AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSIONS AT THE POLO GROUNDS

She Had Never Seen the "Big Leaguers" in Action

Making Sketches Throughout an Exciting Game a Difficult Job

The Famous "Ty."

"Everybody stretch."

Ethel Barrymore's baseball face.

Cleek, the Solver of Riddles

The Riddle of the Harlequin Room

over, was just close enough to hear him mutter disjointedly:

"Willemite—anhydrous silicate of zinc—franklinites, with calcite and some silicates of manganese." To which he added a second later, as he took out his penknife and scratching the dull whitish gray surface of one of the disks, produced a shiny, silverish streak: "Of course, of course. Extreme heat—amazing heat; but not fire; no, decidedly not fire!"

"What do you make of them, old chap?" inquired Narkom, indiscreetly—curiosity blinding him for the moment to the presence of the client. "Anything interesting?"

"Possibly," replied Cleek, serenely. "I should like to keep one of these for further examination if you don't mind, Mrs. Dimmock. May I? Thanks very much. Oh, by the way: How was your husband dressed when he left home?"

"As comm cial travellers always are, sir—top hat and frock coat."

"Carry a second suit of clothes with him?"

"No, sir—only a change of linen. All his other suits are still at home."

"I see. So then, unless he purchased another suit—which is not likely—he would still be wearing a frock coat when—Hum-m! Yes. By the way, did the person who told you that she had seen him entering the house at Wandsworth mention how he was dressed at the time?"

"No, sir. She said nothing at all about that. But it was him; it was Oscar, fast enough. There's no doubt about that now, not a shadow of one, sir."

"Isn't there? How do you make that out?"

"By this," she answered, putting her hand into her pocket and producing a small section of slim bamboo cane about four inches in length and with a long metal cap on the end of it. "I've hung about that house night and day since my first call hoping to catch some sign of him. I never saw nothing, sir, until I found this in the open field behind that house at daybreak this morning."

"H'm! Looks like the end broken off from an umbrella."

"It is. It's the end of Oscar's umbrella. I gave it to him for his last birthday. The ferrule come loose the very day he was starting on this trip, sir. He hadn't time to stop to have it mended, so I drove a tin tack, the onry thing I had handy, into it to hold it on until he should have.

"Look, sir, there's the tack, see? It was finding that that drove me to appeal to Scotland Yard, sir. I'd something to go on, you see. There's no doubt now, sir, none at all. He did go to that woman's house, and—and—

"Oh, sir, help me to find him, sir. Have the girl watched, have her followed, have him found. For God's sake do! I don't care how he ill treats me, I don't care what he does, so long as I can only have him back again."

Cleek saw that she was upon the point of breaking down, and having got all the information she could give him hastened to terminate the interview. Promising to look into the matter at once and to report to her the result of his investigations, he sent her off home for a much needed rest and so got rid of her, for the time being at least.

It was just as well that he did too, for she had scarcely got beyond sight of the Fiddle and Fish Hook when the door of the bar parlor opened and the second client made his appearance.

He was a tall, frank faced, fresh colored young Englishman of about 26, this second client, by name Frank Farnsworth, by occupation a solicitor's clerk, but owing to the sudden death of his employer, the late Breezly Dockets, at present out of a position.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Farnsworth, you are in excellent time," said the superintendent as the young man came in. "Let me introduce you to one of my best men—Detective Sergeant George Headland. Headland, this is Mr. Frank Farnsworth, the gentleman of whom we were just speaking."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said Cleek, tapping his forehead with his right forefinger in recognition of the introduction. "Superintendent's been telling me all about the business, sir, and I must say it ain't pleasant."

"Decidedly it isn't, Mr. Headland," replied Farnsworth, accepting the chair which Mr. Narkom pushed toward him. "You can readily understand that, hard as it is on old Prof. Grimshaw, and indeed on me, the effect upon a delicately nurtured and sensitive girl like Miss Blake is something beyond words.

