us before we had gone a day's journey. Most of the fellows would have bolted directly they saw them. As it is, I fancy only about a dozen have got away, perhaps not as many as that, and they are all men that one can rely upon. One can feed a dozen without difficulty—a sheep a day would do it—and by giving a turn to each of the settlers, the animals won't be missed. Besides, we shall want money if we are ever to get out of this cursed country. It would not be difficult to get enough for you and me, but when it comes to a large number the sack of the whole settlement would not go very far.

"My own idea is that we had best join the others tonight, kill a few sheep, and go two or three days' march into the bush, until the heat of the pursuit is over. We are all armed, the blacks would not venture to attack us, and the soldiers would not be likely to pursue us very far. In a week or so, when we can assume that matters have cooled down a bit, we can come down again. We know all the shepherds, and even if they were not disposed to help us they would not dare to betray us, or report a sheep or two being missing. Of course, we shall have to be very careful to shift our quarters frequently. Those black trackers are sure to be sent out pretty often."

"As long as we are hanging about the settlements there won't be much fear of our being bothered by the blacks. Of course, we shall have to decide later on whether it will be best for us to try and seize a ship, all of us acting together, or for us to get quietly on board one and keep under hatches until she is well away. That is the plan I fancy most."

"So do I. In the first place the chances are that in the next two or three months at least half the fellows will be picked up. To begin with, several of them are sure to get hold of liquor and make attacks upon the settlers, in which case some of them, anyhow, are sure to get killed. In the next place, most of them were brought up as thieves in the slums of London, and will have no more idea of roughing it in a country like this than of behaving themselves if they were transported to a London drawing room. Therefore, I am pretty sure that at the end of three months we shall not be able to reckon on half of them. Well, six men are not enough to capture a ship, or, if they do capture it, to keep the crew under. One must sleep sometimes, and with only three or four men on deck we could not hope to keep a whole ship's crew at bay."

"Then there is another reason. You and I, when we have got a decent rig out, could pass anywhere without exciting observation; while if we had half a dozen of the others, whatever their good qualities, they would be noticed at once by their villainous faces, and if questions were to be asked we should be likely to find ourselves in limbo again in a very short time. So I am all for working on our own account, even if the whole of the others were ready to back us; but, of course, we must keep on good terms with them all, and breathe no word that we think that each man had better shift for himself. Some of those fellows, if they thought we had any idea of leaving them, would go straight into Sydney and denounce us, although they would know that they themselves would be likely to swing at the same time."

As none of the convicts were acquainted with the bush, they had been obliged to select as their rendezvous a hut two miles out of the town, where the convict gangs that worked on the road were in the habit of leaving their tools. On the way there the two men killed a couple of sheep from a flock whose position they had noticed before it became dark. These they skinned, cut off the heads, and left them behind, carrying the sheep on their shoulders to the meeting.

"Is that you, Captain Wild?" a voice said as they approached.

"Yes; Gentleman Dick is with me."

"That is a good job. We had begun to think that the soldiers had caught you."

"They would not have caught us alive, you may take your oath. How many are there of us here?"

"Ten of us, Captain. I think that that is all there are."

"That is enough for our purpose. Has anyone got anything to eat?"

There was a deep growl in the negative.

"Well, we have brought a couple of sheep with us, and as we have carried them something like a mile, you had better handle them by turns. We will strike off into the bush and put another three or four miles between us and the jail, and then light a fire and have a meal."

Two of the men came forward and took the sheep. Then they turned off from the road, and taking their direction from a star, followed it for an hour.

"I think we have got far enough now," the man called Captain Wild said. "You had better cut down the bushes, and we will make a fire."

"But how are we to light it?" one of them exclaimed in a tone of consternation. "I don't suppose we have got flint and steel or tinder box among us."

"Oh, we can manage that!" the Captain said. "Get a heap of dried leaves here first, then some wood, and we will soon have a blaze."

His orders were obeyed. Some of the men had carried off the warders' swords as well as their muskets, and now used them for chopping wood. As soon as a small pile of dried leaves was gathered the Captain broke a cartridge and sprinkled half its contents among them, and then dropped the remainder into his musket. He flashed this off among the leaves, and a bright flame at once shot up, and in five minutes a fire was burning.

One of the sheep was soon cut up, the meat hacked in slices from the bones, a ramrod was thrust through the pieces, and, supported by four sticks, was laid across the fire. Three other similarly laden spits were soon placed beside it, and in a short time the meat was ready for eating. Until a hearty meal had been made there was but little talking.

"That is first rate," one of the men said, as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Now one only wants a pipe and bacca and a glass of grog, to feel comfortable."

"Well, Captain, are you satisfied with the day's work?"

"It would have been a grand day had it not been for the soldiers passing just at the time. As it is, Gentleman Dick and I have been agreeing that as far as we are all concerned it has not turned out so badly. There would have been a lot of difficulty in finding food if we had all got away, and some of those mealy mouthed fellows would have been sure to go back and peach on us at the first opportunity. A dozen is better than a hundred for the sort of life we are likely to lead for some time. We are strong enough to beat off any attack from the black fellows, and also to break into any of these settlers' houses.