"I hope, sir, that you can arrive at some effective means to stop this terrible Dimmock woman from persecuting my dear girl in this abominable manner; for it is past endurance to have her rousing the whole neighborhood with her manifestations and her appalling charges against Miss Blake—especially when she knows nothing whatsoever regarding the man in question.

"Find that man if you can and thereby disprove these vile charges against Miss Blake's character; but finding him or not, at the least stop that Dimmock woman from coming to the house and raising these abominable scenes—as peaceful, law abiding citizens we have a right to demand that much, and—we do!"

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Farnsworth. You are quite within your legal rights there, and means will be taken instantly to put an end to the annoyance," said Cleek, suavely. "Naturally, however, you would have gone to the local police station instead of appealing to the yard had that been your only desire in the matter, but as you wish this missing man found for the simple sake of clearing Miss Blake of a very infamous charge, why, of course—there you are. I quite understand the interest which you and the lady's uncle take in the affair now. You wish this Oscar Dimmock found and are willing to defray the expenses of an inquiry in order that Miss Blake's name may be cleared."

"Exactly. But let me say at once, Mr. Headland, it is Prof. Grimshaw who is supplying the 'sinews of war'—I have not the means to do so. I am out of a position at present and have very little money—very little indeed. That is why the Professor insisted upon my going to live at his house. It was to save me from debt and expense while I was looking for another berth."

"I see. Just so. Seems like a warm hearted old chap, the Professor."

"Best in the world, bless his heart. He may be a bit dotty at times, and on some subjects, but his heart's all right, bully old boy. Where would you find another uncle like him, I should like to know? Think of him stepping in and taking care of his sister—after being separated from all his family for over twenty years—and then, on that sister's death, taking full charge of Honor and little Eric and looking after them with all the care and affection of a father. That's an uncle to be proud of—what?"

"Rather," agreed Cleek. "By the way, what kept him separated from his family for all those years? Trouble or—what?"

"Don't know exactly—never liked to ask, you know. I gathered from what the late Mrs. Blake let drop at times, however, that he was rather a wild one in his youth, and as the family was somewhat straitlaced—father was a clergyman, you know—they let him 'gang his ain gait' and never troubled about him after he drifted over to Persia."

"Oh, lived in Persia during those years, did he? Make his money there?"

"I expect so. At all events he hadn't any when he went away and he was comfortably to do when he returned and brought Haroun with him. Haroun's his deaf and dumb servitor, you know. Believe the Professor originally bought him as a slave out there; but of course he immediately gave the poor beggar his freedom."

"Haroun grateful to him for it, of course?"

"Oh, rather! Fairly worships him. Go to the bow-wows for him and all that sort of thing. Won't even leave him and go to the hospital for treatment—as he ought, the beggar—just simply because the Professor declares it's nothing and it will all come right in time."

"What will 'all come right in time'?"

"The trouble with his skin. Breaking out in sore spots all over him and his hands—my hat! you never saw such things; they look, when he takes his gloves off, as if they were rotting away. If it wasn't for what the Professor says, and the fact that the thing is not 'catching' in any way, even if one touches something he's touched immediately after—if it wasn't for that, why, remembering where the man hails from, I'd believe the beggar had leprosy or some other of those horrible Eastern diseases—I would upon my word. But of course the Professor ought to know: and he says it's nothing serious."

"Why ought the Professor to know?"

"Chemist—scientist—half fledged M. D.—all that sort of thing. Would have taken his degree in another six months if it hadn't been for—whatever it was that caused that flare up between him and his pater and sent him off to the East.

"Too bad that he did go too, by the way, although he made his money out there. The beastly climate—the broiling hot sun—all that. It weakened his brain, poor, dear old chap.

"And the death of little Eric didn't improve matters. He fairly worshipped the little fellow, and when he died suddenly it was an awful shock. After that the old Professor's 'dotty periods' seemed to come on more frequently."

"Poor old chap," said Cleek sympathetically. "So he has intermittent attacks of insanity has he? H'm! Bad?"

"Rather! Mad as a hatter. Goes clean off his dot for two or three days at a time and will rave like a hurricane if anybody comes upstairs to his laboratory. Only thing that quiets him is to have Honor sit down at the piano and play by the hour.

"By the way, he had one of those fits on the very night that that Dimmock woman says her husband came to the house. That's what the playing and singing was about—he kept Honor and me at it down in the drawing room from 7 in the evening until long past midnight."

"Oho!" said Cleek in two different tones; then he took up the little metal disk and looked at it fixedly, the curious one sided smile travelling slowly up his cheek and after a second or two as slowly slipping down again. "Tell me something," he said without looking up. "Ever any sign to warn you when these 'dotty' attacks are coming on?"

"Oh, yes—very clear ones. First of all he gets the idea that hundreds of people are pining to take stock in his new invention (he's trying to perfect a one exposure plate for taking photographs in their actual colors, you know) and sits down and writes letters by the dozen, getting their names out of the newspapers and dashing them off hot shot, so that Haroun can go out and post thebm. He never does, of course."

"How can you tell that if he's deaf and dumb?"

"Why, he makes it a point of bringing them back and burning them in front of Miss Blake."

"All of them? You feel perfectly certain that he brings back as many as he takes out?"

"I suppose so. Of course, as nobody knows how many actually were written—But, see here. He wouldn't have any reason for posting any of them, of course."

"I wasn't suggesting that. He might drop one and lose it on the way."

"Oh, I see what you mean now—but it did seem funny at first. No, I don't think he ever loses any. If he did, you know, somebody would be sure to pick it up and either drop it in the pillar box or carry it back. And as nobody ever comes in answer to any of the letters, why, that's pretty clear proof that they never get sent."

"H'm—yes! Quite so. Well, the letter writing fad is the first sign of the 'dotty' period's approach, you say—what's the next?"

"Wall paper!"

"Pardon?"

"Wall paper," repeated Farnsworth with a laugh. "I don't wonder you're astonished. All the different kinds and different colors of wall paper that can be procured. He sends poor Honor flying all over London in quest of it—(that's what she was doing that day when the Dimmock woman saw her getting into the taxi and followed her home). Honor has to get it—rolls and rolls of every conceivable color—give it over to Haroun; then Haroun has to take it up to him along with a brush and a pot of paste, and away the poor old chap goes at it—slap, dash!—for dear life!"

"Hanging it do you mean?"

"Yes. We're always glad when the paperhanging mood comes round, for that's the last phase and by the next day the dotty spell is past and gone. But Lord, he does make a sight of the place while the mood lasts. Covers the walls with strips of every color from one end of the room to the other; and as for the interior of the cabinet—it's a sight."

"Cabinet? What do you mean by cabinet? Is there one in the laboratory, then?"

"No; but he calls it that. His developing cabinet is the name he gives it. It's only an alcove, however—a sort of deep niche in the rear wall—about seven feet high by four deep and three and a half broad. He had it specially constructed, poor old chap, before he moved in.

"I believe he did it so as to experiment in there with his sensitized plates and that; but I don't know how he manages it, I'm sure, for there's no door to shut it in and certainly no ruby lamp to operate by if he uses it for a dark room. He may hang up a curtain, however, and darken it that way. I don't know—and as I don't understand the first living thing about photography, why there you are. He doesn't volunteer any confidences and I of course don't ask any questions—it's none of my business one way or the other, you know.

"But as I was saying, Mr. Headland, you ought to see the inside of that blessed cabinet after the poor old chap's paperhanging fit has passed."

"I should like to. A sight, is it?"

"For the gods! Strips of paper—green, yellow, red, pink, blue—all colors—slapped on without rhyme or reason, all over the shop. On the walls; on the ceiling; on the floor; round the entrance to the alcove—everywhere. My hat, but it's a nightmare. Honor and I call it his 'Rainbow Roost,' poor old boy!"

Cleek sat silent for a moment or two stroking his chin and staring fixedly at the little metal disk; then, abruptly:

"What was the cause of the boy Eric's sudden death?" he asked without looking up.

"Concussion of the brain," replied Farnsworth, arching his brows in surprise. "My hat, Mr. Headland, but you do ask some funny questions. What in the world can poor little Eric's death have to do with the subject?"