"We can, when we have a mind to, take a stray sheep now and then, or even a bullock would scarcely be missed, especially if our pals in the settlement will lend us a helping hand, which you may be sure they will do; in fact, they would know better than to refuse. Then a large party could be traced by those black trackers at a run, while a small one would not; especially if, as we certainly will do, we break up into twos and threes for a time. First of all, though, we must go well into the bush; at daybreak tomorrow morning we will drive off twenty sheep, and go right away a hundred miles, and wait there till matters have settled down. They will never take the troops out that distance after us. Then we can come back again, and hang about the settlement and take what we want. The wild blacks don't come near there, and we shall be safer in pairs than we should be if we kept together; and of course we could meet once a week or so to talk over our plans. We must borrow some whisky, flour, tea, tobacco, and a few other items from the settlers, but we had better do without them for this trip. I don't want to turn the settlers against us, for they have all got horses, and might combine with the troops to give chase, so it would be best to leave them alone, at any rate till we get back again. Another reason for treating them gently is that even if they did not join the troops they might get into a funk, and drive their sheep and horses down into Sydney, and then we should mighty soon get short of food. It will be quite time enough to draw upon them heavily when we make up our minds

to get hold of a ship and sail away. Money would be of no use to us here, but we shall want it when we get to a port, wherever that port may be.”

“That sounds right enough, Captain,” one of the convicts said, “and just at present nothing would suit me better than to get so far away from this place that I can lay on my back and take it easy for a spell.”

There was a general chorus of assent, and there being neither tobacco nor spirits, the party very soon stretched themselves off to sleep round the fire.

In the morning they were up before daylight, and half an hour later arrived at one of the farms farthest from Sydney. Here they found a flock of a hundred sheep. The shepherd came to the door of his hut on hearing a noise.

“You had best lie down and go to sleep for the next hour,” the leader of the convicts said sharply. “We don’t want to do an old pal any harm, and when you wake up in the morning and find the flock some twenty short, of course you won’t have any idea what has come of them.”

The man nodded and went back into the hut and shut the door, and the convicts started for the interior, driving twenty sheep before them.

During the first day’s journey they went fast, keeping the sheep at a trot before them, and continuing their journey through the heat of the day.

“I tell you what, Captain,” one of the men said when they halted at sunset, “if we don’t get to a water hole we shall have to give up this idea of going and camping in the bush. My mouth has been like an oven all day, and it is no use getting away from jail to die of thirst out here.”

There had been similar remarks during the day, and the two leaders agreed together that it would be madness to push further, and that, whatever the risk, they would have to return to the settlements unless they could strike water. As they were sitting moodily round the fire they were startled by a dozen natives coming forward into the circle of light. These held out their hands to say that their intentions were peaceful.

“Don’t touch your muskets!” Captain Wild exclaimed sharply, as some of the men were on the point of jumping to their feet. “The men are friendly, and we may be able to get them to guide us to water.”

The natives, as they came up, grinned and rubbed their stomachs, to show that they were hungry.

“I understand,” the Captain said; “you want a sheep, we want water;” and he held up his hand to his mouth and lifted his elbow as if in the act of drinking.

In two or three minutes the natives understood what he wanted, and beckoned to the men to follow. The tired sheep were got onto their legs again, and half a mile away the party arrived at a pool in what in wet weather was the bed of a river. A sheep was at once handed over to the natives, and when the men had satisfied their thirst another sheep was killed for their own use.

After a great deal of trouble the natives were made to understand that the white men wanted one of their party to go with them as a guide, and to take them always to water holes, and a boy of fifteen was handed over to them in exchange for two more sheep, and at daybreak the next morning they started again for the interior, feeling much exhilarated by the piece of luck that had befallen them. They traveled for four days more, and then, considering that the soldiers had ceased their pursuit long ago, they encamped for ten days, enjoying to the utmost their recovered freedom and their immunity from work of any kind. Then they returned to the neighborhood of the settlements, and broke up, as their leader proposed, into pairs.

They had been there but a short time before the depredations committed roused the settlers to band themselves together. Every horse that could be spared was lent to the military, who formed a mounted patrol of forty men, while parties of infantry, guided by native trackers, were constantly on the scent for the convicts.

“This is just what I expected,” Captain Wild said to his lieutenant. “It was the choice of two evils, and I am not sure that the plan we chose was not the worst. We might have been quite sure

that these fellows would not be able, even for a time, to give up their old ways. If they had confined themselves, as we have done, to taking a sheep when they wanted it, and behaving civilly when they went to one of the houses and begged for a few pounds of flour or tea, the settlers would have made no great complaint of us; they know what a hard time we have had, and you can see that some of the women were really sorry for us, and gave us more than we actually asked for. But it has not been so with the others. They had been breaking into houses, stealing every thing they could lay their hands upon, and in three or four cases shooting down men on the slightest provocation.

“The money and watches were no good to them, but the brutes could not help stealing them; so here we are, and the settlement is like a swarm of angry bees, and this plan of handing over most of their horses to the military will end in all of us being hunted down if we stay here. Two were shot yesterday, and in another week we shall all either be killed or caught. There is nothing for it but to clear out. I am against violence, not on principle, but because in this case it sets people’s backs up; but it cannot be helped now. We must get a couple of horses to ride, and a spare one to carry our swag. We must have half a sack of flour and a sheep—it is no use taking more than one, because the meat won’t keep—and a good stock of tea and sugar. We must get a good supply of powder, if we can, some bullets and shot. We shall have to get our meat by shooting.

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