"Oh, nothing—mere idle curiosity of mine, that's all. Concussion of the brain, eh? Poor little shaver! How did it happen?"

"Nobody knows. He was found lying at the foot of the cellar steps, quite unconscious, one morning. He must have tripped and fallen headlong down; though what in the world could ever have taken him to such a place nobody can understand. He never recovered consciousness. Two doctors worked over him for hours, but it was all to no purpose. He died the next day."

"Coroner's inquest, of course?"

"Oh, yes—that couldn't be avoided under the circumstances; though it was naturally a brief affair, considering that the doctors were able to certify the cause of death beyond all question. The verdict was 'death from misadventure.' In issuing the certificate for burial the Coroner said that he couldn't quite understand how so short a fall could possibly have produced so serious a condition of affairs. It was one of the worst cases of concussion in all his experience. Indeed he remembered only one which could at all compare with it; and that was the case of a man who had been sandbagged by footpads in the streets of London in his early days of office.

"But I say—we're not sticking to the subject Mr. Headland; so let's get back to it please. Miss Blake and the Professor will be waiting for me to return and report to them. The main point is that we want this man Dimmock found if it's possible, that this abominable lie about Miss Blake can be nailed and held up for the slander that it is."

"Quite so," said Cleek, getting to his feet. "And the sooner we set about it the better, of course. I'll start in on the case at once with your permission, superintendent. Don't think it will be a very difficult one. Find a chap of that sort without half trying. Lay you a tanner it's a simple case of give his missus the slip and gone off on the hi-tiddledy-hi-ti for a day or so—that sort of thing. Shouldn't be a bit surprised if the party as give Mrs. Dimmock the tip knows where he is and just done it to throw her off the scent—what? Always providin' it isn't a case of common or garden blackmail, with Mrs. Dimmock herself in the game."

"Good heavens above, Mr. Headland, it can't be possible that there's a woman vile enough to do that sort of thing—and against a pure girl like Miss Blake?" exclaimed Farnsworth, shaking with indignation. "If such a thing could be, hanging would be too good for the creature."

"Well, she won't get that, sir," replied Cleek, 'but she'll get all that's coming to her, never you fear. You must leave the business to me. It takes all sorts to make a world, sir; and if that's her little game she wouldn't be the first as done it. But I'll nab her; and I'll have all the evidence clear and straight and well testified to, to give her hers 'good and plenty,' as the Yanks say.

"But by the way, sir," he added offhandedly—and it was then and only then that Mr. Narkom realized what he was at and what all this was the prelude to—"as we shall want to be able to lay a clear report on the table when we charge her I reckon it'll be as well for Mr. Narkom and me to pay a visit to the Professor's house and go over it, if it's all the same to you. Just a mere form, you know—so as we can testify that there was no truth in the yarn that Dimmock ever was there for a minute—see?

"It will carry weight, by George, if we can go up and say that we searched the place and are willing to take oath to that. Think you could arrange that, sir—eh?"

"Certainly, Mr. Headland," replied Farnsworth. "I can speak for the Professor as for myself."

"Righto! That's the talk. Superintendent's got the address, aint he? Good business. Well, you look out for about half past one, will you—better get it over at once, you know, so's I may be free to get out and go after my man.

"Just explain it to the Professor. Tell him it's a mere formality—you know; just sort of walkin' through the place so's we can say we've been there and looked—understand? That sort of thing. Half past one suit you all right?"

"Perfectly," replied Farnsworth. "I'll get back at once and tell the Professor, so as to have everything arranged, and at half past one we will expect you."

"Right you are!" said Cleek—and touched his finger to his forehead again; and smiled one of his peculiar smiles as he watched him shake hands with Narkom and walk hurriedly out of the place.

The man had scarcely got beyond earshot, however, before the superintendent was at Cleek's side and his low sunk, eager voice was pelting him with excited questions. What did he think of it? What did he make of it? Had he got an idea? Was it robbery, blackmail, murder, or what?

"I'll be better able to tell you that after we've looked into the 'Rainbow Roost,' Mr. Narkom," he replied. "As between a Persian servant with a bad case of skin disease, four little metal disks, an alcove which is periodically papered and a scientist who is periodically insane there is a significance which should not be overlooked. If to add to these I could find a bit of lead pipe, or, say, a small leather bag with duck shot in it——

"H'm! Yes! To be sure. Pardon? What do I make of it? Why merely a verification of the old old saw that 'there's many a true word spoken in jest,' Mr. Narkom. As how? Oh, well, if you will have things down in A B C"—irritably—"you will, I suppose.

"You said in the beginning that unless the man had melted—Well, maybe he has then. I'm beginning to realize that a melted man isn't so absurd as it seemed at first blush. Those four disks and Haroun's bad hands stand sponsors for the probability of it. As for that 'Rainbow Room' and that Harlequin Room to which it is attached——

"Come along, please. Call Lennard and let's be moving. I want my lunch and we're due at Wandsworth Common at half past one o'clock."

III

It was half-past one to the tick when the limousine set them down before it and the Persian servant, Haroun, opened the door to admit them; but, although young Farnsworth was almost on his heels and Cleek's interest seemed wholly centred in greeting him, Narkom did not fail to note that he made it a point of turning round and handing his hat to the Persian to hang up for him—thereby finding an excuse to get a square look at him in the full light of the open door—and that when he faced round again his eyes narrowed and there was a curious tense expression about his closed lips.

They were gone in a second, however, those outward signs of clear understanding which the man's gloved hands and the loathsome sore on his neck and cheek had brought, and he was greeting Farnsworth with free and easy assurance.

"Well, here we are, you see, sir," he said, rubbing his palms together and advancing to meet the young man. "No cobwebs on us for a couple of pacemakers—eh, what? Now let's get on to the business and over with it as soon as possible, please, so I can be off on the track of my beauty.

"I say, Mr. Farnsworth, if you'd taken me up on that bet this morning I'd stand a good show of being a tanner in. Got a line of information on that Dimmock woman and it looks pretty much like my chance shot about her being a blackmailer is like to be a bullseye. She's done time in her day. Slandering innocent young women and then squeezing them for hush money seems to be her regular business."

The horror and disgust with which this assertion inspired young Farnsworth were too real to be doubted.

"Good heaven, to think that there can be women so low as that!" he shuddered; then turning, called over his shoulder in the direction of the room out of which he had just issued, "Do you hear that, Honie? Do you hear that, Professor? It was blackmail, blackmail pure and simple."

He did not wait for them to reply—although they did so—but, beckoning the two callers to follow, led the way to that room, and an instant later Cleek found himself standing in the presence of a girl whose purity and innocence were things so manifest that he who ran might read, and looking into the mild eyes and benign countenance of a smiling old gentleman who sat beside her holding her little white hand.

He had said to the superintendent earlier in the day that "memory was an excellent possession for the professional criminologist," but in this case he found it of no possible service to him whatsoever. For he had never, at any time or under any circumstances, looked upon these two people before.

"Gentlemen," said the Professor in a voice as mild as his placid countenance, yet with a flash of absolute joy in his eyes—"Gentlemen, I am pleased to meet you—doubly pleased, in that you come with such good promise of vindicating my dear niece's name, after the shame and horror of that abominable public assault upon it. God knows what our neighbors must have thought."

"Oh, that's all right, Professor—don't you let that worry you none," said Cleek, with all the easy assurance of the illiterate. "I reckon nobody needs to do more than just look at Miss Blake to know that there's nothing shady nor wrong nor off color about her."

Miss Blake would, perhaps, have preferred this tribute to be a little more gracefully put, a little more delicately expressed; but she could not but understand that it was an honest and truthful expression of the speaker's sentiments, and, in a timid, shy, maidenly manner, murmured a soft "Thank you" and smiled through glorious blushes, as young Farnsworth came round and stood beside her with love light in his eyes. And if Cleek had put his thoughts into words at that in-

Batter "up."

Watching the teams at practice.